



View from Ella in Badulla

Armed with his camera and collection of one-inch-to-the-mile maps, Cecil Perera has traversed 50,000 km across Sri Lanka to photograph his homeland in all its glory.

Words Keshini de Silva



Cecil Perera

One of the earthly locations most closely associated with the mythical Garden of Eden, Sri Lanka boasts some of the most breathtaking landscapes in the world.

Photographer Cecil Perera has walked the Island's mist-enshrouded mountains, lush green plains and golden shores, capturing these sights for his debut coffee table book, *Sri Lanka: A Mystical Journey*. The result is nothing less than stunning.

For a landscape photographer, every aspect of the scene before him, both natural and man-made, must come together in perfect harmony. Whether soaring waterfall, moody sky or beach crowded with fishing boats, each resulting photograph is testament to the extraordinary patience of the photographer.

"Meticulous planning" is required, says Cecil, of the hours spent in preparation for each and every shot. "Nothing was at random." A retired banker, Cecil has always loved the natural world. But he discovered his passion for photography just three years ago.

"I visualise the photograph when I see the view and wait for the perfect moment to get the best shot," he explains, flicking through his book, his eyes gleaming as he recalls the magic of each scene.

Many of the panoramas that appear in the book have been chosen because they offer Sri Lankans a new perspective on the Island

"You have to wake up pretty early if you want to catch the sunrise over the Island's central hills. The view, once you get there, is so beautiful that it's almost unworldly." Hence the title *A Mystical Journey*, which tries to get across the unique quality of Cecil's photographs.

A quotation or proverb - a few words to disrupt your thoughts and shed light on the photographer's feelings as he timed the shot - accompanies each scene in the book.

✘ "I remember when I was trying to perfectly time the reflection of the sun in a little stream that flows through a paddy field in my village in Piliyandala," recalls Cecil. "Passing villagers jokingly asked if I was worshipping the morning sun."

Every photograph captures an experience that he hopes to share with the world, but the idea for bringing them together in a book came later. Many of the panoramas that appear in *A Mystical Journey* have been chosen because they offer Sri Lankans a new perspective on the Island.

The photographer's descriptions of trekking to the same site day after day, or travelling through rough terrain - sometimes guided by friendly Sri Lankans - to find the perfect vantage point, reveal his perfectionism. This commitment extended to the publishing of the book too, Cecil explains, recalling countless hours of research and discussions with printers to gain an understanding of how best to showcase the colours of the natural world in print.

Cecil's efforts capture the essence of the unending Sri Lankan canvas, writes wildlife photographer Chitral Jayatilake in the introduction to *A Mystical Journey*, offering readers the chance to experience the Island's riches for themselves. The book is the work of a proud Sri Lankan who wants to enthrall the world with the beauty of his motherland. And so he does, taking the reader on an awe-inspiring excursion across the pearl of the Indian Ocean.

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