



The lounge area of Jetwing Yala, a mellow ambience is created by illuminations encased within globes made of cane

Swaying gently in the swing chair overlooking the blue ocean, sparkling in the setting sun, I let my gaze wander... Over the ocean, over the sand dunes and over the lush greenery surrounding Jetwing Yala. In a heart beat I have lost myself in the beauty encircling this enchanting expanse where the very essence of nature has weaved an enduring allure...

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda and Indika De Silva

The history of Jetwing properties at Yala could be traced back to the 1980s with the establishment of the Yala Safari Game Lodge. Known for their fine hospitality, through the years the Yala Safari Game Lodge rose to become a preferred place of accommodation within the Yala periphery.

Dampening this enticement, the year 2004 marked a sombre one for Jetwing as the whole

hotel was swept away to the ocean in the onslaught of the Tsunami. However, undaunted Jetwing yet again ventured to the outskirts of the Sanctuary to emerge with Jetwing Yala, in an all new location while remembering those who have stood steadfast and committed to the once extant Yala Safari Game Lodge.

Spread across an area of 38 acres, Jetwing Yala was officially unveiled in January 2014, and boasts of an higher elevation with sand dunes providing adequate protection. Straying from the concept of being just a Safari lodge, ideal for a one-night stay, Jetwing Yala goes beyond to reveal an enticing setting filled with a myriad of facilities, tempting a guest to linger for days enjoying the nature, tranquillity and comfort encircling the hotel.

Stepping into the reception, the eye is at once drawn to the ceiling where an intricate design resembling a tree branch takes centre stage. When lighted, the bright glow of the lights within the branch are projected onto the ceiling and then reflected on the floor below rendering an intriguing effect. Comfortable cane chairs are arrayed around the area, for guests to sit awhile. However, the two swing chairs overlooking the ocean are bound to be the favourite among guests, as they can indulge in a moment's respite swaying gently back and forth enjoying the calming breeze and the picturesque beauty before them. Also located on the same floor are lounge areas overlaid with wooden tones fused with light and at times vibrant hues that allow guests to wallow in comfort, relishing the company of others or in solitary contemplation. The balcony beyond poses an ideal setting, be it night or day, to enjoy a refreshing drink while enjoying the surrounding charm.

Open spaces, wide corridors, sand and water filled expanses are some of the defining characteristics embedded into the design of the hotel where brown tones with at times striking and muted hues have been used to harmonize the built and natural environment. From the reception area, a flight of stairs at one corner leads to the restaurant equipped with an indoor as well as an outdoor deck area built to accommodate 175 guests. Though the restaurant is open only during breakfast, lunch and dinner, the experienced team of chefs do not shy away from obliging the culinary whims of guests at any time with a variety of scrumptious dishes ranging from international to oriental flavours. However, the dining experience at Jetwing Yala is not limited to the main restaurant as The Lounge and The Bar offers a tantalising assortment of tapas, salads and beverages including choice wines. Further for a difference, guests have the option of experiencing dune dining with a cosy bonfire or dinner by the pool as well.

On the other side of the reception, a spacious corridor and steps lead down to the rooms, 80 in total, divided as superior and deluxe while two are segregated as suites. Spanning across three floors, all rooms afford a breathtaking view of either the aquamarine ocean or lush

greenery of Yala. The interior is highlighted in earthy tones infused with either red or green overtones and soft tinges imparting a touch of vivacity. All rooms come with a multitude of amenities to enrich a guest's stay from which the luxury shower enclosure with a water sprout lend a singular experience.

A favourite retreat of many guests is the pool area, which provides the perfect escape from the sweltering heat. Stretching 75 metres in length, after a weary day many find a welcoming interlude by the pool. Close by, an area shaded by trees and set up with lounge chairs presents an inviting extent. Aptly named The Chill, the cool environs rendered by the foliage lures guests to its midst and once there, many are reluctant to leave the serenity the space offers. Further, a spa, gym as well as many other facilities are located close by to provide a more comprehensive experience to guests.

Those who thirst for adventure can join in the many excursions organised by Jetwing Yala, which include travels to Yala Sanctuary, Bundala, Kataragama and even beyond, revealing a taste of the Sri Lankan culture along with the natural habitats the country is famed for.

Jetwing Yala is armed with a dedicated workforce, where nearly 70 percent are from the area and have been given employment under the Jetwing Youth Development Project, that sees to every need of guests. Further, the hotel is committed in protecting the environment, employing numerous modes to reduce energy and water wastage such as building their own sewer treatment plant, re-using water for gardening and a boiler for hot water, fired by cinnamon wood. However, much is in store for the future as plans are under way for a solar plant and 15 villas, designed to impart a unique 'tent' experience to guests.

A small walk down to the beach and one would be in for a treat where the beauty of the crashing waves and the lonely sandy stretch beckons for a stroll. With feet sinking into the soft sand, I ambled along the length, savouring the beauty of the setting sun before bidding adieu to Jetwing Yala, a place where serenity reigns.

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Jetwing Yala: A Concourse Of Two Worlds