

# **South Sri Lanka Insider's Guide**

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# 1. Introduction

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This is Soul & Surf's take on a local area guide. A real insider's guide to our South Sri Lanka.

We don't want or need to add to the noise and give you another Lonely Planet-style tourist guide. You can look that up anywhere. This guide won't necessarily tell you about the best, flashiest restaurants, or where to go to get the best sunset (although those things are obviously brilliant and you should do those things too).

This is straight from the mouths of the people that actually live here, work here, have spent a lot of time here. It's where the staff run away to when they have a day off, or when we slow down in the quiet season and give ourselves a little treat. Where we spend our time when we are in these places. Most of this stuff is close to home – the everyday that we take for granted in these special corners of the world.

And it's the little gems we've found and assimilated over the years that are away from the tourists, off the beaten path. These special spots sometimes won't have the best decor, wifi or the best service (or any service at all). You may not be able to find them easily, the people that work there may not speak English to you, you might get lost, you might get something completely different to what you ordered. But you'll be experiencing something real. And

that's why we all travel, right?

So here is our version of the Lonely Planet for you. Anecdotes, tips and a peek into a life less ordinary.

**Contributors:** Ed, Sofie, Hayley, Ellis, Gayan, Udara, Madu, Chef Aruna, Anura, Min & Franco, Sunil, Adam, Rachel, Kit

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## 2. Ed, Sofie & Kit

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*Ed & Sofie are Soul & Surf's founders who found themselves in Varkala in 2009 thinking... I wonder if we could open a little surf & yoga stay here? Kit joined the party a little later than 2009 and they all now divide their time between home-town Brighton and a mix of India, Sri Lanka & Portugal.*

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### Ed & Sofie

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## Kahana Kanda

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One of the first few times we came to Sri Lanka we found Kahanda Kanda. It's a really special hideaway at the top of a hill surrounded by tea plantation. When friends visit us on the island we always take them for a late afternoon swim, a cocktail or two, and a snack of cashews stir fried with curry leaves & Sri Lankan spices before a great dinner.



*"A really special hideaway at the top of a hill surrounded by tea plantation."*

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# The Shack, Dewata

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In Dewata beach, behind a strip of beaten up, knackered looking shops you will see a cool old motorbike mounted high up at the front of the store. Our friends Ben & Annie run motorbike tours from their Soul Riders store and have an excellent beach bar & café called The Shack. It's a mix of expats and tourists with great food, a great atmosphere, the odd beach party and all-year-round surf out front.

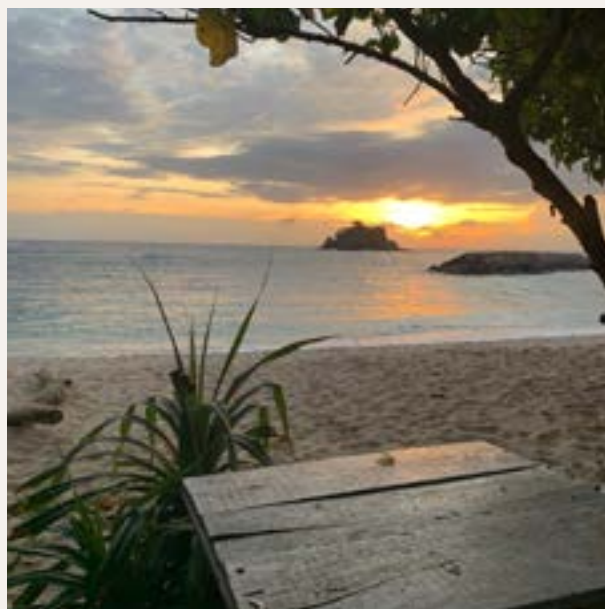


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# Wild Beach, or SB1

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Just down the way, pretty much right on the beach road is one of our favourite secret beaches, hidden in plain sight. Once you get on the beach you'll find a little cafe hidden under the trees with a lovely family serving drinks and snacks. We often take our BBQ and have sunset swims in the calm waters and a few drinks before dark.



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# The Paddy Fields

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Hop on a bike or a scooter at dawn or dusk and just pootle around getting lost. From where we are it's only minutes before you feel like you've stepped back in time to a slower, more gentle Sri Lanka. The elegant tranquility is only pierced now and then by the shrill call of a peacock, the deep grumble of a water buffalo or the scrambled passing of an enormous monitor lizard.



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## Kit

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# Wijaya Beach

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If you want to snorkel with a massive turtle - bigger than me - Wijaya's the beach for you. There's a great lagoon to swim in between the reef and the beach and there's a rope swing and Wijaya restaurant makes pizzas too.





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# The Shack, Dewata

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After school on a Thursday we all go down to the Shack with our parents. We all get in the water on surfboards, canoes, body boards and whatever we can find and then eat burgers or pizza. The parents all seem very thirsty and mostly stay on the beach drinking.

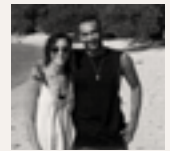


"The parents all seem very thirsty and mostly stay on the beach drinking."

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### 3. Raff & Hayley

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*Raff manages both Soul & Surf Kerala and Sri Lanka, and is based in Lanka. He is married to Hayley and they have a dog called Kumi, who stayed in Varkala to look after the place. Hayley is an amazing yoga sprite who taught for five years in Kerala before moving to Lanka with Raff.*

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### Raff

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## Mr. Sunil's

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My favourite place for a post surf refuel is Mr Sunil's roti shop just on the side of the road a short walk from Devil's Rock (Sion) wave. Even though it's just a tiny shack on the beach (just the way I like it) it's got a great view of the sea and these amazing fried buns stuffed with eggs, lentils, onion sambol and veggies. It's a bit indulgent but also so good for a post surf snack, along with a tambili (king coconut).

If you're feeling adventurous ask him to give you a spoonful of his Kocchi chilli sambol on the side. But bear in mind this isn't for the faint of heart, Kocchis are some of the spiciest chillies in the world. Don't say I didn't warn you.





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# Lighthouse

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Right next to Mr Sunil's and up 4 flights of stairs on a beautifully located rooftop, Lighthouse is the equivalent of the neighbourhood bar for me. Run by a really cool collection of people, it's a great place to go for a sunset cocktail or a beer and bump into familiar faces for a chat. It's one of those places you can go to by yourself and be sure that you'll leave with a group of friends.



"It's one of those places you can go to by yourself and be sure that you'll leave with a group of friends."

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Hayley

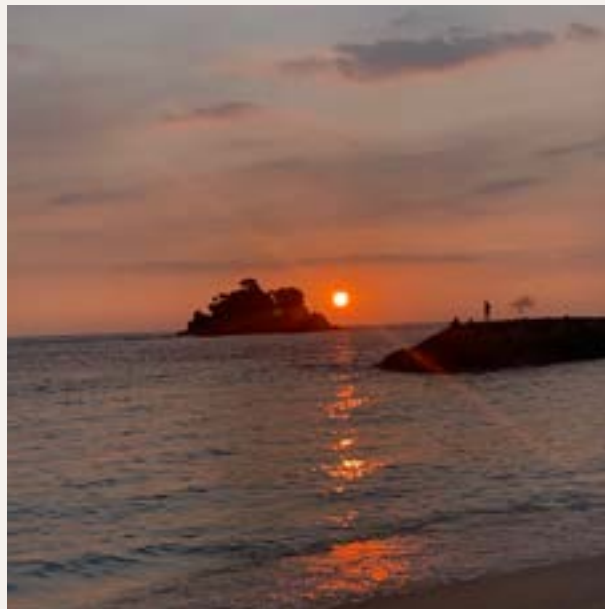
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## Secret Beach 2, or SB2

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In all honesty it's not even a secret anymore – everyone knows about it – but actually not that many people go there still. I think that's because there are so many beautiful stretches of beach along the area between Kabalana to Midigama that we're spoiled for choice.

But what I like about this one is that it is a tiny little cove that is paradise in the morning, the water is calm, and there are trees to set up camp under so you're not in direct sunlight. If you're into seeing what weird and wonderful creatures live under the water, take your snorkel – the calm water allows you to see all of it.



"It is a tiny little cove that is paradise in the morning."

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## 4. Ellis

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*A Brighton boy who feels more at home in the tropics. Ellis has worked with us in India and Sri Lanka and has been with us for a really long time now. A true soul surfer, you can always count on Ellis to make surf lessons fun and quirky, just the way we like it. Just don't ask him about the moon landings.*

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## Kitchen Moana

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A small place that belongs to Kallum who used to work at Soul & Surf back in the day. I like to stop by when I'm cycling back home through the back roads of Ahangama.

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## 5. Gayan

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*We first met Gayan when he was driving a tuk tuk in the village. He'd often be one of the drivers to take us back and forth from the surf. As we got to know him we realised we needed to have his beautiful smile on our team and around our guests.*

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## Trip to Matara & Back

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My favourite place to go is the temple in Matara, and then stop over at Mirissa beach with my wife and son and drink a green kurumbu coconut. We like to then have some food (my favourite food is egg omelette) in one of the beach shacks at sunset time before we come home.



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## 6. Udara

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*A retired major of the Sri Lankan army, Udara is our operations manager. He's also one of the best carrom players we've seen.*

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## Fatna

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I like to go to Fatna when I have time. It's around a one and a half hour drive from Ahangama and is one of the picnic places - you can have a river bath, jungle hike and more.

The road runs via a beautiful tea plantation and villages. Fatna is close to Sinharaja jungle, which has been nominated as a world heritage site.

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## 7. Chef Aruna

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*Fondly called Chef, always a smiling face in the kitchen. Chef has worked with Sofie over the years to create and deliver our Sunshine Food concept in Sri Lanka. Aside from that he's also the best carrom player on our team. We may be a bit biased but we genuinely think he makes one of the best rice & curry spreads in the world. Having him on our team is an absolute treat.*

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## Merchant House

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I really love this old Sri Lankan house that has been renovated into a villa. I enjoy going there to use the pool with my family, and it is also in a very quiet area where we don't hear the noises of the road and buses.





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## 8. Min & Franco

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*Min & Fran are part of the Soul & Surf family, who have worked with us in Kerala, Sri Lanka and Peru. Franco has been a body therapist for the past 17 years, developing youarethesea.com and shaping his practice through art, surfing and philosophy. Min, an eternal soul-searcher, runs her own clothing brand – MINDIA.*

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## Devil's Island

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A weekly practice is swimming to Devil's Island. I'm sharing a temple with you here, and you will have to be careful with the lady's spirit that lives there. The crows take care of the island so you will feel if you are welcome or not.

It's a great and demanding swim since there are some strong underwater currents. You need to be a confident swimmer and a person of the sea to be able to read them. I love looking at the sky on a clear night. I find my nearest rice paddy and stay there for some time.

We also recommend taking walks around the village and getting lost – it's the best way to sink into the pathways of Sri Lanka. You will be invited for a tea, kissed by a dog, surprised by amazing birds and bathed in sunshine.



*"You will be invited for a tea, kissed by a dog, surprised by amazing birds and bathed in sunshine."*

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# The King of Snacks

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In Ahangama town this man stands with his moving blue stall on the railway side corner. He always stays in the corner before the main Ahangama Junction. His fried kinda' chips are dangerously AMAZING. Always good with a beer for sunset! Franco will never give up his classic Chicken Parma from Hangtime (in Weligama). It's one of our favorite places to go for coffee or food. Very good prices and you eat overlooking Weligama Bay, checking for the best place to surf (and possibly nap).

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# Wiener Schnitzel

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We love our Schnitzel church on the main road, right next to the petrol station in Habaraduwa and led by a Sri Lankan man that lived in Germany long years back. It's the best best. My fav (Min), is the chef – a bountiful presence crossing the little window who creates the greatest mash potato and schnitzel.

We once asked them to set a bonfire at the beach – so magical to be by the fire watching the stars, listening to the roar of the sea.



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## 9. Sunil

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*Sunil is a very old friend of ours, who worked with us at Soul & Surf Kerala. Now you can find him at Lion's Rest in Gurubabila – and if he's not there he'll probably be surfing Coconuts.*

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## The grass field in front of Lion's Rest

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It's my favourite place to have a picnic and I even recommend it to the guests at Lion's Rest. I love hanging out at sunset time, just me and the village cows with a beer watching the kids play cricket. It's a bonus that it's between my place of work and my favourite wave.

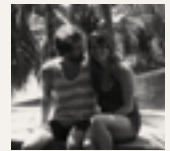


"I love hanging out at sunset time, just me and the village cows."

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## 10. Adam & Rachel

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*Adam & Rach joined us back in 2013, back when Soul & Surf was still in black & white. From humble beginnings baking cakes and working as surf coaches they've scaled the heady Soul & Surf heights and are now hanging out in Portugal.*

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### Rachel

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## Gurubabila

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This is not exactly a secret, but this little village is off the main road, on the way to Weligama from Midigama.

One of my favourite waves (Coconuts) is right out front of a lovely big patch of grass with old, tall palm trees. At sunset there is often an impromptu game of cricket going on between locals and tourists, and it's a great spot for watching the sun set over the surfers. But preferably I'd be in the water, so watching the cricket from the sea is also good.

If you head left from there (with the sea in front of you) and keep walking down the beach it gets really cool. Lovely little swimming coves, plus a creepy abandoned hotel you can explore. Don't fall in the giant empty swimming pool.



"Lovely little swimming coves, plus a creepy abandoned hotel you can explore."

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# The Back Roads to Galle

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When Adam and I lived in Kathalua and fancied a trip to Galle Fort, instead of going on the hectic Galle Road, we would take the scooter and go the long way around, through the paddy fields and jungles – just five minutes inland from the main road. So beautiful. If you were lucky you'd see howler monkeys. If you were unlucky you'd get stuck behind a truck the whole way.



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Adam

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## Indian Hut

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There is a place called Indian Hut (I have no clue if that is its real name) in Dewata – on the main road towards Galle Fort – which was the best place around to get anything close to good Indian food. When you've lived in Kerala, you get kinda addicted to having a curry every day, so this was a little bit of home. We would go pretty regularly and order so much food that the scooter ride home was always a bit slow.

