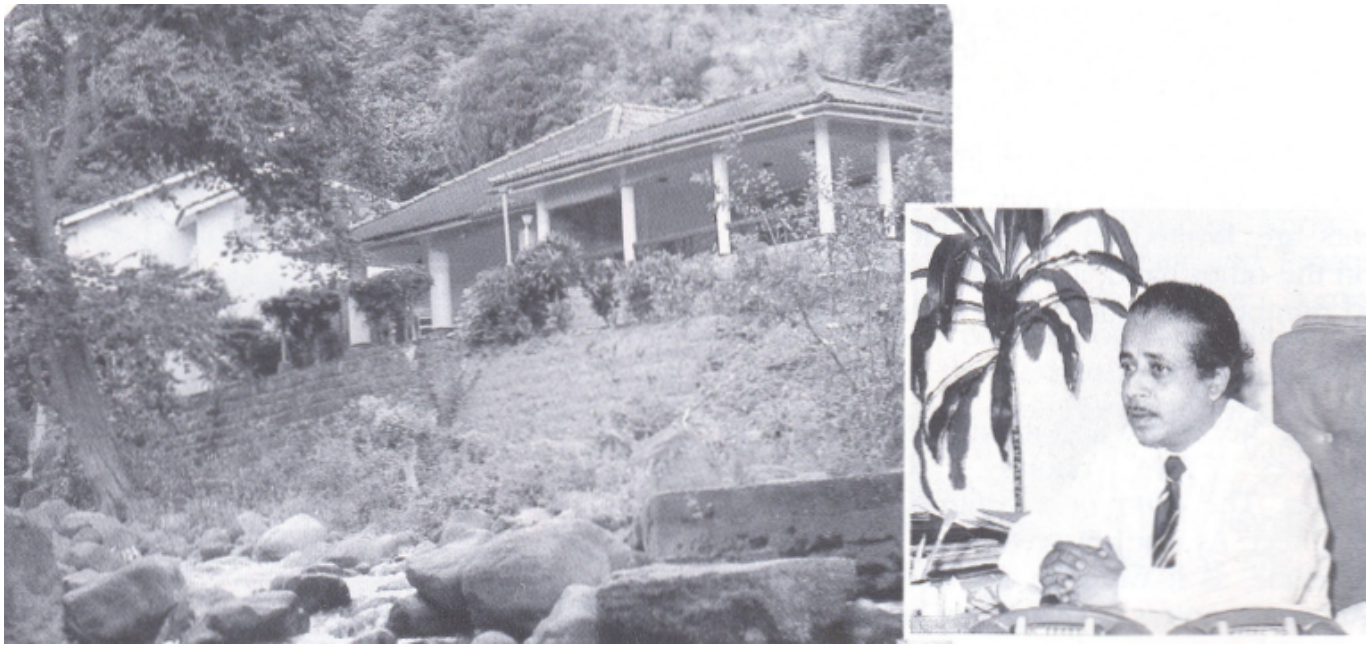
The Resthouse Alternative

Posted on

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Resthouse from the Dutch Resthuys: the meaning and significance of which needs no elaboration in any language. But in their beginnings, in the century-long peace, however tenuous, that followed the Dutch occupation of the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka in the 17th and 18th centuries, the resthouses were built by those practical men to afford a temporary abode of reasonable comfort to their administrators and bureaucrats travelling through the coastal areas of the country on tours of inspection to hold regular courts of justice at diverse times of the year to visit outposts and forts.

In these sturdy buildings the government officials and their retinues could work as well as relax. Holidays as such were not the original intention. Later, in the early 19th Century, after the British had ousted the Dutch, they fancied the idea of “resthouses” themselves and built many more in the hinterland as well.

Almost every resthouse in the island is scenically sited and commands the countryside in which it is built. There is always some noteworthy feature in the vicinity to enhance its attractions. It might be a graceful waterfall, a rich sweep of river scenery, a panoramic landscape, a golden beach, an ancient monument or a group of them, a bustling junction where four roads meet – and among them, the best known are the distinctive group of resthouses managed by the CEYLON HOTEI.S CORPORATION, which has done a great deal to promote them as places of rest and relaxation for individuals, couples and family groups; where efficient, personalised service is rendered to guests and where Sri Lankan food is a speciality.

The Ceylon Hotels Corporation has its own travel counter with fleet of limousines t the airport and a travel bureau for hotel reservations in Colombo at its head office. It also manages the 40-room Hotel Seruwa at Polonnaruwa and the 62 room Tissa Resthouse. The Corporation is the majority shareholder in the Associate Hotels Company which owns the Lihiniya Surf Hotel at Bentota and Kandy Hotels which owns the Suisse Hotel and the Queen' (this latter in association with the Oberoi Hotel Management), both famous properties in the hospitality trade in Kandy-and is currently developing a 50-room, Japanese ryoken-style hotel in Anuradhapura in collaboration with the Hokke Club Ltd of Japan. It is also the General Agent for British Airways through Airline Services (Pvt) Ltd, a CHC fully owned subsidiary.

Interview with the Chairman

On the advice of Mr. A.M.S Adikari M.P., Honourable Minister of Tourism, and Mr. Gamini Lokuge M.P., Honourable Minister of State for Tourism, the new Chairman of the Ceylon Hotel Corporation intends to embark on what he vividly described as "an image re-building exercise". According co Mr. N.W. Dissanayake, himself well equipped or his role, having served for several years as Senior Assistant Secretary for Tourism in the Mini . • o ce for Tourism and in an official capacity in several years related fields and having his 2nd Class Honour in Geography (1964), joining the C.A.S. in `967 after a short spell in teaching, his "beginnings" as he recalls it in sphere of tourism occurred in November 1975 and he has not since looked back He has led, represented and been a member of several delegation in this field to Prestigious meetings, seminars and conferences of tourism worldwide in all its innumerable and i able therefore to draw upon the knowledge and experience thereby gained "to retrieve the situation of the Ceylon Hotels Corporation as far as is viably possible.

What he is convinced of is that the Corporation's resthouses have a market but we

have to identify it, both here and abroad, and tap that full potential.” Mr. Dissanayake sees the resthouses as holiday places for those with concern for the environment for the local business traveller up market domestic tourists and for students and professionals from abroad who do not care for the five star atmosphere of hotels but who look for more casual surroundings and an unspoilt Asian tropical environment, amidst friendly people.

I’m also considering more promotion in the SAARC Region under the Travel Voucher Scheme. Ceylon Hotels Corporation is the designated travel agency under this scheme. The project has been approved by Heads of State in the SAARC countries and it is now left for the bankers in the region to give clearance; it has all the potential to be a viable enterprise for all concerned,” was his opinion.

“My intention also is to bring a high degree of professionalism into the management of the Corporation and its accommodation units spread all over the island. The hotel industry is not one chat can be run like any government department! The improvement of conditions at Tissamaharama Resthouse is a priority. This 62-room resthouse which has a great demand by tour operators will be the first unit to be improved under the image re-building exercise. I will also give some attention to revival of the Ceylon Hotel Corporations/National Apprenticeship Board training project in the hoteliering sphere which the CHC handled from 1982-1986. The NAB is willing to revive it so we could train young men and women in this industry giving support to the Janasaviya programs to develop and instill skills in the unemployed young for their future betterment.

The Chairman is fully aware of the setbacks the industry has faced in recent years but is far from despairing. “What we need is vision and dedication, he claimed, “and the people with the right spirit and attitudes to reviving what was one of the most flourishing industries in the modem history of Sri Lanka. We must all make meaningful efforts he concluded.

The Resthouses

In the winding chain of resthouses scattered all over the island-a 12-link chain as far as GK ·concerned-is the “selling asset” for the Corporation. The CHC’s resthouses are remarkable for the variety they offer the visitor, and for those who wish to make any of these resthouses the ‘base· for a most delightful and enjoyable holiday, even three nights at any of these places would hardly be sufficient.

Belihuloya Resthouse nestles below the Horton Plains on the road to the Uva hills. Located by the side of a flowing stream, with 10 double rooms with attached baths and serenely restful in aspect. Here are unlimited resources to the hiker, the mountain climber, and those in search of perennial villages in the rugged landscape of the lower hills, reaching up 7,000 feet to the awesome, majestic Horton Plains, and its several peaks.

Ella is in the higher mountains, in the country long associated with the legendary Bronze Age “demon” king of Lanka, Ravana, and his fabled “Asoka Gardens”. Duwa, with its ancient cave temple, one of the oldest human settlements in Lanka, is close by. A few miles away are the famous Dunhinda Waterfalls. Trips from Ella can radiate to cover the tea country. right down to the coastal plains and back in a series of day tours.

Farr Inn is right on the Horton Plains itself: a cosy bungalow once belonging to an early planter, Thomas Farr. Here is the only trout fishing to be done in the island in well-stocked streams and a place of very special interest to botanists, geologists, ecologists. The climate and environment are wholly Scottish: silvery mists, clouds and sudden sunbursts.

In the Ancient Cities Resort Area, CHC has three resthouses and a hotel: Hotel Seruwa in Polonnaruwa and the Polonnaruwa, Dambulla and Sigiriya Resthouses. Here are more than glimpses of the 2500 year-old living culture of Sri Lanka: the civiliization of Polonnaruwa dates back to the times when it flourished in the 10th to 12th Centuries AD. The ruins are magnificent and under the Cultural Triangle programme much has been restored of its splendours. At Polonnaruwa Resthouse, Queen Elizabeth II’s room -where she stayed on her 1954 visit to Sri Lanka-is not to be missed. No one stopping at Sigiriya Resthouse would fail to climb the “Lion Rock” and marvel at the 5th Century frescoes there. And as for Dambulla, the murals at the cave temple are among the wonders of early paintings.

The “showpiece” of CHC is the 62-room Tissamaharama Resthouse within easy reach of wildlife reserves of the deep South of Sri Lanka, 160 miles from Colombo and beautifully located on a lake shore. It is close to the Yala Game Sanctuary; to Situlpahuwa, site of an ancient monastic retreat; and co Kataragama, the hallowed shrine of god Skanda Kumara, tamed for its mystical powers and a spot sacred to Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims.

On the golden beaches of the South is the Weligama Bay Inn overlooking the

splendid bay. At Bentota Holiday Resort is the Hotel Lihiniya Surf with its 96 rooms and all facilities for a restful holiday. Weligama was once a famous port in medieval times and is distinguished for the remarkable “Kustaraja” statue of a king at the crossroads. Matara, an ancient centre of learning. once also a Dutch town with two medieval forts, is nor far away.

Kitulgala Resthouse is most picturesquely situated on a bank of the Kelani river en route to Nuwara Eliya in the central hills. It is renowned for the varied birdlife in its environs; several indigenous species of birds being found here at all seasons of the year. Once the location of a famous film, “Bridge on the River Kwai”, which won international fame, remains of the artefacts used in the ’50s when the film was made are still to be explored there.

Hanwella Resthouse is just a 45-minute drive from Colombo city and is also located on the lower banks of the Kelani river; a delightfully secluded spot set amid groves of rubber and coconut and not far from a silk-making centre of some repute. The jak tree in the garden was planted by the Prince of Wales (Edward VII) when he visited Sri Lanka a century or so ago.

What CHC describes as Wayside Stopovers are the resthouses of Ambepussa on the Kandy-Colombo Road, Pussellawa Resthouse on the Kandy-Nuwara Eliya Road and Habarana at the main junction or crossroads to the North and East in the North Central Province. But all these are bases from which to leisurely ‘do’ the surrounding most fascinating and full of flavor countryside. Tea gardens, spice gardens, walks, drives, parks, ancient monuments, perennial villages and lifestyles and modern marvels like the Mahaweli Development Scheme can be visited from these places – or one could simply relax. It is the visitor’s choice-and he will love to return and be pampered in the resthouses of the Ceylon Hotels Corporation.



The modern resthouse at Tissamaharama



Ella Resthouse with a homery frontage of lawns and flower beds