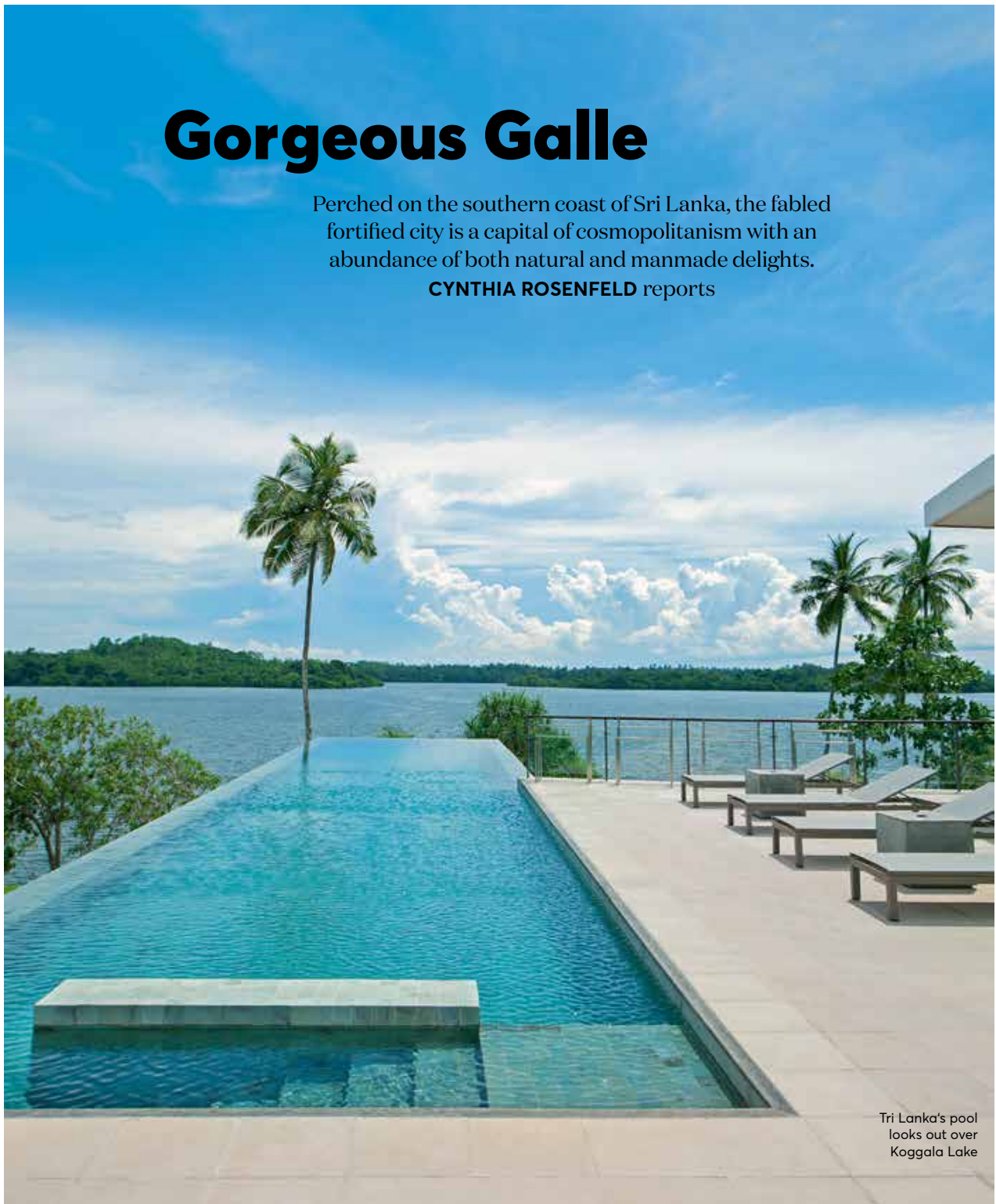


Gorgeous Galle

Perched on the southern coast of Sri Lanka, the fabled fortified city is a capital of cosmopolitanism with an abundance of both natural and manmade delights.

CYNTHIA ROSENFELD reports



Tri Lanka's pool looks out over Koggala Lake

A popular port of call since Ptolemy put it on the world map (literally) around 125AD, this natural harbour on Sri Lanka's southern coast has lured Arab, Indian and Chinese merchants, then Portuguese, Dutch and British empire builders, all drawn by the island's strategic location,

prized spices and precious stones. More recently, after nearly a decade of peace since the end of the country's 26-year civil war, developers and sunseekers are recasting this once sleepy landscape of fishermen's huts with minimalist villas and august hotels to create a new style of waterside offering in the Indian Ocean. →



Clockwise from top left: KK Beach's coastal vista; colonial stylings on a Galle street; seafood delight at Bedspace Kitchen; a KK Beach suite



STAY & RELAX

Since decamping from London in 2001, designer George Cooper has had a hand in nearly every photogenic interior along these palm-dappled shores, including **KK Beach** (kkbeach.com), his own wonderfully indulgent hotel. Understated nautical furnishings and kaleidoscopic Sri Lankan contemporary artwork finish off the ten rooms at this prime perch on Koggala Beach, just south of Galle. Those in the know turn inland too, heading for the expansive palm-fringed swimming pool and ambalama with its cushy day

beds at **Why House** (© whyhousesrilanka.com), a colonial pile that achieves the delicate balance of being simultaneously family friendly and delightfully romantic, boasting two jungle cabanas that rank among this island's most intimate sanctuaries. "The land leads," explains owner Robert Drummond, another British transplant, discussing his 2.4ha, 11-room **Tri Lanka** (© trilanka.com), a highly sustainable inland paradise by

Raefer Wallis of A00 Architecture with living walls, edible gardens and built with entirely local materials like recycled jak wood and cinnamon sticks. Guests share the verdant scenery with more than 50 bird species, 18 types of butterflies and eight varieties of dragonflies. Unwind alongside the 21m pool cantilevered over Koggala Lake, or in the treetop yoga pavilion or at the bijou spa with steam cavern.

EAT & DRINK

It's a minimalist Moorish backdrop for Galle's most linger-worthy Sri Lankan breakfast served with a side of exceptional people-watching at **Church Street Social** (teardrop-hotels.com/fort-bazaar/dining) inside the 400-year-old Galle Fort. An easy meander down the Fort's maze of lanes leads to lunch at **Poonie's Kitchen** (☎ +94 9122 26349) a welcoming courtyard café complete with fishpond, a mini-library and picnic tables. Order the juice of the day, which may be a combination of pineapple, →



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: © KK BEACH, © AMAN, © BEDSPACE KITCHEN, JIRI LIZLER



Clockwise from top left: Wijaya Beach, one of Galle's most relaxing spots; looking out over the rooftops of the picture-perfect town; the refined Church Street Social bar; an Ayurvedic treatment at The Baths at Amangalla

"Everything you see here is a reflection of how beautiful Sri Lanka really is"



guava, gotu kola and mint while the salad thali gets made, according to the chalkboard menu, with "all things fresh". Poonie's carrot cake is renowned far beyond the Fort's massive stone ramparts. Sri Lanka's top-ranked chef Dharshan Munidasa brings dishes from his Colombo eateries Nihonbashi and Ministry of Crab to **The Tuna & The Crab** (thetunaandthecrab.com) at the Old Dutch Hospital, a meticulously restored colonnaded structure along the

Fort's eastern perimeter. "Everything you see here is a reflection of how beautiful Sri Lanka really is," says the Japanese-Sri Lankan restaurateur, referring both to the fresh daily inflow of this island's renowned chilli crab as well as the sleek interiors. Joining Munidasa in that historic arcade is a seaside outpost of Colombo's cult-favourite burger joint, **Sugar Bistro & Wine Bar** (sugarcolombo.com/sugar-bistro-galle), equally worth a stop for the fresh

passion ginger mojitos. New on the scene, **Bedspace Kitchen** (☎ bedspaceuna.com) started as a pop-up, seasonal dinner party founded by a former London banker and his business partner from New Zealand. Now permanent, it's a short tuk tuk ride from Galle Fort.

SEE & SHOP

A 1996 Sri Lankan holiday prompted Hong Kong-born Jo Eden to decamp here with her investment banker husband and two young children. These days, the talented designer runs Poonie's restaurant along with **Mimimango** (☎ joedenmimimango.com), where Eden unloads treasures from her travels around Rajasthan and the Indonesian archipelago. Whitewashed walls get lined here with ethereal kaftans hanging alongside the sparkly belts, bags and other beautiful bling. A few steps away, Geoffrey Bawa protégé Channa Daswatte created a homey Fort outpost for handloom haven **Barefoot** (barefootceylon.com), a Sri Lankan institution known for its multicoloured textiles and soft cuddly toys, beach frocks and home goods. Around the corner, third-generation Galle Fort jeweller Safa Ibrahim helms **MM Ibrahim** (fortgalle.net), southern Sri Lanka's most reliable merchant for serious rocks including locally mined sapphires and moonstones. Customers can choose from his designs or create a custom piece handcrafted by in-house artisans. After the wallet workout, join **Idle Bikes** (☎ idlebikes.com) for a mountain bike trek through Hiyare Rainforest, which rolls up to end at local chill-out spot Wijaya Beach. Recover by taking the waters inside the former storage wing of a 17th-century colonial mansion, now living on as **The Baths at Amangalla** (☎ amangalla.com). These male and female detox chambers integrate a herbal steam room, a dry sauna enhanced by Ayurvedic herbs and the hydrotherapy pool with its 40 high-pressure air jets strategically poised to work like a million magic fingers. ●