



Travel



LAZY DAYS

Pamela Goodman is seduced by the gentle charms of Sri Lanka

The cloud hangs in low, wispy drifts above a grey expanse of lake, the surface of which bristles with the raindrops of a torrential downpour. Occasionally, a vividly green hillside emerges through the mist, or the silhouette of an island, or the outline of a low-slung house on the far shore. With croquet laid out on the lawn through the window, a log fire at my back and a gin and tonic in my hand, I could be in Scotland. The eucalyptus trees give it away though, and the hibiscus, and the narrow, pointed rowing boats that scuttle across the lake. The air feels tropical, not dank, and the green on the hillsides is not fern but tea - mile upon mile of immaculately tended plantations rising from shore to summit, among which appear small flashes of bright colour as the sari-clad tea-pickers harvest their crop.

The tea plantations of Bogawantalawa Valley, 1,220 metres above sea level, have become one of Sri Lanka's most popular spots for visitors - and rightly so. Even in the rain, this is an area of immense beauty, made all the more inviting by the clever conversion a few years back of four former plantation managers' residences, located at different points on or near to Lake Castlereagh, into four lodges for paying guests. Collectively known as the Ceylon Tea Trails, the lodges feel unashamedly colonial: think teak four-posters draped in billowing mosquito nets; slowly turning ceiling fans; giant Victorian baths; wide verandas with wicker furniture; and gardens of roses. Guests are encouraged to visit them all - four-room Summerville and five-room Castlereagh stand on opposite shores of the lake, a mere paddle apart by boat, while five-room Norwood is a two-and-a-half-hour walk from Castlereagh, and six-room Tientsin a further two hours' walk from there, uphill and down dale through dense plantations, past villages and tea factories, with glorious views of lakes and mountains.

The temptation - easily yielded to - in the tea plantations is to potter and to read, to drink in the scenery and eat four meals a day, including scones and jam for tea. For the less sedentary, there are tea factories to visit, Adam's Peak to climb, bike rides to enjoy, and the colonial outpost of Nuwara Eliya to explore. Or, the tea >

OPPOSITE Lake Castlereagh is in Bogawantalawa Valley. THIS PAGE FROM TOP Tea pickers make their way to the plantations. Tea can be taken on the lawn at Summerville. The Ball Room is one of four charming rooms at The Dutch House



