

TAPROBANE



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NATURE

Cashew Tree

HISTORY

Kaymen's Gate

SRI LANKAN CUISINE

Chef Pabilis

COVER STORY

CINNAMON

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Sri Lanka, an island nation renowned for its nature, culture and heritage, has continued to win and enrapture the hearts and minds of many with its beauty and hospitality. Stories of great kings, enlightened civilizations, marvelous technological feats, glorious battles and many things wonderful that continue to regale the current generations and the world over are testaments to the proud history and heritage of Sri Lanka.

Located strategically in the midst of the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is situated at the crossroads of major shipping routes to South Asia, the Far East and Europe and America. This makes the Island an ideal port of call for shipping lines and airfreight services. In ancient times, Sri Lanka was well known as a crucial seaport where travelers, explorers and traders from other nations alike frequented, traded, explored and discovered. However, the Island, more popularly known as Ceylon, Taprobane and Serendib, in the bygone centuries, was not without its fair share of trouble with many nations seeking, and succeeding, to colonize the island for its location, tantalizing spices and flavorsome foods.

The current cuisine of Sri Lanka has its roots in indigenous and traditional foods of the Island. These 'roots', spanning several thousands of years,

are augmented and made all the more richer by unique traditions, food cultures and habits added by traders, royal marriages, and invaders. With everything added, the food culture of Sri Lanka at its depth still retains the habits, culture, and palate of our nation's people. Our food culture is strongly intertwined with ayurvedic principles that dictate the importance of nutrition, health, and therapeutic reasoning in the ingredients that we use and the methods used to prepare the food. However, these customs and knowledge are fast dwindling with our current busy lifestyles and other influences, leading to many health issues and nutritional challenges.

In our culture, food is treated with respect, gratitude and the generosity of our spirits is expressed through the food we share with one another as well. We at Taprobane are striving to preserve this amazing food culture and the respect, gratitude and generosity of our nation. In the pages of our magazine you will discover the beauty and value of our food culture while understanding how to embrace the modern trends that are fast becoming fixtures in the Sri Lankan food landscape. Travel with us as we take you on a culinary journey unlike any you have experienced- with a bit of old and a bit of new.

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Fruit sellers can be found all over the island. But a good one; a decent one; a one worth changing your work route every morning just to get a taste of that fresh fruit.

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Kevum

HER MAJESTY THE LADY BUN



The Sinhala and Tamil new year season – which is fondly referred to by Sri Lankans as Awurudu – is a time where the hearth of the house steals the limelight with an impressive pageantry of traditional sweetmeats – made one after the other – in preparation to celebrate the dawn of the new year. Of this array of delicacies is Kevum – a luscious treat that holds a place of royalty among traditional awurudu confections.



The beloved kevu is always in high demand. So much so that the Sri Lankan equivalent to the phrase “selling like hot cakes” is “unu kevu wage wikinenawa.” Why the Sri Lankan folk replaced hot cakes with ‘unu kevu’ (hot kevu) is a question that is easy to answer. It is simply because this traditional sweetmeat made of rice flour, kittul jaggery or palmyrah palm treacle – is among the most popular traditional treats that are exclusively made during new year or to celebrate an auspicious or celebratory occasion.

Konda kevu is the most popular celebrity among its plethora of variations; and is thus named as it emulates the ladies’ hair bun. The batter of this sweetmeat is made by mixing rice flour (overnight soaked rice ground into a powder), jaggery or treacle and seasoned with salt. Then scoopfuls of thick batter are poured and deep fried in a round bottomed pan.

For traditional Sri Lankan master chefs, making kevu is a craft perfected with years of practice. The trick is to make sure that it is evenly cooked and the shape is just right. Making kevu is as much a treat to watch as it is to eat. As the batter begins to fry into a thick lump in sizzling hot oil, the master chef pokes it in the middle with a thin coconut stick and sprays spoonfuls of hot oil on it, with the frying strainer; all the while holding the stick and gently moving it in circular motions. This rhythmic dance that continues close to two minutes turns the lump of batter into a plump kevu with an adorable knot on top.

Kevum in History and Folklore

Enjoying its fair share of the limelight, kevu has made its way into Sri Lankan folklore and historical chronicles. In ‘Kusa Jathakaya’ (of the 550 jathaka stories in Buddhism depicting the past lives of The Buddha), it is

mentioned that King Kusa had a kevu shaped face (depicting that he had a displeasing appearance) as a result of a karma he had committed in a previous birth by taking kevu which was served to a Bikku from his alms bowl. Kevum is also mentioned in historical Sri Lankan texts such as Pujawaliya, Saddarma Rathnawaliya and Ummagga Jathakaya.

It is believed that King Dutugemunu – the hero of Mahavamsa who ruled the Anuradhapura kingdom – had prepared kevu, months in advance and left them exposed to air so fungi would grow on them. This fungi’s penicillin-like properties would prevent soldiers’ battle wounds from festering when applied after mixing with a poultice.

Robert Knox, in his famous book – A Historical Relation of Ceylon – refers to kevu as “a fritter made up of rice flour and jaggery. They make up in little lumps... fry them in coconut oil... and the king ordered



these Caown to be sent to them as a royal treat.”

The historical text Dathuwansaya brings to light 18 varieties of kevuam including ‘konda kevuam, mung kevuam, Narang kevuam, thala kevuam, undu kevuam, uputu kevuam, diya kevuam, kudu kevuam, garauppu kevuam, pana kevuam, ulundu kevuam and hendi kevuam.’

Historical narratives also mention that kevuam’s roots may go back even prior to the introduction of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, when people used to pay homage to gods by making various offerings. Given that the basic ingredients of this sweet are those that were natively abundant throughout the history of our civilization.

Health Benefits

Since this traditional sweetmeat is prepared with ingredients such as rice flour and kithul treacle, it contains a variety of nutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, fat and energy. Moreover, when stored in an air tight and dry container, this sweet treat can be preserved for a few months.

The sight of kevuam on an awurudu spread is always a delight, and you don’t necessarily need to wait for awurudu to enjoy this delicacy as it is now made available in many stores that offer traditional Sri Lankan sweets. Whether you are young or old, her majesty the lady bun is sure to delight your taste buds with her luscious lumps and bursts of flavour and aroma.



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RAM BUTAN

JEWEL OF THE JUNGLE

Malwana in May is a sight for sore eyes; for it is when the rambutan orchards in the area bejewel themselves with clusters of bright red fruits. There is not a soul that doesn't love this tropical delicacy and isn't enticed by the sight of trees laden with clusters of red, yellow and green fruits.



Malwana is the capital of rambutan country which spans across around 15 km northeast of Colombo along the Kelani River, extending all the way up to Hanwella. Come rambutan season, the streets in Malwana (and even Colombo) wear shawls of red and yellow as wayside vendors set up makeshift stores to sell the seasonal fruit.

Although Rambutan has a history of more than 500 years in the paradise island, it is believed that this succulent fruit found its way to Sri Lanka through the Portuguese from its birthplace Malaysia. Rambutan gets its name from Bhasa-Malay, which translates to 'hairy man of the jungle', owing to its quirky outer appearance. According to historical narratives, Rambutan ended up along the banks of the Kelani River in Malwana, because back then the Portuguese had a fortress in the town. Luckily for us Sri Lankans, the climatic conditions and soil in Malwana was perfect for the tropical fruit to thrive in harvest.

It is in May that Rambutan trees start bearing flowers announcing the harvesting season which follows through till August. This is when busier times begin for the orchard owners as they start preparations to begin harvesting. The biggest challenge for them is to safeguard the fruit laden trees from bats during night time, and squirrels and other birds during the day. Strategically placed huts across the orchard to be used for night watches become commonplace during the harvest season as farmers spend many sleepless nights to save the harvest from bats. During the day, the constant 'clicking and clunking' sounds made from 'takas' keeps the squirrels and birds away. A 'Takaya' is an apparatus that is

made from a glass bottle or tin with a metal rod inside which are then hung on trees to produce a sound when they sway with the wind.

The red jewels find their way to the streets of Colombo and suburbs through merchants who flock to Malwana during the harvesting season to buy these succulent fruits to be resold to young and old consumers alike, who eagerly await to taste this sweet delicacy. The Sri Lankan soil and climate has been a blessing for Rambutan, as the variety that grows in Malwana is considered to be the most delicious kind of it all.

Rambutan is rich in zinc, potassium, iron, magnesium, calcium,

phosphorus and manganese, and also contains vitamins A, B and C. It is a good source of natural sugars such as fructose and sucrose. Rambutan leaves and bark are used as a remedy to heal wounds and to treat fever. Native Malaysians use these as a natural medicine for eye infections. Young shoots and leaves of the tree are used to make dyes for fabrics.

Enjoyed mostly as the fruit in its raw form, today Rambutan is also used to make various drinks such as mojitos. Despite how it is enjoyed, Rambutan is a flavorsome treat that brings delight with each bite into the delicious lychee.



The advertisement features a dark background with coffee beans and leaves scattered around. At the top center is the 'BEST FARMERS LTD' logo. Below it, the text 'Best Quality' is written in a cursive font, followed by 'Coffee' in large, white, textured letters. In the center, there are two coffee bags: a white one labeled 'Pure Sri Lankan Arabica Coffee' and a blue one labeled 'Pure Sri Lankan Blended Coffee + Robusta'. A black coffee cup with a lid is shown with a splash of coffee. At the bottom, a small bowl of coffee beans is visible. The 'BEST FARMERS LTD' logo is repeated on the coffee bags. The background also features a faint illustration of a woman in traditional attire.

FOOD BOATS OF YORE

With a history that spans over 2,500 years, our nation is a country abound with a rich history that carries the legacy of our ancestors who were well adept at creating marvels that leaves us still in wonder...

Traversing through the ancient ruins of the Anuradhapura Kingdom, one could only fathom the glory of the kingdom's yesteryears. Remnants and ruins evidence a civilization that was ahead of its time, with advanced hydraulic systems and engineering marvels that could rival the present times. The first established kingdom in Sri Lanka, the Anuradhapura Kingdom was witness to a great many remarkable events that forever changed our country's path—the most significant being the arrival of Buddhism. The remains and relics of the many temples, stupas and complexes spanning over acres, tells the story of an era governed by religion. History tells that these temple complexes were home to thousands of monks and were equipped with all necessary facilities such as refectories, chapter houses, chambers, sanitary requirements, hospitals and much more.

Refectories or Dhana Shala (Alms Halls) have been the center at

many temple complexes. A key feature of the Anuradhapura Kingdom refectories is the Bath Oruwa (Rice Boat/Canoe), often accompanied by the Kanda Oruwa (Curry/Gruel Boat/Canoe). Bath Oruwa as the name implies is deemed as a large chaffing dish that held rice for serving while the Kanda Oruwa is said to have held side dishes/curries. Often times carved out of stone or granite, a few written historical records reveal some information as to how these were used. Two of the largest and well-preserved bath and kanda oru can be found at Mihintale and the Abhayagiri Temple Complex, respectively.

Mihintale Refectory

The origins of Mihintale could be traced to the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, 3rd Century BC, where Emperor Ashoka's son, Mahinda Thero first met King Devanampiyatissa. It is said that King Devanampiyatissa built a temple (vihara) and 68 caves for monks or bhikkus at Mihintale. Historical records and inscriptions show that over time, various other kings and regents have added stupas, temples and other buildings to Mihintale, which now spans across a vast area.

One of the most visited areas of Mihintale is the Refectory or the Alms Hall. Monks had gathered to eat communally at this 'Bhojana Shalawa' or the Monk's Refectory. Situated just before the Mada Maluwa, left of the Courtyard, the length and width of the Refectory is 114 feet and 77 feet, respectively. Rectangular in shape, the Refectory is overlaid with granite slabs and is equipped with a central courtyard that opens to the sky. There are two large troughs, deemed as the Bath Oruwa and the Kanda Oruwa, carved and hollowed out of single blocks of stone, and set at right

angles to each other. It is surmised that the Bath Oruwa was filled with cooked rice while the Kanda Oruwa was filled with curries donated by locals. Due to the size and extent of the Refectory and the 'boats', it is considered that the facility had the capacity to feed more than 1,000 monks. Furthermore, it is believed that the troughs were once inlaid with a layer of metal as well. Part of a pipeline has also been discovered at the Refectory along with water cisterns and covered drains.

The Mihintale Tablets, two inscribed stones, at the entrance of the Dhatu Ghara or the Relic House reveals the rules and regulations that were administered to the monks at Mihintale and also provides information to the many servants who worked at the Refectory. The mentioned servants include the Warden of the Refectory (bath ge ledi) and Twelve Servants who Cooked (Pisana salayin dolos janak) to name a few.

Abhayagiri Temple Complex and Refectory

Considered as the largest among the ruined monasteries in Sri Lanka, the Abhayagiri Temple Complex was established by King Valgamba in the 1st Century BC and was given as an offering to a monk by the name of Mahatissa of Kupikkala as a token of gratitude. According to an unearthed inscription found in 1909 the Temple Complex is said to have sprawled across an area of approximately 200 ha. As time went by, the Abhayagriya became the seat of Mahayana Buddhism in the country and in 4th Century BC under the direction of King Mahasena, the temple complex rose to even more prominence.

In 5th Century BC, a travelling Chinese monk by the name Fa Hsien noted down several anecdotes about the Abhayagiriya. In his

records, he has mentioned that there were 5,000 monks living at the Abhayagiri Temple Complex at the time, surpassing the Mahavihara.

Only ruins can be found of the Main Refectory or the Alms Hall at Abhayagiriya now. During the golden age of the Abhayagiriya, this was where the alms were provided to the monks who resided at the monastery. The Refectory is complete with a large rice trough, kitchen, sun-dial (the original is kept at a museum), courtyard, dining area, storerooms, and underground water conduits. During excavations, Historians and Archaeologists have identified four phases of construction of the main Refectory starting from the 1st century BC. The remnants of the Bath Oruwa can be found at the East end of the Main Refectory; A large stone trough carved out of a solid stone slab, it is 19 m long.

Dr Roland Silva has conducted a study to determine the capacity of the Bath Oruwa and thereby the temple complex. In this study, he has taken alms bowls used in ancient times and has filled them with sand and placed them in the Oruwa. He discovered that the Bath Oruwa can hold 5,800 of such bowls, thus determining that the Main Refectory has provided alms to nearly 5,800 monks on a daily basis. The capacity or the volume of this Bath Oruwa is approximately 481,000 cubic inches. The smaller stone boat found almost

next to the Bath Oruwa is deemed to be a Kanda Oruwa that may have held curries or side dishes.

Records and ruins uncovered at refectories at Inner City, Jetavanaramaya and Maha Viharaya, also show that Bath Oru were prominent in the Anuradhapura Kingdom due to the vast sizes of the temple complexes built to accommodate thousands of monks at a time when



Buddhism was flourishing. After the Anuradhapura Kingdom Bath Oru seemed to have faded into history. Looking at these remnants of a bygone era, one could only imagine the glorious past where sprawling grounds of green, dotted with magnificent structures and monks clad in saffron robes would have lent a charming and soothing sight to the eye...



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SUPERIORITY OF CEYLON CINNAMON

For centuries, trading nations who traversed the silk route came in search of the finest quality cinnamon to Sri Lanka. And still Sri Lanka is the world's largest exporter of the best quality cinnamon or the highest grade cinnamon of the cinnamon family. Cinnamon grown and produced in Sri Lanka has acquired a long standing reputation in the international market due to its unique quality, colour, flavour and aroma.

AT present Cinnamon is widely used as a food ingredient as well as in pharmaceutical preparations and in the cosmetics industry worldwide. High in antioxidants, it is considered a product which is good for overall health. Volatile oil of Cinnamon is widely used in perfumes, cosmetics and scented exotic gifts.

Cinnamomum zeylanicum Blume, also known as true cinnamon or Ceylon cinnamon is indigenous to Sri Lanka and southern parts of India. It has wide applications in diverse industries, including food & beverage, pharmaceutical, nutraceutical, cosmeceutical, perfumery and oral care. It is still used daily in many cultures because of the widespread benefits and its distinctly sweet, warming taste and ease of use in culinary purposes.

The cinnamon of commerce is the dried inner bark of the tree. Cinnamon primarily contains

essential oils and other derivatives, such as cinnamaldehyde, eugenol, cinnamic acid, and cinnamate. The main compound of cinnamon essential oil is cinnamaldehyde which is the chemical compound that gives the specific spicy aroma and flavor of cinnamon. The volatile oils obtained from the bark, leaf, and root barks vary significantly in chemical composition, with primary constituents such as cinnamaldehyde (in bark), eugenol (in leaf) and camphor (in root-bark). This suggests that they might vary in their pharmacological effects as well. Thus, cinnamon offers an array of different oils with diverse characteristics, each of which determines its value in different industries.

Cassia (Cinnamon cassia), the so called substitute for true cinnamon or Ceylon cinnamon, contains

appreciable amounts of coumarin (1,2-benzopyrone), which is a secondary metabolite with strong carcinogenic and hepatotoxic (chemical-driven liver damage) properties. Sri Lanka is the world's largest producer and exporter of Ceylon cinnamon to the world with 90% of global market share. Cassia is produced in large quantities by other countries whereas production of Ceylon cinnamon is mainly by Sri Lanka. However, in the global market, no distinction is made between cassia cinnamon and true cinnamon, and both are identified as cinnamon. In view of the above, Ceylon cinnamon, a unique and versatile spice, has an immense potential in the global market, though competencies and competitive advantage over cassia is yet to be promoted strongly.

The cinnamon of commerce is the dried inner bark of the tree.



Today, markets are increasingly globalized and dynamic, consumers are increasingly becoming health-conscious and there is a growing interest in natural food additives and flavors. It has been extensively revealed that the chemical constituents present in cinnamon offer a wide variety of medicinal benefits.

Potential role of cinnamon in human health

Initially in vitro (carried out outside human body) and later clinical trials in humans from different parts of the world have demonstrated numerous beneficial health effects of Ceylon cinnamon, such as antioxidant activity, anti-inflammatory activity, anti-diabetic activity, anti-cancer activity and reducing neurological damage and the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Research carried out in reputed laboratories around the world have found that the spice ranks No. 1 out of 26 of the most popular herbs and spices in the world in terms of its protective antioxidant levels. It is a spice commonly used worldwide and it is shown to be effective in improving health due to its functional properties that reduce free radical damage. To date, 41 different protective compounds have been identified in cinnamon. Due to the presence of these compounds, cinnamon possesses a wide range of other health benefits, including anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties.

Antioxidant effect:

Antioxidant compounds present in foodstuffs play a vital role in human life, acting as health-protecting agents. Cinnamon was proved to be higher in antioxidants than many other herbs and spices. The beneficial properties of cinnamon and its isolated compounds,

including polyphenols, are mostly attributed to their antioxidant activity. These compounds work to fight oxidative stress in the body by neutralizing harmful free radicals and other toxic compounds. This contributes to reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Although early studies on the antioxidant activity of cinnamon was confined to in vitro studies, recently many human clinical trials have been conducted to find the effect of cinnamon on oxidative stress. Review of these research has concluded that cinnamon reduce oxidative stress levels in humans.

Relieves Inflammation

Inflammation is part of our immune response which leads to destroy harmful pathogens that enter our body. After the destruction of the pathogens, immune response including inflammation subsides. Harmful compounds produced during inflammation could harm not only pathogens but also our own cells which in long term could lead to chronic diseases. In the modern-day environment we are constantly exposed to many toxic compounds through inhalation, digestive tract and through the skin, thus stimulating our immune system resulting in inflammation. Although the degree of inflammation is low in such instances compared to

infection by pathogens, prolonged low degree inflammation also could lead to chronic diseases. The antioxidants in cinnamon can help relieve chronic inflammation by neutralizing the harmful compounds produced during inflammation. Thus, lowering the risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and cognitive decline. Researchers have identified many different types of flavonoids in cinnamon, all of which are highly effective at neutralizing harmful compounds during inflammation. Review of recent human clinical trials, where biomarkers of inflammation were studied showed that cinnamon could reduce inflammation in humans contributing to reduction of risk of chronic diseases.

Cardiovascular diseases (Heart diseases)

Prolonged oxidative stress and inflammation are high risk factors for heart diseases. Reduction of oxidative stress and inflammation by cinnamon significantly contribute to reduce the risk of heart disease. In addition, blood cholesterol lowering ability of cinnamon also has been demonstrated in research, further contributing to diminish the risk of heart disease. High blood pressure is one of the highest risk factors in heart disease and stroke. Recent review of human clinical trials

Sri Lanka is the world's largest producer and exporter of Ceylon cinnamon to the world with 90% of global market share.

carried out on effect of cinnamon on high blood pressure had concluded that cinnamon could significantly reduce high blood pressure suggesting that cinnamon supplementation could be used in managing high blood pressure.

All these mechanisms mentioned above collectively contribute to reduce the risk of heart diseases.

Anti-diabetic Activity

Most common type of diabetes (Type 2 diabetes) prevalent in the world is due to impaired production of insulin or impaired potential (or activity) of insulin. Insulin is the hormone that controls the blood sugar levels and keeps it within normal range. Research studies have found that cinnamon can increase both the production and potential of insulin. In fact, a polymeric polyphenolic compound found in cinnamon was identified as an 'insulin potentiating factor'.

Recent review of human clinical trials revealed that cinnamon consumption could lower blood sugar levels thus indicating the potential of cinnamon to reduce the risk of diabetes, specially type 2 diabetes.

Anti-cancer activity

Cancer initiation is by damage to the DNA in human body. This damage is initiated by toxic carcinogenic compounds that enter our body. Antioxidant activity of cinnamon components could contribute to reduce the risk of cancer initiation by neutralizing these harmful compounds in the human body. In addition, research had shown that cinnamon could reduce tumor growth as well. As cancerous tissues grow very fast, one of the requirements for the progression of cancer is the formation of new blood vessels to provide the nutrients for the fast-

growing cancer. This is known as "angiogenesis". Research has shown that cinnamon has anti-angiogenic properties that can reduce growth of cancer. "Apoptosis" or the process of programmed cell death is important in preventing cancer progression. Impairment of apoptosis is often associated with rapid progression of cancer. Research has demonstrated that cinnamon could improve apoptosis thus contributing to reduce the risk of progression of cancer.

The above mechanisms contribute to the anti-cancer properties of cinnamon.

Anti-microbial Properties:

Customarily, cinnamon is considered as a spice having anti-microbial properties. Recent scientific studies have also proven the antimicrobial activities of cinnamon against different types of bacteria and have shown that cinnamon extracts, essential oils, and individual compounds in cinnamon have the ability to inhibit bacteria. This is achieved through damaging the cell membrane of the bacteria and inhibiting metabolism. Thus, the age-old beliefs of anti-microbial activities of cinnamon have also been confirmed by modern scientific research.

Industrial applications of cinnamon

Cinnamon and its essential oils are widely used in a range of industries. Cinnamon is mainly used in the aroma and essence industries due to its fragrance, which can be incorporated into different varieties of foodstuffs, perfumes and personal care products. In the food and beverage industry, cinnamon is used as a flavoring additive and aromatic condiment. It is also used as a flavoring in certain alcoholic beverages. Owing to its

medicinal properties, including its benefits as an antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anti-microbial, this spice is used in the production of various medicines and medical supplements as well as in ayurvedic remedies. Nutraceutical industry is a dynamic, innovative

and an expanding business that attracted a lot of interest as dietary supplements promoting health and wellness. Cinnamon has many applications in various nutraceutical products that formulate in the form of capsules, powder, or pills. Use of cinnamon in aromatherapy is

gaining popularity in the wellness industry. In the cosmetics industry, cinnamon extract is used as an essential oil which can be used as an ingredient in various personal care products. Apart from those applications, cinnamon is also used in preparations in insect repellents.

In conclusion, cinnamon is a versatile spice much sought after nowadays and has an immense potential to be made into diverse array of products and formulation for the benefit of mankind.



The
Man of
Fruit

Under the Cluster Fig Tree

Fruit sellers can be found all over the island. But a good one; a decent one; a one worth changing your work route every morning just to get a taste of that fresh fruit juice or that exceptionally large box of fruit salad, cannot be found easily. And the man under the cluster fig tree, has it all.



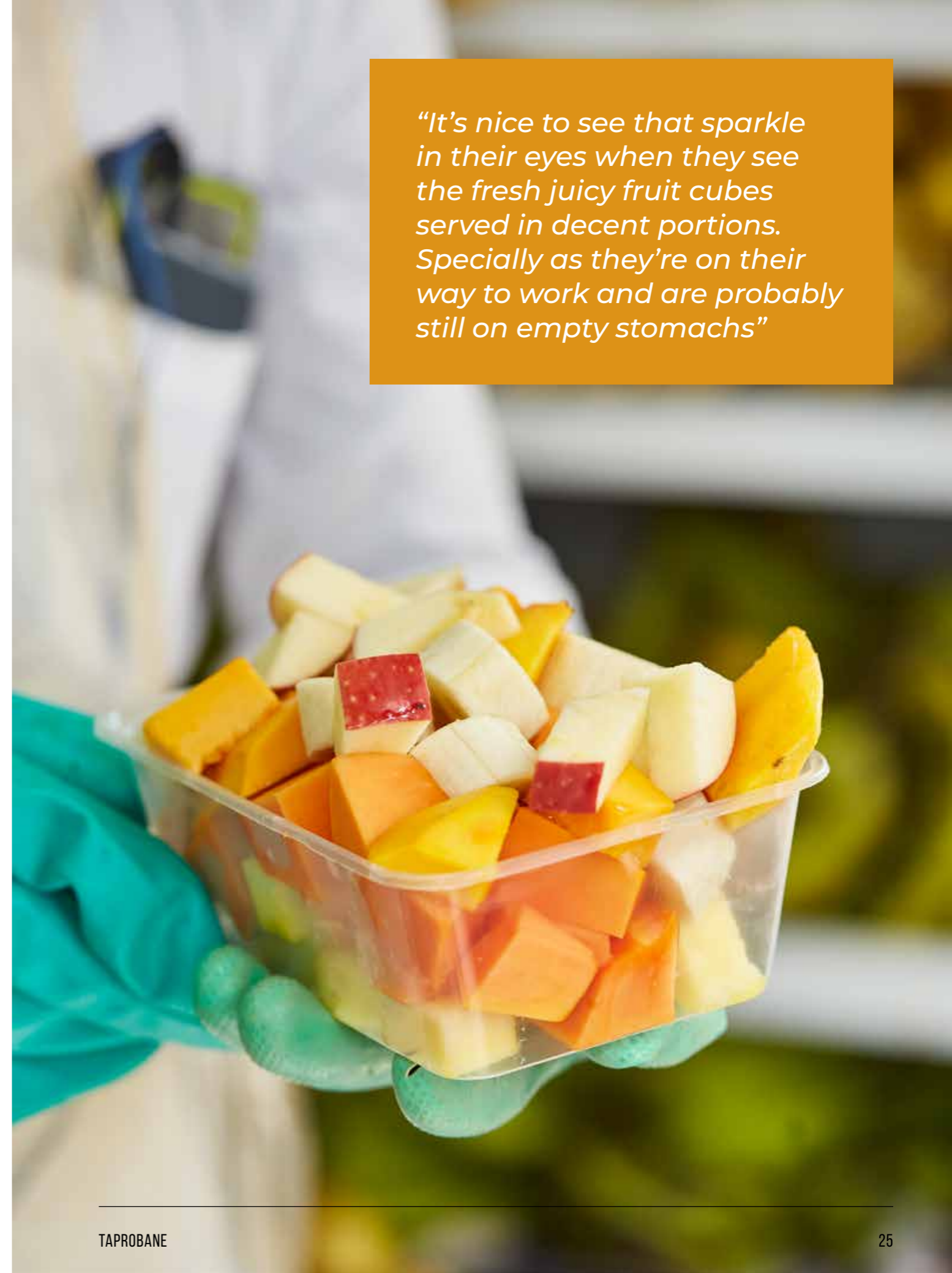
Since the mid-1990s he has been well known. People would change their work route, for a clean-cut piece of papaya which can be scooped by a spoon and eaten then and there.

Even in five-star restaurants the quality and taste of fruits can vary during off seasons, but here, N.G Manimel's ability to pick the right fruit was unbeatable. He knew what's good and what's not as soon as he laid eyes on them, or smelt the fruit's scent, or felt the outer skin of the fruit.

He started his small business by the side of Bristol Street, the very street where countless people have started their currently thriving businesses from. And that was, in his own little bicycle. He came there every morning and gave a bit of extra energy and light to everyone's day. His nectar and fruit salads made wonders in peoples' lives giving them refreshing energy to begin their days.

Before he picked this particular spot and started his little shop, his work had been somehow involved in fruit related activities. Hence, he mastered in choosing his daily supplies. And not very long after he started selling fruits on his bicycle, he got permission to put up a small shop and it was flourishing and he would have a better income but eventually reconstruction work of the road started which put him in a bit of a muddle. And that was when the Cluster fig tree was cut down and the shop was moved to the other side of the road.

Mr.Manimel didn't do his little business just for the sake of doing it. He loved every minute of his work. He was an agricultural expert from the start, even though he never had the chance to get it certified on a piece of paper.



“It's nice to see that sparkle in their eyes when they see the fresh juicy fruit cubes served in decent portions. Specially as they're on their way to work and are probably still on empty stomachs”

He doesn't care about what faith or religion that the people who come there represent. He only sees the good, and he only wants to spread the good, with as much as he can do from what he has.

"Cutting up fruits nicely and serving them is the best," he said, "It's nice to see that sparkle in their eyes when they see the fresh juicy fruit cubes served in decent portions. Specially as they're on their way to work and are probably still on empty stomachs"

Every good businessperson has hit rock bottom at least once in their lifetime, and for Mr. Manimel there have been times when they have had whole tubs of fruit thrown out due to issues in demand, and this was mostly during the first few years of their work.

They have also faced issues when they had no choice but to increase the price of their fruit salads and drinks. And times when they need to run on zero profits as they cannot disappoint their daily customers.

"An amount has to be separated for the rent payment. Then there's also the water and electricity charges." He said.

Before starting the fruit shop, even though Mr. Manimel's work was always mainly based on fruits and vegetables he tried to change his path and tried to go for a garment store at wall market. This didn't seem to be working out for long and so, Mr. Manimel left it all and travelled all the way to Dubai to find a way to provide for his family. He spent a good 10 years working

in Dubai and came back home and got to work to start his fruit shop.

It took some time for the people around to get used to the spot the shop was located in, but after they did, they'd come every morning, and not just as customers, they'd come as friends. With a warm smile every morning. There were no borders whatsoever among the ones who came. No religion, no race, no ethnicity was even noticed. "Everyone who came was the same to us. The more they come the more love you feel for them. Even if you don't speak, you can tell from person's eyes and their smile."

Another reason for every customer to come back to the shop may have been the homely feeling and the family like atmosphere. Now this could be because everyone who worked there was Mr. Manimel's family. His son, his sister, his wife and so on. They take turns with their jobs and do it all out of love. And you can feel it when you get closer to the shop: the rush and annoyance caused between siblings which stays the same as when they were 5 years old; the care between the parents for each other; and of course, the wise aunties giving advice to their 30-year-old nieces and nephews.

"Sometimes people have to wait in line for 10/15 minutes till we finish making the stuff for them, but a few

things that we never do is to keep a pregnant lady, or a mother carrying her child, or ladies and gentlemen of the forces in line, waiting" "and if we are able to, we give them a small discount." The smallest things like these, are what matter the most, and it's heartwarming to know that people like this do exist.

Due to the pandemic a lot of plans have been postponed. Mr. Manimel and his family have been having an idea of expanding and starting a delivery service for all of their fruit products this April and we shall only hope for the best.

After seeing all of these years of hard work through thick and thin, the main thing we see in Mr. Manimel and his success is the dedication he has towards his work. His dedication towards good, pure and honest work is astonishing. He doesn't care about what faith or religion that the people who come there represent. He only sees the good, and he only wants to spread the good, with as much as he can do from what he has. This kind of people, especially during these days cannot be seen everywhere. So, we wholeheartedly wish them all the best, because, even with all of these challenges, this fruit shop will not be waving goodbye anytime soon as one of their main challenges faced these days, is serving their long lines of customers.

FINEST SRI LANKAN CASHEW



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The Flowing Waters of SERA ELLA

Rolling hills and dense forests - Central Hills of Sri Lanka is a truly stunning landscape that a traveler could never get enough of.

Of all things beautiful in the Central Hills, perhaps one of the most amazing wonders of nature are Waterfalls! Let us trace our steps to the exquisite Sera Ella, located at the very heart of the Central Hills.

Central Hills is a treasure trove for nature lovers with many amazing landscapes ranging from thick forests, and scrub-lands, to rivers and waterfalls. One of the most important landscapes, situated to the Northern part of the Central Hills is the Knuckles Conservation Forest, home to many marvels of nature and known among travellers for its unique beauty and diversity. Knuckles Forest area is also home to many waterfalls, out of which, Sera Ella, without a doubt many would agree, is the most picturesque.

There are several folklores as to how the Falls got its name 'Sera'. One belief is that the name Sera Ella was derived from a species of fish that lives in the waters, known locally as 'Sera'. Another belief is that the cascade of the Falls is similar to letting Sera (lemongrass) seeds fall from one's palm and that is why it is named 'Sera'. Yet another tale tells that the name stems from the cascading falls looking similar to the leaves of a Sera plant.

Located in the Pothatawela Village, in Laggala, Matale, Sera Ella is formed

at the confluence of two rivers—Kitul Canal, surging from the Kaudagammana Mountain, and the Hunumadala River, springing from the Gonamada and Deyuthu Gammaduwa mountains. The Kitul Canal and Hunumadala River together forms the Puwakpitiya River, which later joins the Thelegam River. It is at this point that the Sera Ella is formed as the water plunges down a protruding rock surface. As the water falls, it splits into two sections, clearly visible depending on the time you visit.

Though the waters of Sera Ella flow all year around, the best time to visit the falls is between November to March/ April during the monsoon period when the water gushes down, creating a soft mist. To get to the falls, one would have to wind through narrow roads that are not in optimal condition before stopping and walking a further 150 m or so. However, the path to the Falls has its own charm amidst the hassle with lush hills and, depending on the time, misty mountains completing the amazing vistas. Once you arrive at the parking area, to reach the viewing platform of the Falls, you must tread stone steps that lead down where a railing is in place to ensure the safety of the travellers.

The height of the Sera Ella is 10 m while the pool is said to be very deep as evidenced by its dark and murky tones. Therefore, one must be extremely very cautious when bathing – an activity that many advise to refrain from. The

most attractive feature of Sera Ella is the cave that is hidden behind the waterfall. Stone steps are cut out to reach the cave somewhat safely, even when the water flow is heavy, where one could catch glimpses of the other side through the heavy curtain of water. Dark and damp, with jutting stones and plants, the cave is narrow and can only fit a small number of people at a time. However, if the water flow is too rapid and heavy, it is better to think twice about exploring the cave area.

The beauty of the Sera Falls is breathtaking, and it is a must visit if you are going towards Knuckles or even just passing through Illukkumbura.

Road to Sera Ella from Illukkumbura

The entrance to Sera Falls is located 8.5km passing the Pitawala Pathana where a concrete road leads to Puwakpitiya. From the entrance,

stone steps, lead down to the Falls—about 150-200 m on foot.

Key tips to know before you visit

- You can reach the Sera Falls in any vehicle, however due to the condition of the road, if the vehicle does not have a high enough ground clearance it is best to park the car about 1.5km from the entrance.
- Many advise to refrain from swimming, even if you are a pro, as the pool is deep and can be dangerous, especially during the monsoon season.
- The rocks at the Falls can be slippery, take care and wear appropriate clothing and shoes when visiting.

A Symbolic Celebration of the Shared Past

Ginette Olivesi-Lorenzi, as quoted by American culinary writer Coleman Andrews states that, "To read about a country's cuisine isn't simply to go looking for good things; it is also to better know by means of the recipes, the customs and the richness or poverty of a place, and the spirit of those who inhabit it. It is above all, to participate in the symbolic celebration of the shared past."

A country's cuisine presents a unique window to its past – a doorway to explore the lives of the ancestors that inhabited the land in yesteryear; their livelihoods and traditions. For instance, the ancient food preservation methods hide within them, the vast knowledge possessed by a civilised community to ensure food security by preserving the excess; or their wisdom to ensure

food security for their people by storing the surplus of their harvest.

Sri Lanka too is home to a rich food culture which traces its roots to the agrarian lifestyle of our ancestors. It is with this vibrant cuisine that the island nation has to come to be known for its hospitality. The first written record of the Island's cuisine related hospitality can be found in the Mahavamsa (chapter VII), where it is said that the noblewoman



Kuweni served prince Vijaya and his group, special rice preparations, sweets made from rice, rice flour, jaggery, honey and local fruits.

According to Chef Dr. Publis Silva, the repertoire of Sri Lankan cuisine begins with the one who is preparing the food – be it to be served to family or guests. The first step begins with a noble thought – “may the food that is prepared now be a medicine to the one who consumes it.” Around 30 of the 42 principal spices and condiments used in our country's cuisine are ‘osu karaka’ which means that they possess medicinal properties. He teaches us that the kitchen is akin to a ‘osu kutiya’ (a chamber of medicines) and that it should be treated as a sacred sanctum. The individuals who are preparing food should always clean themselves before entering the kitchen – much like going into a religious shrine. “The kitchen should always be treated with respect,” he says.

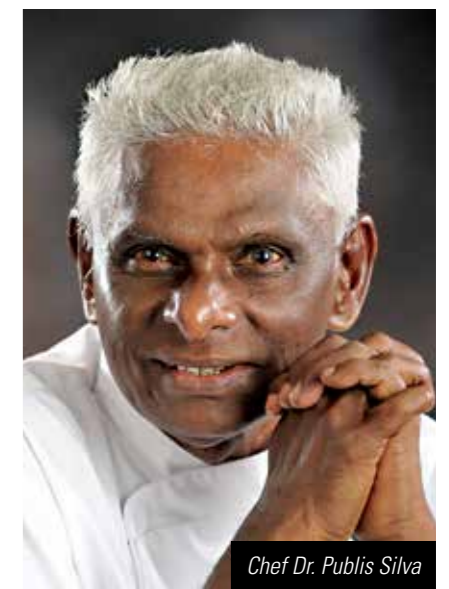
Chef Publis mentions that food when consumed should satisfy the five senses – vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch. It is when all these senses are satisfied, will a person truly enjoy the food he consumes. He explains the technique behind this by taking ‘mallung’, a Sri Lankan dish consisting of shredded greens that are lightly cooked or sautéed with fresh coconut and spices.

“There is an art even to cutting or chopping vegetables. Greens for a mallung should be cut with similar size and consistency; and the ingredients that are mixed into it should be aromatic. The perfect method to cook mallung is to place it in high heat for 30 seconds. You must be careful not to overcook so as to preserve the natural flavour and the colour of greens,” he says.

Chef Publis says that the secret ingredient of every dish is love. “How do you mix love into the food you make?” he asks. “Here, love means the mental affirmation you make when preparing food, mixing ingredients; the positive affirmation that the food prepared will remedy all ailments of the one who consumes it.”

The food prepared with such kindness, care and attention will certainly satisfy all primary senses of the people who consume those. “The natural colour of the dish will first satisfy a person's sense of vision, followed by the aroma. He will then feel its texture which will satisfy the sense of touch. Upon eating, he will enjoy the taste and with each bite, the ‘crunch’ of the mallung will satisfy his hearing. This is how enjoying a meal becomes a holistic experience,” he explains.

The food we eat, nourishes and sustains us. It is what contributes to a healthy lifestyle free from ailments; and when it is prepared with so much love, how can one argue that it will not be a remedy? This is simply why Sri Lankan cuisine always takes its connoisseurs on an unforgettable gastronomical journey.



Chef Dr. Publis Silva

STIR FRIED OKRA

Okra or Ladies Fingers as it is called in some parts of the world due to its long and tubelike shape, is a favourite dish among us Sri Lankans. However, contrary to popular belief Okra is a fruit, though we tend to prepare and eat it more as a vegetable. Rich in magnesium, folate, fibre, antioxidants, and vitamin C, K1, and A, Okra is a source of nutrition that adds much health benefits to our lives. Believed to be native to Ethiopia, it grows best in hot and humid climates and as such Sri Lanka, of course, is an ideal location. The taste of Okra is unique and has a mild grass like flavour. It is known for its slimy texture and depending on the way its cooked, sliminess can be reduced leaving a crunchy or tantalizingly tender feel. We have embraced Okra as part of our own and come up with a myriad of dishes that can be prepared—from curried to fried to sautéed and even grilled. Stir Fried Okra is one such loved dish that is crunchy to the bite!



INGREDIENTS:

- Okra 250g
- Salt Tablespoon 1/2
- Turmeric 06g
- Pepper Powder Tablespoon 1/2
- Coconut Oil Tablespoon 03
- Onion 01
- Green Chillies 04
- Curry Leaves
- Pandan Leaves

METHOD:

- Wash the Okra well and make shallow cuts on the sides without slicing through.
- Add salt, turmeric, and pepper to the Okra and mix well. Set aside for five minutes to season.
- In a frying pan, add oil, sliced onions, chillies, pandan leaves and curry leaves and sauté well until the onions turn a slight golden brown.
- Then add the seasoned Okra and mix well.
- Close the lid and cook for three minutes.

**Make sure the Okra are tender and green.*

Dark purple in colour, beetroot is a popular root vegetable that is mostly grown in the highlands or the cooler climes of Sri Lanka. Packed with vitamins, minerals and many other nutritional values, it is believed to have the ability to lower blood pressure while increasing athletic capacity. Most of us are familiar with the Beetroot curry—full of flavour and curried goodness, it is without a doubt a favourite of many. However, many may not know that beetroot can be cooked in various other ways, be it a soup, pickled or even blended into a smoothie. Let us discover how to make the perfect Beetroot Pickle in our own homes...

INGREDIENTS:

- Beetroot 1kg
- Pepper
- Cloves
- Vinegar 70ml
- Sugar 50g
- Salt Tablespoon 01

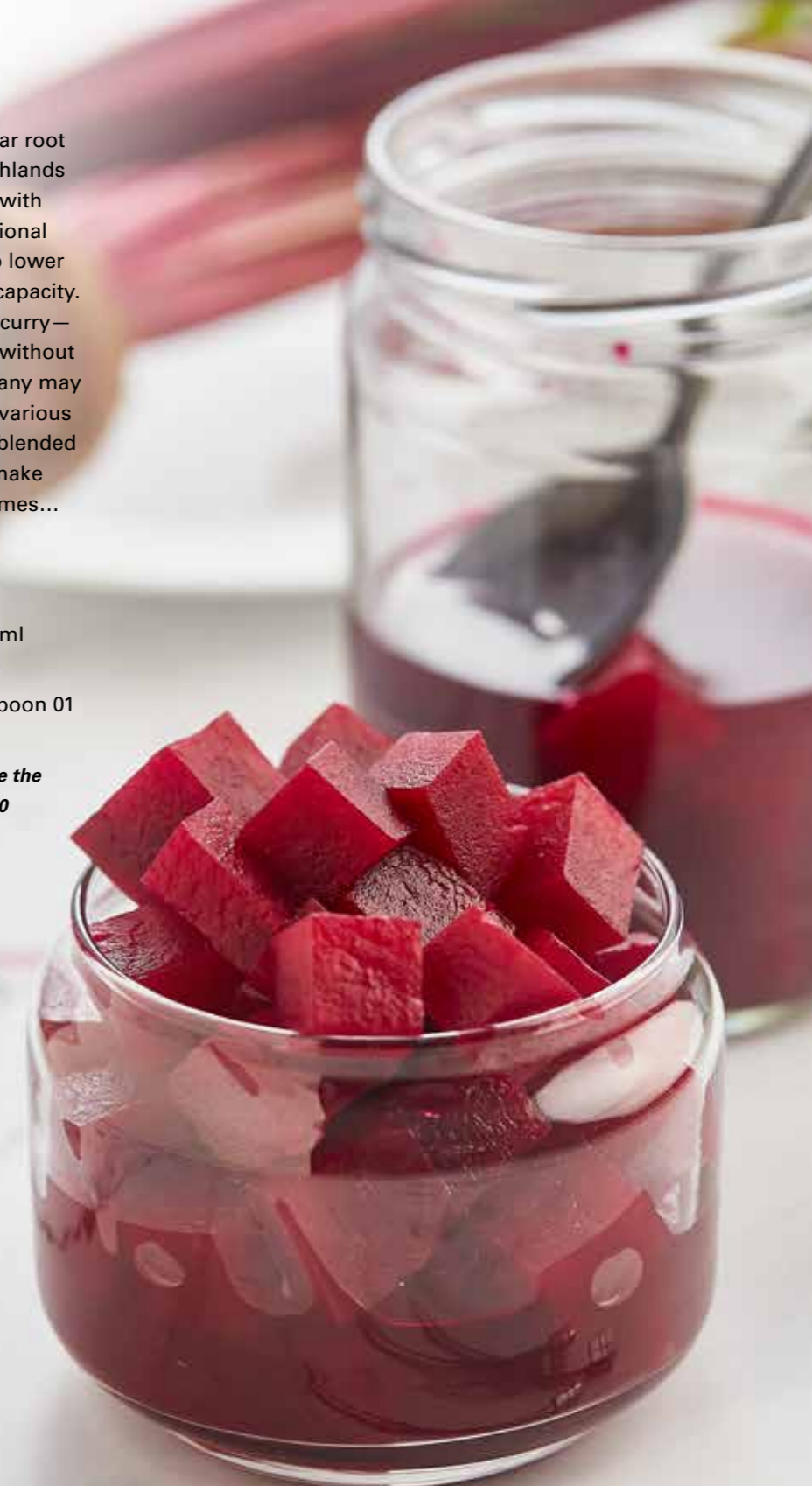
**A jar (or a jam jar) of about 425 ml: To prepare the jar for storage, first boil it in water for about 10 minutes. Then set it aside to dry.*

METHOD:

- Peel and wash the beetroot well and cut them into 2cm cubes.
- Boil the cubes in water for about 15 minutes.
- Keep 1 cup of the boiled beetroot water aside to make the syrup.
- Put a clove and a pepper into the jar and then fill it with the boiled beetroot cubes.
- Pour the syrup and once again boil the bottle for about 5 minutes for hygienic purposes before setting aside to preserve.

HOW TO MAKE THE SYRUP

- Take the cup of boiled beetroot water and pour into a separate pan.
- Add vinegar, sugar, and salt to the water and boil until the syrup is ready.



BETROOT PICKLE



VEGETARIANS' PROTEIN PILL

Sweet aroma of a ghee dosai was so inviting that even while the ethnic conflict was at its peak, most Sinhalese had no hesitation in going to an Indian restaurant. Culture is a main factor that helps to build lasting peace, and food is significant in that. Unlike Cyprus where culture has no chance in supporting a reconciliation, Sri Lanka and Sinhalese, the majority of its population, have been open and flexible to experience various facets of other cultures. Consequently, Sinhalese have embraced the tasty, nutritious Ulundu Vadai and Dosai of the Tamils. In Colombo, Sinhalese are more frequently seen in Dosai kiosks.

A key ingredient of the batter which is used for preparing Dosai, Idly and Vadai is popularly known as (black gram) Black Urad or Undu which has a high nutritional value. It is a major pulse in India and its flour is the major ingredient of crispy Papadam.

Black gram is much similar to green gram in size and shape. It is scientifically known as *Vigna mungo var. mungo*. It belongs to Fabacea family and it is an important commercial pulse crop. India is believed to be the first place for cultivation of black gram from its wild progenitor and

archaeological evidence shows that domestication of black gram has been found in India 4,500 years ago and is one of the most highly priced pulses in India. It has been introduced to other tropical areas mainly by Indian immigrants. When considering Sri Lanka, there are nearly 100 species and varieties of pulses available and Black gram is one of the important grain legumes in the rain fed farming system in dry and intermediate zones of Sri Lanka. According to the Officials of Agriculture, the total annual requirement of black gram is about 21,000mt and currently farmers involve Intercropping practice due to its ability to withstand adverse climatic conditions, improve the soil fertility by fixing atmospheric nitrogen in the soil and has relatively a short (90-120 days) life span. Therefore, it can be grown under low moisture and fertility conditions.

According to ancient sages, black gram or Masha mention in Ayurveda text books is a valuable food as well as a drug which has many health benefits. With the influence of this life philosophy, Sri Lankans also fulfil their protein requirement through pulses since ancient times and black gram is one of the major pulses among them.

When considering its nutritional value it contains

- Protein - 24%
- Fat - 1.4%
- Minerals - 3.2%
- Fiber - 0.9%
- Carbohydrate - 59.6%
- Calcium - 154 mg/100 g
- Phosphorus - 385 mg/100 g
- Iron - 9.1 mg/100 g
- Calorific value - 347 Kcal/100 g

- Moisture - 10.9%.

Due to its high content of proteins, vitamins and minerals, vegetarian based society identified it as an important source of protein.

According to Indigenous medicine, masha or black gram is used as a food due to its medicinal qualities, used for treatment as an ingredient in medicines and used in different treatment modalities too.

Masha shows the following properties according to the Vrushya – aphrodisiac, Pumstvam sheeghram dadaati- improves fertility quickly, Param Vatahara – balances Vata to a great extent, Snigdha – oily, unctuous

Ushna – hot potency, Madhura – sweet in taste, Guru – heavy to digest, Balya – improves digestion and strength, Bahumala – increases bulk of faeces. As a result of these qualities traditional practitioners used masha for people who have lean body mass (krushatha), because it increases the appetite (Ruchya) and increases the bulk of faeces which leads to increase muscle bulk and strength. Furthermore, its ability to increase breast milk (sthnayajanana) is beneficial to lactating mothers. In addition, Masha is very famous in its aphrodisiac action which can increase sperm count (spermatogenic). At the same time traditional medical practitioners advise that some foods should not be paired with black gram. Meat of elephant, cow, deer, buffalo, fish, whale and ripe fruit of monkey fruit or monkey jack (Artocarpus lakoocha) must be avoided with black gram.

Currently, it is often used in the form of the dish “dhal” and due to soft texture yet strong taste, can be consumed with rotis and paired with rice or usually hulled

and split or grounded into flour or soaked in water to make many types of delicious foods: dosa, urad vada, Idly and papadams which are famous in Sri Lanka.

Black gram balances Vata dosha, increases Kapha and Pitta dosha. Stroke or Paralysis, Parkinsonism, Muscular dystrophies and Oligospermia are the most common diseases treated by using masha as an ingredient in different medicines. Mashabaladi Kashaya (Decoction) Kolakullaththadi choornaya (Powder) are some examples. It is also used to prepare some traditional medicinal oils as maha masha thailam and mahakukutamasha thailam. But the ancient sages advise to avoid masha in diseases like Gout arthritis, Difficulty in urination conditions, all types of skin diseases, blood vitiated disorders, bleeding disorders and worm infestations.

Flour of udu is also used in external treatment modalities like Akshi Tharpana, Shiro Vasthi and Kati Vasthi to retain oil for some time by preparing a boundary from paste of Udu (Udu Vetri)

By considering all above facts, Udu is a valuable food, medicine and a sustainable high yield crop which will be a solution for many health-related problems faced by human beings.

*Prepared by
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*Assisted by
Dr. Dinushee Hansani Dharmasooriya, Institute of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo*

CURRENTLY IT IS OFTEN USED IN THE FORM OF THE DISH “DHAL” AND DUE TO SOFT TEXTURE YET STRONG TASTE, CAN BE CONSUMED WITH ROTIS AND PAIRED WITH RICE OR USUALLY HULLED AND SPLIT OR GROUNDED INTO FLOUR OR SOAKED IN WATER TO MAKE MANY TYPES OF DELICIOUS FOODS: DOSA, URAD VADA, IDLY AND PAPADAMS WHICH ARE VERY FAMOUS IN SRI LANKA.



LEONARDO BY BELLA VITA

A TRUE ITALIAN CULINARY EXPERIENCE

Nestled next to a busy street leading towards the Negombo Beach is a restaurant that is quaint to the eye. It stands out with its dark yet warmly lit façade, beckoning passers by to come in to experience the wonderful cuisine and comfort that the restaurant has to offer. Stepping in, amidst the hustle and bustle, you will be transported to a place like no other—welcome to Leonardo by Bella Vita.

“Opening a restaurant was a dream of mine since the year 2000,” revealed W A Nisal Appuhami, owner and founder of Leonardo by Bella Vita. A restaurant specializing in authentic Italian cuisine, Bella Vita has already become a favourite of many, as people travel from far and wide to taste the scrumptious dishes on the menu.

Nisal’s journey in Italian cuisine began in the year 1996 with his decision to migrate to Italy. “My father migrated to Italy in the late 1970s. I went there in the 1990s and made the decision to stay in 1996,” he said. With a passion to succeed in the food industry, Nisal joined a hotel school in Italy

and dedicated his energy to learn Italian cuisine. Finishing hotel school, he joined a restaurant where he mastered the art of cooking for 20 years. “There are so many dishes in Italian cuisine and these dishes change from region to region. So you cannot finish learning,” explained Nisal when talking about the long years of experience. Steadily progressing in his career, Nisal was soon in charge of the restaurant, which also expanded from a two-establishment restaurant to a full-fledged one with 27 restaurants. Reminiscing the journey and highlights of

his career, Nisal recalled that even the Mayor in the region he lived in, requested his services as the Mayor’s private chef at times - an achievement that evidences his talent and skill.

Ever since the beginning, Nisal dreamt of opening his own restaurant but was hesitant to do so at the time due to his lack of experience and expertise. After gathering an ample amount of skill, Nisal came back to Sri Lanka to fulfil his dreams. “After staying in Italy for 15 years, I wanted to open a restaurant there. But at that time, I was married with two daughters and thought the





best decision would be to return to Sri Lanka to open a restaurant here," elaborated Nisal. He came to Sri Lanka in 2017 and looked for a suitable place in Negombo to start his venture. However, unable to find a suitable place at the time, he promptly opened a restaurant in Wennappuwa, now managed by Nisal's wife, which was welcomed with open arms and hearts from the very beginning. Specializing in pizzas only, the restaurant is an absolute favourite among the locals there. Wanting to expand to a larger space, to provide the full 'Italian Cuisine Experience', Nisal continued his search and labour, which ended with Leonardo by Bella Vita. "The restaurant in Wennappuwa is limited by space. To get that authentic Italian experience, you need to have the bar, pizza, coffee, pasta together," expressed Nisal.

The name Bella Vita also holds a special meaning to Nisal. Translated to good or beautiful life, Nisal explained, "I was the youngest when I joined the restaurant in Italy. I was able to progress in my career and at one point I was in charge overlooking the functioning of the restaurants. There people used to



call me Belle Vita as they thought being a foreigner and having such luxuries and a successful career was a great thing. By and by people stopped using my name and called me Belle Vita."

Stepping into Leonardo by Bella Vita, one is bound to be enchanted by the charming atmosphere. The architecture of the building itself lends to a pleasing aesthetic with dark wooden tones, comfy leather chairs and dim lights. There are two storeys that provides ample space. "When I first arrived, I designed and did everything myself. I believed having being in Italy, I would be able to do it. However,

after putting everything together, the feel was not there. That's when I met Mr Malinda, the architect who designed Leonardo by Bella Vita. He was able to capture my idea perfectly," revealed Nisal.

The most amazing thing about Bella Vita is of course its cuisine. With a menu that includes nearly 200 dishes, Bella Vita has a range of pizzas, pastas, risottos and much more. The restaurant also carries a comprehensive list of beverages including non-alcoholic drinks such as coffees, mocktails, juices and alcoholic drinks such as a fine selection of wines and exciting cocktails. Pouring through the



menu, one could see the careful attention to detail and thought that has gone to make the selection at Bella Vita inclusive to all who visit.

"My goal is to exactly replicate the dishes that are in Italy. Except for chicken, fish and water, all ingredients are brought down from Italy to ensure the authentic taste. We might not be able to replicate the dish 100% due to water and climatic conditions influencing the taste of cheese, but we want to give that 'Italian feel' as much as possible. Most people who visit from Italy tell us that the food from Italy and at our restaurant tastes the same," said Nisal.

One of the challenges that Nisal faced in coming up with the menu is that most pizzas in Italy use pork. To overcome this, while keeping the menu as close to authentic Italian cuisine as possible, he has included a few dishes that are of 'Sri Lankan style'. "When creating the menu, we took dishes that are suitable and compatible with the Sri Lankan palate. While introducing new items, we are always mindful that we are in the Sri Lankan market. However, there are dishes in Italy that we call as 'classic' and those you

cannot change. No matter where you go in the world, they should be the same," explained Nisal.

Nisal revealed that in Italy innovation and technology is used in cuisine as well. "They just use salt and pepper as spices and many herbs. They pay attention to the taste of the food and also to the digestion, how it affects our body." The same concepts are carried through at Bella Vita to make the dining experience a gastronomical journey full of delight.

The food at Leonardo by Bella Vita is scrumptious, full of flavour and each dish is a sweet surprise to be discovered. Describing the pizzas at Bella Vita, Nisal said, "when you eat the pizza you should be able to taste and experience the taste of the layer, dough, crust, ingredients and the cheese separately. And that is exactly what we provide here."

When talking about the challenges faced by the restaurant, Nisal explained that there are many challenges especially with the current restrictions and prices. But he remains positive that even though the journey is slow and filled with hurdles, it is worthwhile.

"I want to create history, make something special for myself and for my customers. More than money what I want is to give the very best in terms of quality and cuisine and add this as an important stepping stone in history. I want especially people who know about food and who are interested in food to come and visit here. There is already a crowd who embraces the quality and the good food that we offer," revealed Nisal.

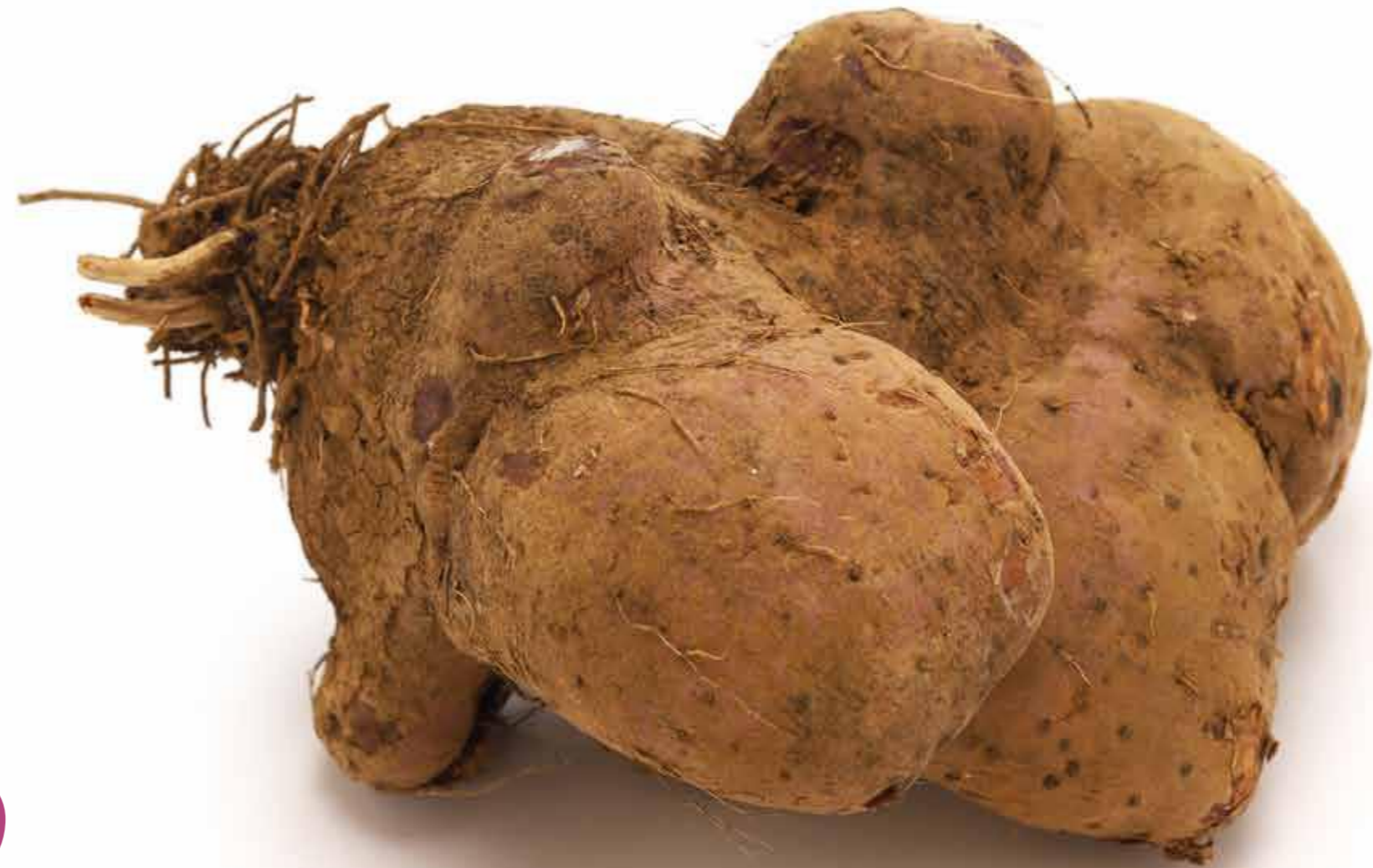
The future holds new and exciting things for Bella Vita and Nisal as he hopes to serve exclusively Italian dishes in the upper floor of the restaurant. He also hopes to expand the brand and to open a villa and a restaurant closer to the lagoon, complete with a picturesque view and an open kitchen concept. "This is my dream and hope going into the future," Nisal affirmed.

With such attention to detail and amazing dishes, Bella Vita will undoubtedly have much to offer for the inquisitive traveller and food lover. During your next trip to Negombo, make sure to pop in and experience the taste of true Italy at Leonardo by Bella Vita.

Yams, big and small, grown in almost all parts of our beautiful island are a staple in every household. A culinary favourite, yams are popular and well sought after for their starchy richness and numerous health benefits. Of the nearly 60 yam and tuber varieties grown in the island, Raja Ala or Purple Yams, are undoubtedly one of the most delicious, with a variety of gastronomic delights to tingle your tastebuds.

RAJA ALA

The **King**
of
Yams





Ube mochi cake is a fusion treat of the classic Japanese sweet snack made with glutinous rice, flavoured with eye-catching purple yam

Raja Ala (or Rajala), naturally grown in tropical countries, is a type of yam from the family Dioscoreaceae and genus Dioscorea, which consists of more than 600 species around the world. A vine that can grow from 15 m to 30 m, the origins of the Raja Ala is attributed to the South East Asian region, especially to the Philippines where it is a staple food source. In Sri Lanka, Raja Ala is considered to be a native species. The outer skin of the Raja Ala is bark-like and brown while the flesh inside

takes on a purple hue (bright to dark purple)—hence probably the name Purple Yam, as it is commonly known in the English language.

Though not a common sight at dinner tables in urban Sri Lanka,

DID YOU KNOW?

In Sinhala Rajala is also known as *Ratala* and *Kiri Kedol* as well. In Tamil it is called *Rasawalli* or *Rajawalli* while in English it is termed *Purple Yam* and at times *Ube*.

Raja Ala is a popular source of food in the more rural settings where it can be easily found at Sunday fairs and even homegardens and backyards. Generally grown in the wet zone of the country, Raja Ala is also grown in dry zone areas such as Monaragala, Marawa, Thengallanda and Jaffna as well. A highly adaptable crop requiring low levels of agricultural inputs to thrive, when compared to vegetables or cereals, the Department of Agriculture highly recommends the cultivation of the species in all climatic zones of the Island.

Raja Ala is renowned for its unique properties that provide a myriad of health benefits and older and wiser generations of our country advise firmly to add some Purple Yam to complete a balanced diet. Full of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, Raja Ala is especially rich in protein, vitamin C and beta carotene. Another important feature of Raja Ala is that it carries anthocyanins, which together with beta carotene is responsible for the purple colour of the yam. Anthocyanins are said to have many healing and preventative properties. Studies have shown that anthocyanins may have the ability to prevent or reduce the risk of diabetes, cancer, cell damage, microbial infections, obesity, cardiovascular diseases and inflammation.

Purple Yams, rich in anthocyanin, have shown to improve heart

function and gut health while regulating one's metabolism by increasing good bacteria in the stomach. It has restorative effects as well, aiding the reduction of fat in the liver and also helps to repair the cecum and colon after a high-fat diet. As such, adding purple yam to one's diet can help to control body weight, increase good cholesterol levels, may help reduce asthma and overall present a better way to repair and keep one's body healthy without resorting to medications. Purple Yam is also known as an immune booster and an anti-inflammatory. It is also a remedy for abdominal and intestinal cramping—grandmothers' epicurean wisdom has included serving Raja Ala as a meal, especially at breakfast, when menstrual pains became difficult to bear. New mothers are encouraged to add Raja Ala to their diet as it is considered to be a food source that increases the production of breastmilk.

Due to the high levels of starch in Raja Ala, many recommend consuming it as a main dish. With its sweet and nutty flavour, in Sri Lanka, Purple Yam is mainly



consumed boiled with coconut and some even recommend boiling it with milk to increase its nutritional benefits. However, one has to be careful when boiling Raja Ala in water as studies have shown this destroys the antioxidant properties of the yam. Therefore, it is recommended to

boil the yam in a small amount of water when preparing.

With food and gastronomical journeys becoming more and more popular in Sri Lanka, the Purple Yam is now coming into culinary style with many dipping their hands to experiment and expand the culinary possibilities of the Raja Ala. Many are now sharing a variety of dishes including but not limited to curried dishes, side dishes, smoothies, puddings and congee to name a few. In other parts of the world, purple yams are turned into a powder or paste form and is used to colour baked goods and pastries. In South East Asian countries, the versatility of the Purple Yam is utilized fully where it is baked, roasted, boiled, cooked, fried, added to soups, and much more.

Undoubtedly a culinary delight, be sure to include purple yam in your diet not only for its taste but for the multitude of health benefits that the yam can bring to your life.

DID YOU KNOW?

One cup (100 grams) of cooked Purple Yam provides the following:

- Calories: 140
- Carbs: 27 grams
- Protein: 1 gram
- Fat: 0.1 grams
- Fiber: 4 grams
- Sodium: 0.83% of the Daily Value (DV)
- Potassium: 13.5% of the DV
- Calcium: 2% of the DV
- Iron: 4% of the DV
- Vitamin C: 40% of the DV
- Vitamin A: 4% of the DV



Ceylon Coffee

Opens its Doors to Connoisseurs at BIA

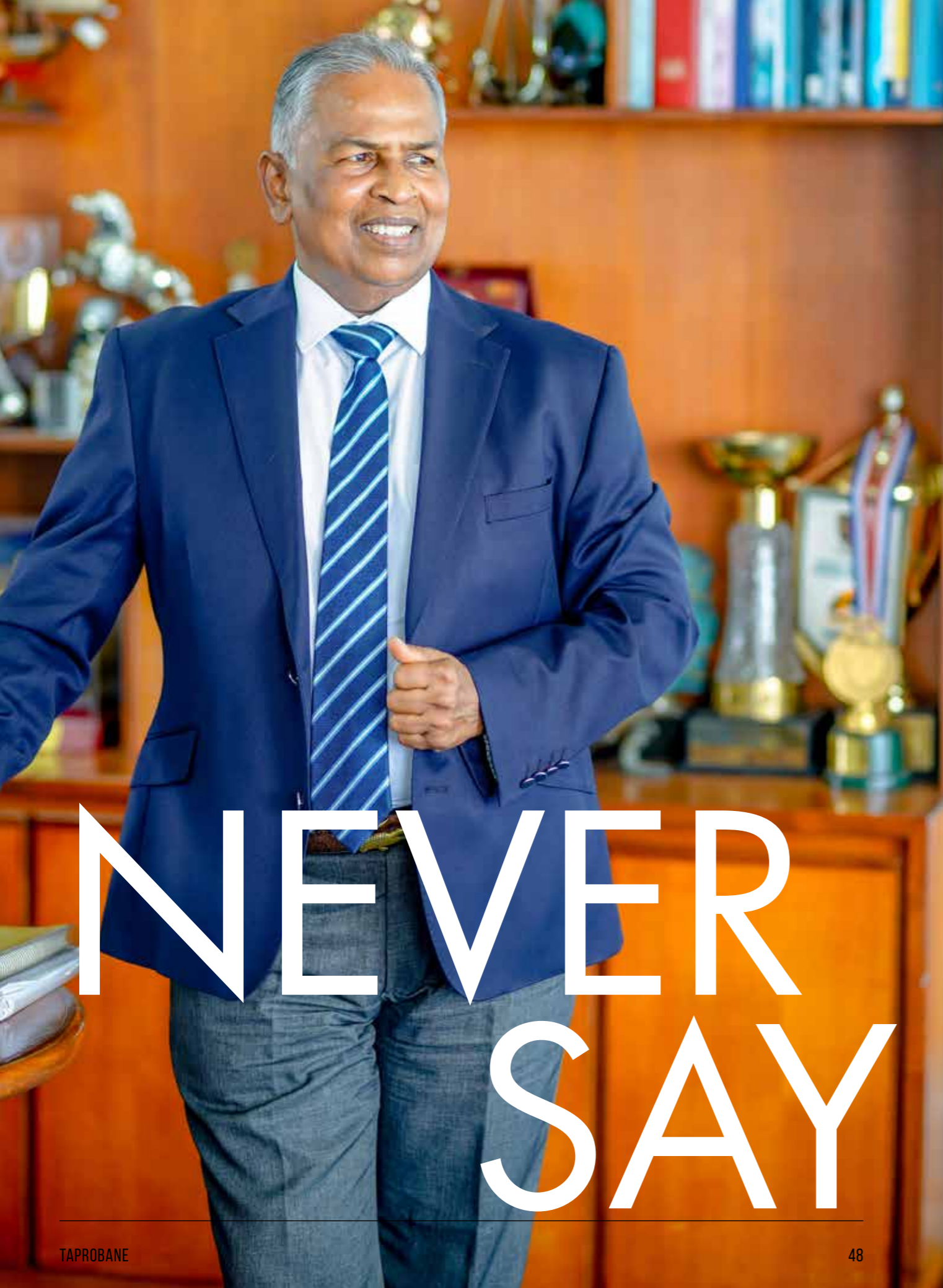


Nothing like a freshly brewed steaming cup of coffee to rejuvenate your senses after a long flight. The aroma of roasted coffee beans beckons discerning travelers at BIA to taste a cup from one of Sri Lanka's finest brands.

Whether you are looking for a quick caffeine boost to energize or searching for that perfect delectable souvenir to take home with you to celebrate your holiday at Paradise Island, you need not look further. Rancrisp – Sri Lanka's premier cashew producer – recently opened Ceylon Coffee – a premium café and coffee shop at the Bandaranaike International Airport. The store will offer an opportunity for coffee aficionados and discerning consumers to purchase and taste the premium range of coffee and related products available.

It's hard to miss the aesthetically pleasing design, coloured with earthen hues and the myriad of unique products in store. The cafe features the complete range of Ranscrip products - including its premium cashew range, fruit-based preserved products and confectioneries.

A renowned brand in Sri Lanka, Rancrisp was established in 1981 with the vision of becoming the most preferred cashew producer and exporter in Sri Lanka. The company sources all its cashew and other agro-based raw materials from the local farmers. The production at Rancrisp encompasses a standardized process where the locally sourced ingredients are purified and refined with special, advanced techniques to release premium quality cashews to the local and international markets.



NEVER SAY

Resilient, Determined and Committed are the three words that we would use to describe this personality who quite stubbornly believes that nothing is impossible. It is this determination and perseverance that has placed him at the helm of success today. A diver turned entrepreneur – we delved into the life and journey of Mr. Ariyaseela Wickramanayake, the Founder and Chairman of Pelwatte Dairy Industries.

He greets us with a pleasant smile, upon our arrival at Master Divers (Pvt) Ltd. His demeanour is calm, patient and collected and yet his presence commands the room like that of a born leader. After a quick exchange of pleasantries, we are eager to 'dive' right into his story and get to what inspired the first Sri Lankan diver to be qualified to conduct ship repairs, to divert from his course and become the chairman of a dairy products manufacturing organisation.

"In 1970, I was the fastest swimmer in Sri Lanka," he begins. He says that diving became his passion after seeing the foreigners who used to get into 'astronaut-like' big suits and dive into the sea to conduct ship repairs, when he was schooling in Galle. "Back in the day, a foreign diver got paid the highest salary and you had to be trained in England to get into the industry. Naturally, the young boy in me aspired to be like them. I wanted to dive, earn a good living and lead a life of luxury," he says.

He states that while the dream of becoming a diver was a mental goal, he continued his school career. "Upon completing Advanced Levels, I came across a vacancy posted by the Colombo Ports Commission (CPC) for a diver and applied for it. He arrives at crossroads when he receives admission to study medicine at the University of Peradeniya and gets selected for the vacancy at Colombo Ports Commission. "I didn't think twice and chose diving because that was my passion. Leaving medicine to become a diver was very much akin to an uphill battle in the 1970s," he mentions humorously.

In 1980, Wickramanayaka, while being employed at CPC, got the opportunity to work on Sri Lanka's first container terminal – Queen Elizabeth, a project funded by the United States. His stellar performance in the project catches the limelight through a newspaper article, which catches the eye of a German engineer who offers him a lucrative job opportunity in Bahrain.

"At first, I was reluctant to take up the offer, but I told him that I would be willing to consider it, if he could pay me a salary that is equivalent to what I would be making in Sri Lanka till my retirement at 55, within the project duration of 24 months. I requested for a salary of US \$ 5,000 and he agreed with a legally binding agreement," he says.

Having completed the project in 9 months (with 15 months to spare), he leaves Bahrain to travel to Singapore, with all of his earnings from the project, tucked in a bag. Befriending another German tourist on the plane, Wickramanayaka arrived at a homestay in Singapore, eager to bank his bag full of cash! He states, "On the second day in Singapore, I got out of the house, got into a taxi, went straight to the nearest bank which was the OCBC and opened a savings account. It was only then that I let out a sigh of relief."

Upon returning to Sri Lanka, he registered at CPC as a licensed diver to conduct ship repairs. His endeavour achieves success as he is able to provide a faster and more convenient service to ship agents which would otherwise undergo several procedural delays, had repairs been conducted through CPC.

"When the Jaya Terminal was being commissioned and funded by the Japanese in 1983, I was offered a contract by the Japanese to build a fisheries harbour in Kirinda. I

NEVER

would travel back and forth from Colombo to Kirinda and would stay at the Hambantota Rest House, from where there were panoramic views of the vast Hambantota beach. While looking at the sea and the ship traffic passing, I couldn't help but think that this would be an ideal spot for a port," he says.

He mentions that even the experts that he worked with at the time such as Prof. Mendis Rohanadeera agreed that Hambantota would be an ideal place to build a port given its strategic location. In 1994, he presented a proposal on the idea to Navin Gunaratne, then Chairman of Southern Development Authority under the government of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumarathunga. "It was my idea and initiative to get the port shifted to Hambantota," he states.

In 2002, Wickramanayaka tenders to buy the Pelwatte Sugar Plants, against the advice of his friend who is an economic planner. Though his friend warns him not to invest in a plant as sugar cane plantation is a dying industry, he makes it his goal to turn the factory around.

"I spoke to the farmers and asked why they couldn't continue harvesting sugar cane. The answer I got was that since it took 12 months for a plant to mature and harvest, they did not have an interim source of income to support their families. My involvement in the dairy industry was initiated when I wanted to find a solution for this issue. I

told them that I would give them cattle, so that they could rear it, collect the milk and sell it to Milco to gain an interim income until it was time to harvest."

In his pursuit to provide cattle to the farmers in Moneragala, he meets a Buddhist monk who conducts projects to free cows from slaughterhouses. "I agreed to look after the cows that were freed, and provided them to the farmers. About a year went by with this project and there was an excess of milk than what Milco could buy.

Thus began the initiation of a project with Denmark to build a manufacturing facility that could produce 2,000 L of milk per day. This factory would soon progress on to manufacture butter and cheese. "I wanted to do more for the industry." He says. "In 2005 I negotiated with the government to pay Rs. 40 per one litre of milk to the farmers. In 2010 it was increased to Rs. 50 and subsequently in 2015, increased to Rs. 75. Thereafter, the price has been on a continuous upward trend."

Pelwatte Dairy Industries is home to the only spray powder plants

in Sri Lanka and the company currently operates three of these. Wickramanayaka states that he got into the dairy industry, because of sugar and was able to develop both.

"In 2012, the government approached me to produce alcohol since the sugar plant was doing well. I refused this proposal. As a result, the government changed laws, and took over the plant. Four to five regimes have changed since then, and none of them were able to initiate their plans. Had I continued with manufacturing, by now the country could have been self-sufficient in sugar," Wickramanayaka states.

He opines that Sri Lanka's heavy reliance on imports have pushed us towards our decline. "Sri Lanka is a prosperous country with a rich soil where we can plant and harvest anything. We spend US \$ 1850 per month on food imports and most of what is imported can be homegrown. I have created an example by leading the way in dairy production and value addition. We have the capacity to become a self-sufficient country and no time is apt than the present to start that journey."





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