



Beautiful beaches are the only borders for the island nation of Sri Lanka. This one, at Bentota, is on the south west coast.



There are two major national parks on the Resplendent Isle. These wildlife sanctuaries feature abundant bird-life as well as elephants, leopards, buffalo, deer and wild boar.



This is one of three exquisite Buddha images carved out of living rock. It's found in the 12th century city of Polonnaruwa, near the center of Ceylon.

Sri Lanka — world's best travel bargain

Sri Lanka.

It's exotic but not expensive.

It's exciting but also restful.

It's fascinatingly foreign but warmly hospitable.

But most of all it is a place we want to go back to.

We wanted to go back even after flying 40 some hours to get home. It is that kind of place.

Almost half way around the world from North Carolina this island republic lies in the Indian Ocean off the southeast coast of India. Just a little larger than the state of West Virginia the country has been known by many names. In this part of the world it was called Ceylon until it became a free, sovereign and independent republic in 1972.

Sri Lanka — the Resplendent Isle — has captivated her visitors from the Greeks and Romans who called it Taprobane to the Arab sailors in the days of Sinbad who called it Serendib. It was the British, who developed most of the country's agricultural resources, that settled for the name Ceylon.

The guide books say that agriculture is the primary occupation of the people. But their farming is of the most exotic products. Tea, rubber and coconut are grown most extensively. But other products of importance are cocoa, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, nutmeg and citronella. The mountain plantations are beautifully landscaped with herbs growing among the tea bushes carpeting the hills in a gorgeous green and filling the cleanest air with the sweetest smells. It really defies im-

agination or worded description.

Even more exotic are the gems of Sri Lanka. Native to the island are the sapphire, ruby, cat's eye, alexandrite, zircon, amethyst, topaz, tourmaline, moonstone, garnet and many others. And the gem shops are like the casinos in Las Vegas, at least one on every corner. To look costs nothing and to buy is so reasonable that even the most economical, normally non-shopping-type visitor, like my husband, feels obligated to invest.

To say that Sri Lanka is not expensive doesn't do it justice. The cost of everything is so reasonable that inflation weary American reactions vary from amazement to disbelief. The prices we paid, for everything, would not have bothered my Scottish grandmother. Added to the reasonable prices is another plus, visitors to Sri Lanka are entitled to a premium rate of exchange on foreign currencies converted to rupees. American dollars can be exchanged at a bonus rate of 65 per cent above the official buying and selling rate. For example, in December the official rate of exchange or dollars was 6.55 rupees per dollar. With the bonus, dollars were worth 10.72 rupees. And that is not all. There are airline discounts on hotels and tours, ranging from 10 to 50 percent. So, if you haven't been you can hardly afford not to go.

As exciting as it is inexpensive Sri Lanka offers all kinds of adventures. We rode working elephants in Kandy. That was late one afternoon when the elephants had come to the river to be bathed. The keeper told us that if he didn't bathe the elephants about every seven hours they wouldn't work. Each elephant

had three or four men to scrub him down. Those very large but very gentle creatures stood at the river's edge and lifted first one foot and then another to be scrubbed with a coconut shell. And after the scrubbers had worked over their backs the elephants would lie down and turn over to have their tummies bathed. The elephants, it seemed, had trained their keepers well.

Another real adventure was a jeep tour through the Ruhunu National Park. It is a jungle-like wildlife preserve that is home to some intriguing animals. We saw countless kinds of colorful birds, lots of wild deer, water buffalo and several wild elephants. Our guide apologized for being unable to find leopards for us to see. But we weren't at all disappointed.

Our days in Sri Lanka were exciting but we also found it a restful place to visit. The places we stayed were delightfully varied. The Inter-Continental Hotel in the capital city of Colombo was as modern and convenient as any in the world with service that was much better than at many of the world's finest hotels. But the service was beyond comparison everywhere. From the charming rest houses in the country to a private tea grower's resort, the care and attention given tourists was a treat money can't buy. We wanted to stay, for a long time, everywhere we stopped. The hurry up way we normally live is alien to the relaxed way of life in that part of Asia.

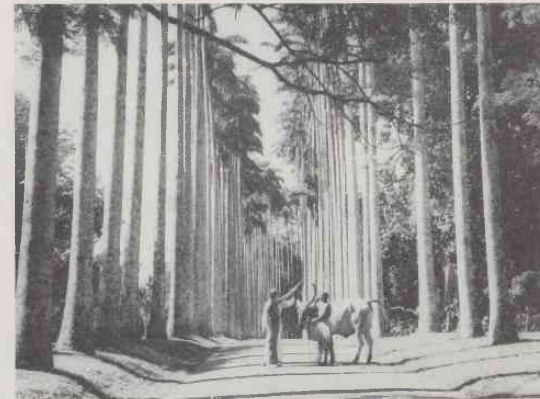
Sri Lanka is very much a man's country. The women do most of the work, manual labor and all. The men are very pampered. We were



One of the most enchanting places to stay is the Hill Club in Nuwara Eliya. Located in the high country, it used to be a private resort for the tea growers and continues to be almost more British than Britain.



Something like a Buddhist version of the pyramids, this dagaba is a completely sealed structure containing ancient religious relics. This Kiri Vehera is among the ruins at Polonnaruwa.



The plant life everywhere in Sri Lanka is a horticulturist's dream. The botanical gardens have plants representing every part of the world, even magnolias and palmetto palms to make a Southerner feel at home.