

# HOUSE CALLS

Although Sri Lanka boasts a varying landscape, ancient cities and endless shores, these resorts marry architectural styles that beg travellers to do nothing but stay in

by ADIBAH ISA

There are luxury hotels, and then there are hotels whose luxuries lie in their colourful past. The Raffles Hotel and The Fullerton Hotel are prime examples. While Singapore had the Sarkies brothers to thank for placing us into the architectural hall of fame with their Neo-palladian and palladian styles, Sri Lanka continues to lie in the limelight left by one of the country's most influential architects – Geoffrey Bawa. Like his birthplace, Bawa's ethnic lineage is also a combination of Dutch, Portugese and Moorish, with bits and bobs of influences executed into his designs. Most notably, he is famed for his creative use of light and space to blend buildings with the country's rugged landscape. Jetwing Lagoon is one resort that bears his handiwork, while there are other properties that too delve into the past for inspiration.



## THE ORIGINAL BAWA: *JETWING LAGOON* Built 1965, refurbished 2012

### Style notes...

Once known as the Blue Lagoon, this was Sri Lanka's first holiday resort. Opened in 1965, it was the first hotel Geoffrey Bawa designed. It was completely abandoned for a period of time until Sri Lankan luxury hotel chain Jetwing took over and gave the resort a stamp much needed – one which declared it environmentally-conscious. Located between the Indian Ocean and the lagoon at Negombo, it now touts itself as a wellness resort rather than a beach resort, promoting healthy, clean, all-rounded living. Working with Vinod Jayasingha, an ex-student of Bawa's, Jetwing Lagoon's open concept doesn't have room for large corridors of massive blocks of buildings- instead, like many of Bawa's designs, you move through garden and concrete harmoniously with little disruption.

The colour palette is simple and understated, mingling caramels, creams, whites and browns. The resort is proud to be the first Sri Lankan hospitality establishment which uses air conditioning generated sustainably by absorption chillers that run via steam generated from the biomass boiler. But that's not its only effort at going green. By choosing to burn cinnamon firewood (cinnamon contains a high percentage of resin), it maximises heat generation with lesser wood. It houses its

own water purification plant, while food waste is converted into compost – in turn providing a growing aide for vegetables in the garden. In fact, the resort plans to start Jetwing Organics, a brand which makes profit from recyclable waste. That profit, in turn, is then fed back to the well-being of their staff. There's also a power indicator in each room to note whether you're using solar power.

### Stay in...

The Bawa room, which is an original Bawa structure. Its private terraces are the best seats in the house to enjoy views of the pool, with the bathroom almost as big as the living area itself. Choose to dine in at Geoffrey's, a restaurant named after the architect, which overlooks the gentle waves of the lagoon. Be warned: the lagoon isn't your typical Hollywood depiction of crystalline blues- it's a legitimate, working one, driving income for the local fishermen. So expect some activity.

### You'll never forget...

The 100-metre pool, which greets you the moment you pass by reception. They don't use chemically-laden chlorine, opting to use a salt chlorinator instead, which breaks down table salt and water into sodium and chlorine.

*Jetwing Lagoon is a member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World.*  
— [www.slh.com](http://www.slh.com)



**THE ROYAL RETREAT:  
MAYA**  
Built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,  
refurbished 2010

**Style notes...**

Nestled deep inside the village of Aranwella, the house draws influences from Dutch and British colonial architecture, originally built by one of the ruling elite in Ceylon. Only the verandah, library and two suites are part of the original design, dubbed the "Old House". The kitchen, dining area and three other suites have actually been added on to form part of the New Wing, built from scratch. Yet, walking through the property you would hardly find something amiss. Though the New Wing could never replicate the Old House, continuity is apparent by connecting the roof and using the same floors throughout.

The Maya (meaning "illusion" in Sanskrit) is the project of British interior designer Niki Fairchild, who first stumbled upon the property in 2004. The Parsons School of Design graduate worked with Sri Lankan architect Pradeep Kodikara in bringing the property back to life. The enhanced space features high 25-foot ceilings with wide views of the garden and padi fields. Original lattice work and antique fittings mingle with sleek lines and contemporary finishes of white, grey, teal and turquoise, setting the stage for a modern hideout.



**Stay in...**

An instant aura of tranquil greets you the moment you step off your vehicle and walk along the stone steps towards the Old House. Choose between the suites in the Old House or New Wing, with each room accessible to a 20-metre L-shaped pool. While the former is best suited for couples, the latter is wide enough for families with a private mini-courtyard. Though the bathrooms differ greatly, with the suites in the New Wing featuring an open concept style without any doors or curtains, rest assured both execute the same warmth that exudes throughout the compound. No bathtubs necessary—the pool is just outside. A personal butler sees to your needs and dining is an easy affair, with dishes prepared a la minute and a menu that changes every day. Aranwella itself is a treasure trove, with hardly any other tourist in sight, and more water buffaloes than watering holes of backpacker bars.

**You'll never forget...**

The garden, which is a beauty to wake up to, works way better than your cup of morning coffee. It's great for family games, such as croquet, petanque and badminton, or for playing catch with the resident dog. The green lawn, old trees (with some sporting a jackfruit that could later be used in your curry) and padi field nurtures diverse flora and fauna, a sanctuary that is yours to explore or take refuge in from the comfort of a hammock. The best seats in the house, personally, are the ones furthest from the Old House, facing the padi field. A book, a glass of Mango lassi and nature's playlist are all you need.

*Maya is a member of Mr & Mrs Smith.*  
— [www.mrandmrsmith.com](http://www.mrandmrsmith.com)



**THE MUNICIPAL MANOR:  
THE WALLAWWA**  
Built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,  
refurbished 2008

**Style notes...**

Once the country estate of Nicholas Dias-Abeyasinghe, the 'Maha Mudliyar' (Head Chieftain) of Galle, it's one of the most ancient manor houses in the entire Negombo region. "Wallawwa", a term in Sinhala is said to mean the physical location of the primary seat of a particular Sinhala family with connections to the local kings or colonial masters. From a period between the late Thirties to mid-Forties, it was occupied by the Royal Air Force. Built in traditional Dutch colonial style, its lobby, study, library, shop and front verandah are over 200 years old. All their roofs are covered with traditional clay tiles, with open corridors and high ceilings, much like the original front verandah. The only major structural change was to raise the roof on the back to join up with the roof of the bedrooms.

The overall design of the courtyard and suites at the back were the work of Company Director Michael Davies, while the new bedrooms, welcome pavilion and restaurant, which recently opened last year, were drawn up by Colombo-based architect Asela Perera. The pool, shrouded in intimacy away from the main compound was built using natural Indian stone tiles. Rather than going overboard with tradition by placing mini-elephants or Buddha motifs onto their textiles, theirs is refreshingly contemporary, with

stripped blues and whites and orange-reds of florals. Still, a smattering of trinkets remind of old Ceylon, such as vintage posters depicting the tea plantations and picturesque landscapes within Sri Lanka such as Tangalle, Nuwara Eliya and the Highlands. Set in three acres of gardens, The Wallawwa joins the ensemble of nature's elements.

**Stay at...**

Just 15 minutes from Sri Lanka's International Airport, The Wallawwa redefines the idea of an airport hotel. Gone are small stuffy rooms, in favour of small, intimate rooms. Note the difference? Small becomes intimate, untamed nature becomes lush foliage and a heavy downpour becomes an excuse to snuggle up with a book from their expansive library. A stay in their small yet more than sufficient Garden Suite gives you the right to fully abuse their large bathroom, which makes clever use of the sky light. The best way to enjoy The Wallawwa is to stay in, soaking up the romantic lull that permeates through the space.

**You'll never forget...**

The Wallawwa Shop, which houses a selection of souvenirs, clothes and jewellery predominantly crafted in Sri Lanka. Every profit collected from sales is donated to the 'Light of Change' project that works to develop the professional standards of Sri Lankan rural youth.

— [www.thewallawwa.com](http://www.thewallawwa.com)

