

Sri Lanka is full of long, elegant words that glide effortlessly off the tongue:

Tissamaharama, Jayasuriya, Trincomalee, Parakramabahu, Polonnaruwa, Radawaduwa, Aravinda da Silva, Nuwara Eliya, Gunasekera. In Sinhala script, they form impenetrable squiggles. Spelt out in Roman lettering, your eyes glaze over after two or three syllables and the rest of the word is taken as read. If a word was spelt three different ways, would anyone notice? Sinister things could be lurking unseen in the final syllables.

It's much the same with Sri Lanka. Twenty years of civil war and a fragile ceasefire should have left more obvious scars, but it all seems implausibly peaceful. It isn't what I expected.

It's not at all like India. There isn't the same vast discrepancy between rich and poor, the same sense of living on the edge. There isn't the litter or the crowds, or the noise or the smell. The heat seems less oppressive.