Mandira Bungalows: Timeless Dwellings

Posted on



Strathdon

With the morning’s ethereal mist and nature’s boundless presence, the Mandira Bungalows seem to reside over lands unconcerned with time. Serviced by a staff that values authenticity and serenity above all, a stay here is an escape from the the rhythms of modern life.

Words Benjamin Fowler

The first thing you might notice about your stay at a Mandira Bungalow is the way in which you are immediately ushered to your room upon arrival. No registration, no hassle of check-in – just a pleasant greeting from the staff and a refreshing cup of tea. Above all, the staff at each of the four bungalows place the highest priority on the comfort of its guests and promise an entirely unique, personalised experience.

The meals illustrate this well. Dinner is decided by a conversation with the kitchen staff rather than a preordained menu, and the chefs are knowledgeable in both Sri Lankan and Western cuisines. An interesting facet is that there is no set time for meals and guests are free to eat at a number of locations on the properties, including the vibrant gardens filled with tropical flowers and vegetables that you can pick yourself for dinner.

The bungalows are so detailed it's easy to imagine how the first tea planters must have felt gazing out over their vast estates blanketing the hill country. Far removed from society, the tea estates offer nothing in the way to disrupt the tranquillity, or history's strong presence amongst the innumerable rows of tea bushes.

The bungalows themselves are elegant and immaculately maintained. Their names – Strathdon, Dickoya, Craig Appin and Taylor's Hill – all refer to those original Scottish planters who constructed the buildings to look over their ever-expanding tea estates in the fertile climes of the hill country.

Another hold-over from those earlier times is the hospitality provided by the staff, who carry on the tradition established by the staff members that served the original planters so many generations ago, dressed in the same uniform: white shirt and sarong. Although the bungalows are equipped with all the modern amenities, they retain the colonial atmosphere inside with the use of elegant, antique wooden furniture. The lounges are perfect to recoup and talk about the day, and comfortable enough to keep conversations going well into the night.

Hatton Bungalows

The three Mandira bungalows in Hatton – Strathdon, Dickoya and Craig Appin – each host 10-12 people, ensuring an intimate, stress-free stay, and are five to six kilometers apart on a breathtaking swath of the incomparable hill country, and offer a tranquillity only found with open space and fresh, high-altitude air. It's an area perfect for being outdoors, whether that involves a casual stroll, mountain biking, or a trip to the famous Tea Cup restaurant. The properties are all uphill from the gorgeous, clear-blue Castlereagh Reservoir. Of note is the Warleigh Church – a quaint, stone church that was frequented by the area's original planters.

Taylor's Hill

At Taylor's Hill, just outside of Kandy, you can stay in the same ivy-draped country manor which, even during its early 19th Century construction, was a throwback to an earlier time and place. Modern amenities aside, the two-storey property strives

for authenticity, and even has a playable 150-year old billiards table complete with original equipment. If lounging around the bungalow isn't up to your speed (you'd be forgiven for thinking so) the area is rich with outdoor activities. There are plenty of trails for hiking, mountain biking, or even a stroll to the quiet reservoir, past ravishing gardens with flowers of every colour, all in the cool altitude. In fact, the neighbouring estate of Loolecondera is precisely where Sri Lanka's history with tea first began. Where better to stop by for a cup?

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