

SQUAREMEAL WEDDINGS

FOR PLANNERS + BRIDES TO BE



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HONEYMOONS

From winter sun in the Carribean and the Indian Ocean to the year-round delights of action-packed Kenya, we've got the best bit of your celebration sorted





Winter warmers

Thinking of getting away in the colder months, but not sure which way to turn?
Here's some totally tropical inspiration for both directions

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We tried four of the best hotels in the south-west of the island.

Close to Colombo airport, the 18-bedroom Wallawwa gently eases you into the country.

Kahanda Kanda came next. Raconteur owner George Cooper tells this boutique hotel's story best himself. Suffice it to say his determination to produce a seamless transition from inside (10 individually designed suites) to outside (luxuriant, tropical forest) has yielded a destination of the highest calibre.

A short – and colourful – tuk-tuk ride away, KK Beach is a new sister property that trades the forest for the beach. The prospect on arrival is exquisite: behind a large wooden door, a covered walkway takes you into a cool reception area that leads smoothly towards an infinity pool, palm trees and a sandy beach.

Twenty minutes up the road, Galle Fort has dominated the Bay of Galle since the 16th century. Portuguese, Dutch and British powers left their mark, but it's now indelibly Sri Lankan. Before visiting any of the gem shops or old churches, we checked straight into Fort Bazaar. Nine short years ago, it wasn't much more than a pile of rubble. Today, it's a fine townhouse

GO EAST SRI LANKA



When to go
A couple of monsoons hit at different times around the island. Where we were, in the south-west, peak season is Christmas to Easter. Prices drop thereafter but – like us – you can still get very lucky with the weather.

hotel built around its own handsome courtyard.

WALK THIS WAY

The sprawling capital city, Colombo, deserves a day's exploration if you have the time. Our walking tour with local architecture historian Mark Forbes focused on the Fort district. Off-limits to all but the military until just a few years ago, the area's handsome colonial architecture is now accessible. Take lunch in the 17th-century Dutch hospital, newly repurposed as a cool – and cooling – shopping and eating destination.

For a new perspective on Galle Fort, walk its 300-year-old walls with local guides who exude genuine enthusiasm. Just make sure you have a drink in hand for the



spectacular if fast-fading sunsets.

Head inland and, from Kahanda Kanda, you can explore the Handunugoda virgin white tea plantation (where gold-plated scissors keep the product pure), cycle the shores of Lake Koggala or take a boat to meet the working families of its Cinnamon Island.

BEACH YUM

It's not something we'd normally do on holiday, but at KK Beach we went back three times for the lunchtime salad: catch-of-the-day tuna with an abundance of locally sourced superfoods

(pumpkin, beets, pomegranate – we could go on). At breakfast, string hoppers with fish curry – trust us – renewed our sense of place each morning.

DETAILS

The Ultimate Travel Company (020 3051 8098) tailor-makes luxury stays in Sri Lanka. Seven nights from £1,795pp, including flights from Heathrow, accommodation, transfers and guided sightseeing.

Adults only, all-inclusive Cocos Hotel was our choice. It comprises a collection of charming rustic buildings dotted over a palm-covered bluff that sits between two white-sand beaches.

Front and centre are the dark-wood decks that house the property's newly refurbished, attractive reception and chill-out area, and its sizeable restaurant. All of them have knockout views across Lignum Vitae Bay to the verdant hills behind.

We were greeted at the former with an obligatory rum punch before taking to our simple – no TV, outdoor shower only – but elegant villa. It took all of 30 seconds to don holiday garb and slouch into the balcony's hammock for an island-favourite Wadadli beer or two.

The simplicity of the place is one of its principal charms, allowing newlyweds to relax into lazy days on the beach: Cocos lays claim to a small corner of the attached Jolly Beach, creating a natural enclave for guests to quietly work through the beach bar's cocktail list.

Pilates and yoga classes are offered once a week, but we favoured the less strenuous complimentary 30-minute couples massage. The spa, in fact, is being enlarged (as part of a resort-wide extension and refurbishment) to

GO WEST ANTIGUA



accommodate mani-pedis and the other pampering favourites.

FULL NELSON

We spent a day in a 4x4 touring the island with Pelican Safaris (booked through the hotel). It begins in capital St John's, where you can spend time taking in the bustling Market Street.

The highlight of the tour, though, was English Harbour, where you'll find Nelson's Dockyard. It's the only working Georgian dockyard in the world and so merits its Unesco World Heritage Site status. We were there for the 50th edition of Antigua Sailing Week and thus had the chance to ogle a serious array of beautiful vintage yachts.

A short ride away is the unmissable Shirley Heights. Once a fortified lookout for ships intent on invading Nelson's Dockyard below, it's now a place to take in the island's best views. Every Sunday afternoon, the Look Out restaurant hosts a

When to go

Peak season is December to April when highs average 27°C. Prices drop and crowds thin from May until November. September is peak hurricane season.

DETAILS

Cocos Hotel

has rooms from £412 a night (double occupancy), on a full-board basis, including alcohol. **British Airways** flies daily from London Gatwick and prices start from £518pp.



party with traditional beach-barbie food and a steel band playing well past sunset.

CATCH OF THE BAY

Among the island's most romantic dining destinations, multi-decked Sheer Rocks sits on top of a low-lying cliff overlooking Ffryes Bay. It's cleverly laid out to offer privacy and spectacular views from every table.

We'd had plenty of the local cuisine at Cocos so didn't feel too guilty about heading to the other end of Valley Church beach to sample the Mediterranean menu of Simon Christey-French (ex-The Square). His seared king scallops and sticky pork belly was a highlight.

Those looking for a more authentic island experience should go to Dennis Cocktail Bar and Restaurant, where guests can choose the likes of saltfish, curried goat and johnny cakes (savoury cornmeal dumplings). We made it down after Sheer Rocks for drinks and some live Caribbean music. ■

