Gal Oya Lodge: One with nature

Posted on
The restaurant at Gal Oya Lodge

Silence coloured by the call of birds was our companion as we walked along the narrow pathway lined with greenery. By and by, blending seamlessly to the surrounding wilderness, a facade brilliant in its allure yet appealing in its simplicity emerged. We were at the Gal Oya Lodge where man could escape the trappings of city life to be lost in nature… at least for a while.

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Indika De Silva

Located on the outskirts of the Gal Oya National Park, west of Ampara, the Gal Oya Lodge sits on a 20 acre plot of land that is a private forest where much of the wilderness has been preserved.

The eight bungalows of the Lodge lie scattered, tucked away in the folds of the jungle with footpaths leading to and from each bungalow. At certain points cunningly carved stone steps lead up or down to the bungalows lending an air of a bygone era.

All structures within the Lodge have been made with materials sourced from the surrounding area The reception, and the restaurant housed within the same premises, is a spacious structure with no walls to hinder the beautiful vistas that unfold. The high roof, made of *illuk* (a type of grass), along with the polished cement floor provide a cooling setting amidst the heat. The furniture has been hand crafted by local artisans utilising teak and *mara* (Lebbeck). Chandeliers made of *pun* (a type of reed), lamps made of bamboo and woven mats enhance the eco-based theme that the Lodge pursues, adding touches of beauty and elegance.

The restaurant able to seat 20 guests serves both Eastern and Western cuisine. Rotis, rice, fresh salads and fruits are prepared as mouthwatering dishes of which the Gal Oya Special is perhaps the most appetising. Dubbed the Gal Oya Lodge Special Chilli Baked Eggs, the dish is a fusion of the best of both worlds where local and international flavours are combined. Tomatoes, onions, pol sambol and fresh roti topped off with eggs and bacon is a unique delicacy.

The bungalows are positioned at various locations. While some are close to the reception, others are farther away and command breathtaking views of scenic mountains and forests, presenting an ideal place to enjoy a moment’s solitude with nature. A private living room with, large windows that open wide to let in the natural light, a king-sized bed and a spacious open air washroom that incorporates natural elements such as bamboo showers and taps, offer a plethora of comforts for guests. The two bedroom villa with a wrap-around veranda that connects the bedrooms is ideal for a family.

For guests who seek to explore the Gal Oya area, the lodge has a variety of exciting activities planned. Boat rides in the Senanayaka Samudraya arranged by an exper enced boatman to observe wild elephants in the waters, safaris to the national park, a meeting with the Veddas to witness their culture first hand, treks in the countryside and a hike up the Rathugala mountain are some of the activities bound to pique the curiosity of guests. Or if one prefers a quieter interlude, one can indulge in the pool with its magnificent Rathugala mountain backdrop amidst verdant landscape.

As dusk falls, the paths leading to each bungalow are illuminated with light bulbs encased in old fashioned lamps. Even the reception and the restaurant is basked in this golden glow that conveys a sense of warmth. Cosying up in bed or enjoying a mouth-watering dinner prepared by the adept staff of Gal Oya Lodge, guests can sit back and relax, taking a moment to revel in the quiet that reigns over the vicinity,

where nature and humans can find harmony enjoying each other’s company.

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