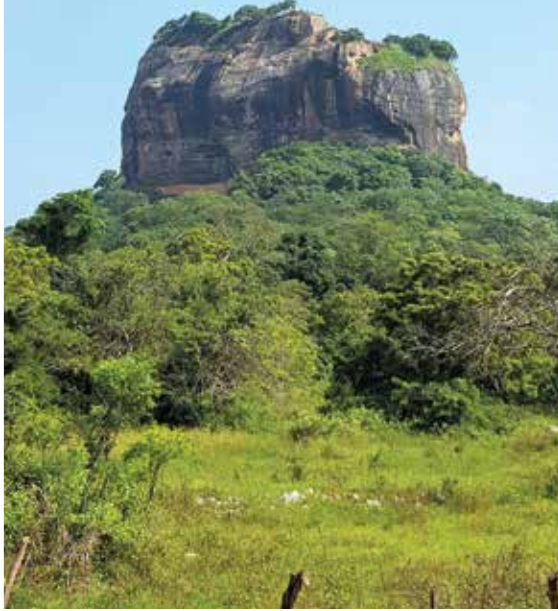


# CHASING SUNSETS IN SRI LANKA

FROM THE BUSY STREETS OF THE CAPITAL OF COLOMBO TO THE SERENE SHORES OF THE SOUTH, KATE WEBSTER TAKES YOU ON A JOURNEY CHASING SUNSETS IN SRI LANKA.

THE CLIMB UP LION ROCK WILL TAKE YOU ABOUT 2 HOURS BUT WELL WORTH THE CLIMB.



**N**o matter where you are in Sri Lanka, one thing I found is the sunsets are magic. Some people collect souvenirs from their travels, I like to collect sunsets.

### ALLURING & ROMANTIC

There is something about sunsets I find alluring and romantic. It is a time to reflect on the day and give thanks for the experiences you have had, while holding the excitement that a new day is just around the corner, wrapped in mystery and adventure yet to be discovered. Also, the fact that a sunset goes hand in hand with a sundowner, you can't lose.

My first Sri Lankan sunset arrived as I was in a car driving from Sigiriya to Dambulla. I had spent the morning exploring Lion Rock, an ancient rock fortress located in the 'Cultural Triangle' in the northern Matale District near the town of Dambulla in the Central Province.

### AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WONDER

The 200-metre-high rock is the site of a historical and archaeological wonder. The name Lion Rock is derived from the enormous lion image that is carved into the rock. Climbing Lion Rock sets you back USD\$30 and takes about two hours to take in the entire complex. It is best to visit early morning to avoid the crowds and give you enough time to move on to your next destination.

The drive from Sigiriya to Dambulla is quite scenic, winding through the country roads and avoiding the constant intervention from local buses does take time. I, unfortunately, did not prepare for this, so by the time I arrived at Jetwing Lake Dambulla, Sri Lanka hotel, I

had to suffice for my first Sri Lankan sunset moment hanging out the car window. Still, it was satisfying, as the sun dipped below the mountains as the farmland passed along the way.

### DAMBULLA

Waking for sunrise as a substitute the following day, I was not disappointed. Jetwing Lake is situated on a lake and surrounded by what can only be described as a serene panoramic vista. Bird morning calls broke the silence as the mist lifted off the lake and engulfed the mountainous surroundings. The golden glow spilled across the horizon as the sun rose and a hot air balloon floated silently across the horizon. For a short moment, I felt I was cheating on my love for sunset as the sunrise warmed my heart.

A property that has been built with the harmony of its surroundings in mind, Jetwing Lake is open and airy which offers an ambience of being one with nature. There was a feeling of 'tread lightly' here, not only in the fact that the property's dedication to sustainable living is evident in their operations, but the staff also seemed to breeze around with a delicate balance of helping when needed but at the same time leaving you to just enjoy being there.

From Dambulla it was time to move south. Determined to arrive at my next destination in time for sunset, I set off early. This time the chaotic traffic was broken for a moment when an old blue train chugged past and I felt transported back in time. I am told these blue trains are quite the experience in Sri Lanka and I am disappointed I missed out on it.

### NATURALLY YALA

Located where the southern and eastern coasts meet, Yala is the gateway to Yala National Park. The journey through provincial greenery and coastal roads is most scenic. As I get closer to Yala National Park the vegetation turns more to grassland and the sightings of elephants begin.

The elephants in the area seem accustomed to human activity and roam right onto the road. I asked my driver to continue past the elephants and avoid feeding them in fear it just entices them more to rely on humans.

### WILD LUXURY

As the sun was getting low in the sky, I made my way along the outskirts of Yala National Park to check in at Jetwing Yala. Sprawled over 38 acres of uncharted coastal wilderness; Jetwing Yala is the closest hotel to Sri Lanka's most popular natural reserve.

I was taken aback by the raw beauty and wild luxury that lay before me. Harmoniously nestled amongst the surrounding bush and resting upon the shoreline of the Indian Ocean behind the dunes, Jetwing Yala makes you feel as if you are one with the wilderness. After a speedy check-in, I sat on the balcony of my room, drink in hand, marvelling at the changing colours of the sky from pastel pinks into a burnt orange glow that reflected off the waves lapping on the shore. My mind wandered as I thought about what the following day would bring in this little piece of paradise I had found.

### NOT SO GAME SAFARI

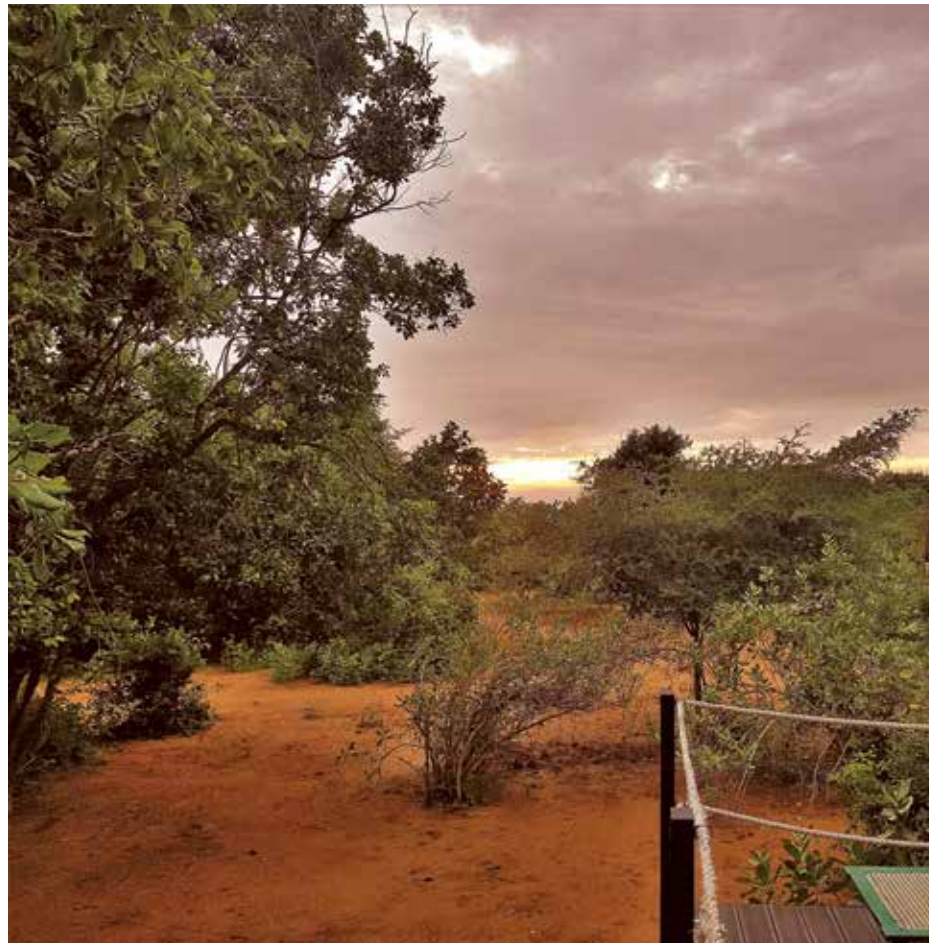
An early morning start took me on a game safari into Yala National Park. Being a frequent visitor to Africa and many game safaris there, I was keen to see the difference between the two destinations. Unfortunately, I found the experience quite busy and disorganised so returned to the hotel quite deflated and disappointed.

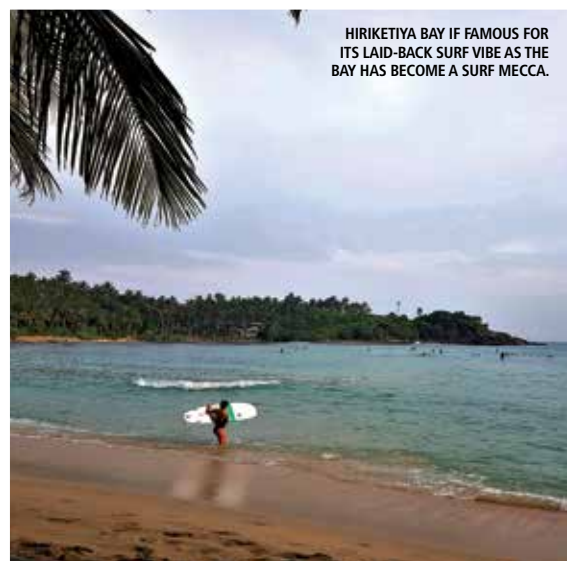
This disappointment soon dissolved as I returned to find Jetwing Yala had a glamping option, Yala Safari Camp, and there was an opening for me to stay. The tent was hardly like one you would pitch in the back yard. Nestled in the picturesque coastal dunes, these elegant tents bring together the pleasure of camping with the creature comforts of modern living. A large wooden deck stretched out into the bush and it was here I would spend my next sunset in Sri Lanka.

Not only was the afternoon greeted by the setting sun, but the wildlife began to stir, finding refuge for the evening or waking for the evening hunting. I sat watching a nearby family of wild pigs, making snuffle noises as they fossicked for food under the bushes. As darkness fell the snuffle noises became louder and I realised it was no longer just the wild pigs present. The crack of sticks and rustle from the nearby bushes confirmed the presence of an elephant. As the last of the light drained from the sky, I thought to myself, you don't need to explore an entire National Park when the wild life comes to you at Yala Safari Camp.

### HIRIKETIYA BAY

From Yala I headed West along winding scenic coastal roads that lead to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, Hiriketiya Bay. Hiriketiya Bay is a small stretch of beach that curves around the outside of Dikwella. Familiar with coastal towns, the relaxed vibe of Hiriketiya makes everyone slow down.





HIRIKETIYA BAY IS FAMOUS FOR ITS LAID-BACK SURF VIBE AS THE BAY HAS BECOME A SURF MECCA.



Rooms are designed to keep you in touch with nature while keeping a local Sri Lankan flare about them. Impressed by the ambience of Salthouse, I decided to spend a few nights here.

**POKE BOWL**

With plenty of time to spare for the afternoon, I wandered up the road, waving at the tuk tuk drivers who passed me. I had been told of a newly opened beachside café called Malu that serves up some wholesome health in a bowl, otherwise known as a poke bowl. This sounded like a perfect lunch option before taking a quick swim to refresh from the heat.

The sunsets at Hiriketiya Bay would have to have been my favourite in Sri Lanka by far. An ice-cold glass of Mojito in hand, funky tunes of Bob Marley serenading the beach crowd from a nearby café, my toes wriggling in the sand as the waves continuously caress the beach in a rhythmic pulse. The salty air is warm and clings like a friendly hug.

It was time. The sky filled with colour, as if giving its last hoorah to the day. The sun began to set, and I reflected on my time in Sri Lanka. This Land of Serendipity had become for me, the Land of Sunsets. ❖

The place is a surfing mecca, as the curve forming a bay like shape causes the waves to come in high. Also, a hot spot for yogis, potters and designers, Hiriketiya oozes with entrepreneurial vibe. Hipster restaurants and quirky cafes are dotted along the palm tree fringed beach. I checked in to Salthouse, a short walk from the beach, run by Australians Cristal Napper and Rob Dixon.

The guesthouse has a holistic approach to your stay, with a yoga shala available for daily practice, a healthy menu packed with goodness and smoothies to boot.

*Pocket Guide*



**Jetwing Hotels**  
<http://www.jetwinghotels.com>

**Salthouse Sri Lanka**  
[www.salthousesrilanka.net](http://www.salthousesrilanka.net)

**Fly to Sri Lanka with AirAsia**  
[www.airasia.com](http://www.airasia.com)