

Sri Lanka's star spas

The Indian Ocean island's new wave of luxury retreats will be kind to your body and your bank balance



And relax: the beach at the Sen Wellness Sanctuary
KRISTINA KASHTANOVA

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Sri Lanka is one of the hottest destinations on the planet right now. It's always had the unspoilt beaches. Now it's got chic new boutique hotels and an emerging restaurant scene, too. And if a holiday for you means hours whiled away in a luxurious spa, there's another compelling reason to visit. The country's wellness scene is becoming the affordable alternative to the holistic honeypots of Thailand and Indonesia, with A-list yoga instruction and authentic ayurvedic retreats. It's five-star pampering at four-star prices. Here's our pick of the best places to lie back and think of the savings.

Anantara Kalutara resort

Kalutara

The luxury hotel chain Anantara has a loyal following, due in large part to its reputation for top-notch pampering, and this glitzy resort, 90 minutes outside Colombo, doesn't disappoint. The vast 10-room spa has relaxation pavilions set over reflecting pools and 60-minute treatments from £78, almost half the price of the same experience at Anantara's flagship resort in Phuket, Thailand. There's also an ayurvedic doctor, beach running, yoga, circuit training and spa cuisine options available at mealtimes. With 141 rooms, the resort is hardly intimate, but it has the distinction of being one of the last projects designed by the late Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, and features his trademark tropical modernist verandas and courtyards. Kalutara's colonial mansions and Buddhist sites are

another draw.

Five nights from £949pp, B&B, booked through healingholidays.co.uk

Surya Lanka Ayurveda Resort

Talalla

This colonial-style, beachfront resort specialises in panchakarma, a hardcore ayurvedic detox. And we mean hardcore: laxatives, enemas, nasal cleansing. For all that, the guests seem remarkably relaxed as they sunbathe in the pretty palm-fringed gardens or on what is one of the country's most picturesque bays. Much of the resort's clientele stay for three weeks. Novices can opt for the one-week panchakarma lite, which includes twice-daily yoga, therapeutic massages and steam baths. There's no coffee or alcohol, but this isn't a starvation vacation: the buffet even includes meat curries. The 42 rooms won't win any style awards and the solitary bar of soap in the basic bathroom is rather disappointing, but the ambience is seriously restorative. Wi-fi is only available in the lobby, and "over-talking" is discouraged.

Seven nights from £1,259pp, full-board, including daily treatments



Treatment time at Santani

Tri

Koggala Lake

Russell Brand and Gerard Butler are among the fans of Tri. Its glamorous co-owner, yoga teacher Lara Baumann, has a great sense of humour, which means

classes are fun as well as demanding. The mirror-calm lake and Instagrammable pool provide all the visual cues required to master meditation. Tri's laid-back vibe is seductive and its 11 suites have fresh interiors by Lindsay Taylor, who previously ran a textile business with Darcey Bussell. Dinner might include oysters from the lake, hay-roasted trevally fish or white-tea panna cotta. The beach is a £2 tuk-tuk ride away and Galle's boho shops are 40 minutes by car. *Six nights from £1,349pp, half-board, including daily yoga, one ayurvedic consultation and two massages*

Sen Wellness Sanctuary

Near Tangalle

The Sri Lankan Sam Kankanamge is one of London's top osteopaths, but, these days, he divides his time between Wimpole Street and his new project, this retreat in a sliver of jungle between a pristine beach and a serene lagoon. Life here has a rhythm as steady as the surf that pounds the coast: sunrise yoga at the shoreline, meditation with a Buddhist monk, spa treatments prescribed by an ayurvedic doctor, free excursions to nearby temples, and cookery lessons with the village grannies. The same grannies cook the resort's delicious Sri Lankan buffets, though the communal dining may not be to everyone's taste. There's late-night turtle-watching, but most guests retire early to their four-poster with a book.

Seven nights from £1,539pp, full-board, including daily treatments

Santani

Near Kandy

In danger of burnout, Vickum Nawagamuwage quit his global consultancy job with Deloitte and returned home to open this sophisticated spa in Sri Lanka's tea country. The 16 rooms have been designed as 21st-century meditation caves, with polished concrete, minimalist styling and floor-to-ceiling windows with views of a jungle-draped valley and the dramatic Knuckles mountain range. This is a place to reconnect with nature through yoga and river walks, but Nawagamuwage hasn't totally given up the high life, so expect indulgent spa treatments and fine dining, too.

Seven nights from £2,199pp, full-board, including a full yoga programme

Susan d'Arcy was a guest of Healing Holidays, which offers all the above packages, all including flights and transfers (020 7135 2436, healingholidays.co.uk).