

# Concierge

Offering the indulgent luxuries of a private villa with the personal service of a five star hotel, Kahanda Kanda sits within the spacious surrounds of a working tea estate with panoramic views of the palm fringed jungle and Indian Ocean beyond.



"The most spectacular villa in the south-coastal region. It is the quintessential tropical dream house, built around a series of pavilions and lotus ponds. Add the gargantuan swimming pool and waterfall, the massage pavilion and his-and-hers bathrooms, and it's hard not to be spoiled rotten. Think James Bond film set, fused with Amanresort sophistication." *Harpers&Queen*



There is a natural beauty to Sri Lanka that is impossible to ignore. But it is that diamond in the rough that perhaps isn't as obvious on first glance that offers an added satisfaction to those who visit, the feeling of uncovering an undiscovered gem amid this jewel of a nation.

Such was the case in 1999 when English interior designer George Cooper visited the hills of Galle along the southwestern tip of Sri Lanka. One of Sri Lanka's major cities, Galle is not where one would expect a 'hidden' aspect of Sri Lanka to have been found. Yet that's precisely what happened.

Cooper saw what anyone else who meandered through the hills did, including a 10-acre plot of cinnamon gardens accompanied by a working tea plantation. The only shelter on the expanse was a single run-down bungalow atop one of the hills. The



**KK – The Collection**  
While in Galle, visit the small boutique store on Pedlar Street within the Fort. Many of the items, such as seashell-rimmed mirrors, cotton organdy bedsheets from Rajasthan, and woven baskets from Indonesia are available inside the hotel itself.

plantation had not been particularly well maintained, a surprise given the dominance of Ceylon Tea as an export here. Cooper saw potential. He saw what would become Kahanda Kanda.

**REVITALISING THE LANDSCAPE**  
Cooper first took down the bungalow and rebuilt it into a series of pavilions. He would reside there as the process was being completed, laying polished concrete floors – cracked and faded – that now weave through the property. Large stepping stones serve as guides for visitors, urging them across serene lily ponds before culminating at a 20-metre pool.

The plantation was not disbanded, but instead some 60% was replanted and Kahanda Kanda – now a 5-suite boutique hotel – includes a completely operational tea plantation.

All of this offers a stunning panoramic view of palm-fringed jungle lands and the Indian Ocean. As the hotel's website quotes a guest as observing, Kahanda Kanda (affectionately known as 'KK') may be 'the most relaxing place in the world'.

Such acclaim has been broad-reaching. Miguel Cunat, CEO of top-flight travel company Sri Lanka In Style, said recently that "Kahanda Kanda is the perfect place for a healthy week of relaxation and rejuvenation from the pressures of a stressful and busy life."

Outside Sri Lanka, the opinion has been the same. *Condé Nast Traveler USA*

named Kahanda Kanda one of its 'Top New Hotels in the world', the critic's highest accolade, in 2007. And Internet travel review site Tripadvisor.com named the hotel Galle's top choice and the second best hotel throughout Sri Lanka.

The reasons for such praise are multifaceted.

**ON THE GROUNDS**  
Sitting atop a ridge, KK offers a genuine Sri Lankan feeling as it overlooks the bustling city of Galle. But nothing says more about Sri Lanka than its people, and the initial impression at the hotel is that its staff, led by George Cooper himself, are inviting you with broad smiles and open arms into their homeland – or, in Cooper's case, his home. One visitor recounted the story of asking a Kahanda staffer for a coconut, and watching him venture 30ft up a tree to pluck one, armed with nothing but a leather belt. That's service!

The view over Koggala Lake is peaceful, but the interiors – remember, Cooper is a designer by trade – cement the tranquillity. From the Peacock Suite's elegant ebony four-poster bed and double bathrooms – each with outdoor showers – to the Mango Suite's expertly blended contemporary Sri Lankan furniture with antique Oriental pieces, the hotel sets out to achieve a relaxing, sensual elegance that is captured equally but uniquely in each of the five rooms. A honeymooners' paradise, offerings include the Garden Suite's private outdoor shower landscaped with



ginger lilies and palms. As Cooper describes it, "imagine yourself rinsing off in the Garden of Eden."

Each room has a private veranda with expansive views, be they a garden filled with aromatic gardenia bushes and frangipani trees, exotic birds as they call from the overhanging trees, or peering out over the work along the plantation.

The serenity of tropical ambience is accentuated by fresh fusion cuisine that draws visitors from the surrounding area. Both resident chefs have been professionally trained in Thailand and offer a variety of Thai dishes, as well as classic Sri Lankan curries made from fruits, vegetables, and herbs grown on the estate, as well as the finest local produce.

Cooper has consulted with Australian nutritionist Samantha Gowling to

cultivate an array of health and wellness offerings, blending Zen Macrobiotics, Ayurvedic, and Traditional Chinese philosophies. Besides special menus and tonics, visitors may participate in holistic cooking classes, yoga and health and nutrition seminars, and receive a variety of rejuvenating massage offerings.

**LOCATION, LOCATION, AND LOCATION**  
The oft-repeated line about real estate's three most important features certainly holds true for Kahanda Kanda, not only for the resort itself but its surroundings, which carry both cultural and historic significance.

Go balloon-riding high above the city of Galle, a fortified city built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Take in the surrounding beaches, including Wijaya, Unawatuna, and Mirissa, all accessible by chauffeur or tuk-tuk.

**Further information:**  
[www.kahandakanda.com](http://www.kahandakanda.com)  
or  
[www.srilankainstyle.com](http://www.srilankainstyle.com)

At Unawatuna, there is a dive centre for all ages, while the Mirissa Water Sports Centre boasts a 54-ft Indonesian fishing trawler for sports fishing and coastal cruises, and a 24-ft vessel for sailing in the bay.

A three-hour guided bike tour weaves in and out of jungle lands and past historic and fascinating temples, some of which have stood for centuries.

And if wildlife is your fancy, rise early and travel to Yala, where elephants, bears, and crocodiles abound at Yala Safari Park, which is also home to the largest remaining group of the world's dwindling leopard population.

However, it would be a failure not to note – and truly take in – the city of Galle itself. The best example of a fortified city built by Europeans in South Asia, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Galle Fort is often touted as one of the modern Wonders of the World. In fact, however, Galle's history extends much earlier, as it has been theorised that Galle was once the ancient seaport of Tarshish, from which King Solomon drew ivory and other valuables.

Kahanda Kanda's enveloping accommodations make it inviting to do nothing, while its magnetic surroundings are equally attractive for doing everything. The choice, of course, will be yours. 🌿