

Special Reports: The forgotten gem

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Malik J. Fernando, Managing Director of Resplendent Ceylon

[Resplendent Ceylon](#) is a known name on the shores of Sri Lanka with three upscale boutique resorts that are a part of the Relais & Châteaux hotel association – Tea Trails, Wild Coast Tented Lodge, and Cape Weligama. The company has been fruitful in catering to the discerning traveler looking to get something more out of their vacation than all-you-can-drink margaritas.

Malik J. Fernando, Managing Director of Resplendent Ceylon, works hard to ensure that the warmth and friendliness of Sri Lanka is represented from the moment guests step onto the company's properties to the time they head to the airport to return home.

"The lasting impression travelers have of our country is how well they have been looked after," says Fernando. "This is a critical ingredient for countries that seek to grow tourism."

Elevating the experience

Sri Lanka itself is an oft-overlooked tourist option, one that Fernando believes provides the high level of luxury that many cooped-up would-be travelers are looking for.

“This small island packs in a continent’s worth of attractions and eight world heritage sites, all available within a few hours of each other,” he says. Some of these amazing destinations include the Ceylon Tea highlands, the Cultural Triangle and, as Fernando points out, “probably the best wildlife parks outside of Africa.”

Want to see leopards, elephants, bear and blue whales outside of Africa? Look no further than the wilderness of Sri Lanka, where all this and more is at a traveler’s fingertips.

Though it may not crack the top ten of many Western delivery apps, Sri Lankan cuisine has a lot to offer, and where better to experience it than on home territory.

“Sri Lankan cuisine is very distinctive, using cinnamon, coconut and myriad spices that the country is famous for – the best cinnamon is grown here,” says Fernando. These are the flavors that the kitchens of Resplendent Ceylon bring to their guests each and every day.



A look at the pristine beauty of the Wild Coast Tented Lodge located in Yala. Sri Lanka

Accompanying these dishes is Dilmah Tea, made by the artisanal beverage company which owns Resplendent Ceylon, with its teas featured center stage in the company’s Ceylon Tea Trails resort. And Fernando also has another unique perspective when it comes to bringing customers to Sri Lanka’s pristine beaches: he sits on the board of SriLankan Airlines along with other private-sector colleagues. Restructuring the airline to grow alongside the country’s booming tourism has been a top priority for he and others who believe in the viability of Sri Lanka’s position in the global travel industry.

Finding “new” customers

International appeal is something that Resplendent Ceylon has historically specialized in, focusing its business on out-of-country travelers as opposed to local. However, the impact of COVID-19 inspired

them to shift their model once it became clear that there was a demographic right under their nose that wasn't being catered to.

“For higher end hotels like Resplendent, the local traveler share was previously small,” recalls Fernando. “However, during the pandemic and overseas travel restrictions, affluent locals who usually holiday overseas experimented with our resorts and were pleasantly surprised. Within a short period, we built up a regular local clientele which, even with the resumption of foreign travelers, is now a significant element.”



A look at the pristine beauty of the Wild Coast Tented Lodge located in Yala, Sri Lanka

The premium travelers who flock to the company's locations are looking for a memorable experience, not a discount, Fernando notes, which is why special packages and discounts are of no interest to the brand. Delivering holidays that will destress their clientele and keep them coming back – hopefully with friends and family – is the goal of Fernando and the Resplendent Ceylon team.

Getting Back to Normal

With the damage of the pandemic still in the rear-view mirror, Fernando has nothing but high hopes for the tourism industry that he and his company have been helping to foster. Offering a safe, unique experience is of the utmost importance to Resplendent Ceylon.

“The 2021/22 winter season was very successful,” notes Fernando, pointing to the pent-up desire to travel following international lockdowns. “Sri Lanka opened for tourism in early 2021. We were considered a mature market thanks to the clear, thought-out rules and protocols that we had in place.”

A pleasant change that Fernando has witnessed is that many customers are choosing longer stays, or even to extend their time in Sri Lanka, which he credits in part to the new telework standard that

many companies around the world are adopting.

“Working from a hotel is convenient – less of a mad rush to get back to the office,” he points out. “To hear travelers ask on the day of checkout if they can extend their stay by a week was unheard of before. It brings joy to the heart of a hotelier!”