

Round And About Alankudah

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Tourists prepare for the kite surfing season along the beach stretch near Alankudah in Kalpitiya

Along the north west coast lies an unspoilt peninsula endowed with sandy stretches, an abundance of marine life just a few miles off the coast, high winds for a rush of adrenaline and a soothing seclusion all year around.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara **Photographs** Indika De Silva

Kalpitiya in the Puttalam District prized with both a beach strip and a coastal lagoon is gaining momentum as a popular stop for tourists. Among its many attributes, in particular, is the dolphin and whale watching season that occurs from November till April drawing a steady stream of enthusiasts to its shores. Since deep ocean waters occur just a few miles off the shore, excursions out at sea take a mere few hours for sightings of large pods of spinner dolphins numbering in the thousands. The marine life of Kalpitiya extends farther to the Bar Reef sanctuary, believed to be the largest coral formation in South East Asia. The live coral plate that can be found just an

hour's boat ride away has resulted in many snorkelling expeditions to view the vivid beauty of coral life in the translucent depths.

In recent times the landscape of the parts has been marked by many man-made structures as well. While the Norochcholai power plant remains a distinctive landmark along the coastal belt, another striking feature is the series of wind turbines that dominate the landscape. The high winds that prevail in the region have paved way for another attraction that has quickly gained popularity – kite surfing. A sporting adventure that evokes just as much attention as dolphin watching amongst tourists, kite surfing draws visitors during the off season to test the winds and the lagoon waters for a bout of adrenaline rush.

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With much to keep one's sights on these shores, the coastal belt has yielded to a number of cosy retreats for tourists and visitors to the parts. The Dolphin Beach Resort in Elanthadiya is just such a leisure retreat that affords seclusion and comfort across a sandy expanse. Reached by a turn off the Palavi-Kalpitiya Road, near Alankudah, the resort extends towards the beach front, lulling guests in its serene refuge. On either side of the powdery white expanse are spacious tent accommodations complete with comforts that leave little or nothing to be desired. Of the total of nine tents, six are family tents while the remaining three are standard tents for two. While all tents are air conditioned guests have access to phones, wi-fi and hot water.

Amidst the sounds of the lapping ocean and the rustle of coconut fronds, the tents afford inviting comforts within its cosy confines. The plush arrangement of beds with double height mattresses, the rustic bathrooms complete with cement floors and curiously designed shower heads and taps, simply add to an experience designed for relaxing and unwinding. The invitation to indulge extends outside of the accommodation with hammocks and lounge areas. The structures across the landscape nestled in the shade of trees are crowned with thatched roofs and add to the aesthetics. The Ice Lounge with its cool interiors and fibreglass tables affect an ethereal quality while the dome, that takes after the traditional stupa design, is accentuated by creative touches to its interior. At the beach front is the Deck that allows dining under an open sky and is meant for special occasions such as anniversaries.

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For the gastronomic indulgence, Dolphin Beach offers its speciality menu, a tantalising range of thin crust Italian pizzas prepared in a wood fired oven, as a part of the daily dinner offering. Alternatively is the à la carte menu available throughout the day and in addition are breakfast buffet, rice and curry or continental cuisine and special theme nights such as hoppers night, rotti night or Italian nights to cater to an eclectic palate. Furthermore the region is dotted with crop cultivation lands and much of the produce can be obtained fresh for preparation of various dishes.

While Dolphin Beach Resort may have much to offer for lazy indulgences, it also affords ample opportunities for guests to experience Alankudah at its best. The resort's own boats with off beat names such as 'Anna Malu', and 'Don't Panic', are arranged complete with a boatman for dolphin and whale watching during the season. Similarly, kayaks to take out to sea during the calmer seasons, troller fishing trips, tours to Wilpattu and water sports such as water skiing and donut rides can be availed by guests. All in all the Resort ensures that guests have access to all that the region has to offer.

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A short distance away down Palmyrah Avenue in Alankudah lies the Bar Reef Resort. Upon entering the premises, privacy and seclusion are the immediate impressions that dawn on visitors. Nestled unobtrusively along a stretch of beach, a narrow and shaded path leads to the common areas of the resort. Fenced in on either side of the path are accommodations designed as cabanas and villas. It is apparent that natural elements are very much a part of the Resort's distinct character. Subtle comforts can be enjoyed amidst earthy tones and a rustic ambience in both cabanas and villas.

The Resort, which opened its doors seven years ago with just two cabanas, gradually expanded to comprise of two villas and seven cabanas today. Each caters to a variety of needs with subtle tweaks and variations in their decor for individuality. All accommodations are enclosed with a private garden to impress the feeling of being amidst nature. Cabanas accommodate up to a maximum of five guests with two double rooms and an additional bed arranged in its spacious

common area or porch along with a mosquito net. In its effort to uphold a running eco-friendly theme the Resort minimises consumption of electricity and wastage. As a result air conditioning, hot water, television and mini fridge are not made available, however these can be provided on request along with any other whim or fancy of the guests.

With the open air design to facilitate natural air ventilation, the cut cement, floors and rustic interiors sheltered by thatched roofs capture a chilled atmosphere. Out of the seven cabanas, the bathrooms of the older three cabanas are located externally while outdoor showers have been designed for all, where the shower heads are placed such that the water spurts from a tree. Cabanas are also named to reflect a natural element, for instance “Palmyrah” where the cabana roof is pieced together entirely of palmyrah fronds. The two villas, Samara and Thala villas in contrast offer much more space accommodating up to ten guests in the two double rooms and six extra beds allocated in the common area. Furthermore three bathrooms and an additional outdoor shower afford ample comfort and flexibility and the Villas too are infused with natural elements and themes.

A personalised service with attention to detail, around the clock is a speciality at the Bar Reef. The aesthetic touches using natural elements are exemplary of this promise and are a reflection of the conscientious services offered. Emerging from the refuge of the rooms the common areas open out to the beach front where a salt water swimming pool serves as a centre piece. The Beach Club where boat rides set off and stores gear for water sports and activities is soon to be combined with a living room as well. At the pool front is The Ambalamba which offers a place to unwind while indulging in a buffet dinner served here. Both western and Sri Lankan cuisine can be ordered from an à la carte menu, and meals can be arranged on guest requests such as dining under the stars or a BBQ. Guests are assured that meals at Bar Reef arrive with the guarantee that they are prepared instantly using fresh produce cultivated in the region.

Peaceful escapes such as Dolphin Beach and Bar Reef Resort pave the way to discover the diversity of the peninsula in complete ease and comfort

Bar Reef Resort too provides guests with a number of recreational activities including boat rides to dolphin watching sites, kayaking and other water sports, bicycle rides and excursions to nearby attractions in the region.

All in all peaceful escapes such as Dolphin Beach and Bar Reef Resort pave the way

for the steady stream of visitors to discover the diversity of the peninsula in complete ease and comfort.

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