Sri Lanka's crowning glory

With its stunning beaches and heritage sights, the island should be perfect for Prince Charles on his 65th birthday, says ANDREW EAMES.
EAST COAST DREAMING

Tourism is in its infancy on Sri Lanka's east coast, home to white-sand beaches and unspoilt fishing villages. Unlike the far more popular west coast, Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall won't be hassled here by trinket sellers or excursion touts.

Trincomalee is an overgrown fishing village on a peninsula with a superb natural harbour. The important pilgrimage temple of Koneswaram sits on a hill and is reached through an old Dutch Fort.

Inland is wild peacock and elephant territory, where farmers retreat into their treehouses at night, prepared to defend their crops with bright lights and...
noise. Offshore is Pigeon Island, renowned for Sri Lanka's best snorkelling; there is good whale-watching to be had here, too.

A handful of hotels are distributed along a 20-mile strip to the north of Trinco. The royals should book into the new Jungle Beach (ugaescapes.com (/expressadmin/posts/add/442033/ugaescapes.com)), a selection of upmarket wooden cabanas nestled between bird-rich trees at the back of its own two-mile stretch of virgin sand. Doubles from £150 per night (two sharing), B&B.

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Once his official duties in bustling Colombo are over, Charles may want to go to ground for a bit.

The quirky Mudhouse (themudhouse.lk (/expressadmin/posts/add/442033/themudhouse.lk)) north of Colombo, near the town of Ambanpola, is perfect. Flanked by lakes rich in birdlife, the lodge, the epitome of sustainable luxury, consists of five organic hideaways dotted among the trees and connected by walkways.

Mud-walled, rattan-roofed, with floors of rammed earth, each "hut" is a cluster of living and sleeping areas. Thankfully they include western bathrooms or outdoor showers in little compounds cupped in forest. Another bathing option is the Mudhouse's own swimming lake, which comes complete with an island and pagoda.

Dinner, cooked in clay pots over charcoal using ingredients from the Mudhouse farm, is eaten together by candlelight in an open-air dining room, usually accompanied by the calling of night birds on the lily pads.

In the morning, the royal couple could join a nature walk with the Mudhouse rangers. Sri Lanka's Unesco-registered Cultural Triangle, with ancient monuments such as the Sigiriya rock fortress and Yapahuwa, is a short drive away. Doubles from £168 per night (two sharing), full board.
Crowned by spectacular peaks and draped in rainforest, Sri Lanka's highlands are reminiscent of England, both in terms of the cool weather and English signage. The road from the tropical lowlands weaves through a secret Eden of delicate rice paddies terracing up to a rolling sea of tea plantations, punctuated with cinnamon, where you can buy red bananas at the roadside stalls.

Hillsides around the agricultural town of Hatton, at 5,000ft, are kept as neat as botanical gardens by armies of leaf pluckers, who sing as they work.

A handful of tea estate bungalows have been turned over to tourism. Ceylon Tea Trails (teatrails.com) is Sri Lanka’s first Relais & Chateaux resort, although "resort" is a misnomer for these four bungalows idyllically located around Castlereagh lake.

Make a decision to stay in one, then take a walk to the next (around 30 minutes away), and stay there, too. Expect wood-panelled walls and big fireplaces, with verandas surrounded by sweeping lawns and rose gardens. Each has its own swimming pool and summer house.

Here the day starts with Bed Tea, charmingly served by your butler, then there’s the tea factory to inspect, and later on there are cucumber sandwiches and sultana scones served in the bungalow's dining room. Just like Highgrove, no doubt.

Doubles from £468 per night (two sharing), all-inclusive.
COLONIAL GEM

The Old Town of Galle is the kind of architectural gem that Prince Charles adores. Situated on a promontory within a ring of formidable ramparts built by the Dutch back in the 1660s, the World Heritage Site is full of beautifully restored Dutch and British warehouses and merchants' houses.

An eclectic semi-residential British community is the driving force behind an annual literary festival which attracts big names such as Joanna Trollope and Tom Stoppard.

Galle is also home to one of Sri Lanka's finest boutique hotels, the Amangalla (amanresorts.com).
Tradition and modernity have seamlessly melded, and there is a top-class spa alongside the colonial traditions. The jade-green swimming pool is dappled with the shade of overhanging acacias, and there are complimentary yoga classes in the Garden Pavilion. I wonder if Camilla could drag Charles along? Doubles from £480 per night (two sharing), B&B.

THE KNOWLEDGE

All of the accommodation mentioned above is bookable via Experience Travel (020 3355 4730/experiencetravelgroup.com). Return flights from Heathrow to Colombo can be arranged from £595.

Sri Lanka Tourism: srilanka.travel
The village of Trincomalee is well worth a visit [GETTY](http://oas.northernandshell.co.uk/5c/www.express.co.uk/life-style/travel/1697912761/x04/default/empty.gif/657638536e464b4162486741444783362?x)