

FEATURE ON JETWING VIL UYANA  
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**Global Adviser**



*Dawn chorus Peace and quiet  
in Vil Uyana's wetlands*

**NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN ... SRI LANKA**

**Water World**

IF YOU HEAR WHAT SOUNDS like screams and gunshots at Vil Uyana, there's no need to panic. The screams are just the local farmers warning each other of elephants, and the gunshots are in fact fire-crackers used to scare them away. But what you mostly hear at this stunning new eco-resort in Sri Lanka's dry zone is

silence, punctuated only by the calling of kingfishers and the cooing of spotted doves. There are 426 bird species in Sri Lanka, and many of them can be seen here, in this extraordinary nature reserve that also doubles as a superchic hotel.

Vil Uyana is the first hotel in Sri Lanka to construct a wet-

land system with lakes, reed beds and imported forest. Accommodation is in vast villas—the bathroom alone, which boasted its own lily pond, was about the size of my apartment. Designed by Sunela Jayawardene, Sri Lanka's leading environmental architect, the villas combine wood, granite, thatch and concrete in a haven of elegant simplicity: a haven, in fact, for man and beast.

"Can you see the

crocodile?" said the waiter over breakfast. "Can you see the kingfisher?" His notepad, it turned out, held not only my order for kurrukan roti and chicken curry, but also page upon page of bird species. There's a resident naturalist, too, who monitors the growing numbers of birds, fish and animals. "We're hoping to attract fishing cats," he confided eagerly, "and more black bitterns and rusty-spotted cats."

Vil Uyana is near some of the richest architectural treasures in the world. Just up the road is Sigiriya, the extraordinary rock fortress built in the 5th century, and widely hailed as the eighth wonder of the world. The ruined capitals of Anuradhapura, founded in the 4th century B.C., and 900-year-old Polonnaruwa are a shortish drive away, and so are the cave temples at Dambulla, which date from the 1st century B.C. They're so amazing—and so amazingly well preserved—that you could stay in a hut and be happy. But how much better to return, after a hard day communing with history, to a fabulous Ayurvedic massage, a herbal bath infused with petals, a delicious meal—and the sight of a peacock dancing, alone, in the dusk. [www.viluyana.com](http://www.viluyana.com) —BY CHRISTINA PATTERSON

**NOTE**

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