

DOWNTIME IN SRI LANKA: THE PERFECT PRE-HOLIDAY

SO here we are in July, a month swamped with sunshine and our minds salivating at the prospect of summer when we can swap suits for surf and paperclips for Peloponnesian clip joints. Stop right there – let’s just puncture that little idyll while there’s still time. Take a good hard look at yourself. That’s right – that chi chi Paul Smith blouson may successfully hide a multitude of sins in a homo haunt’s low-light levels. Unfortunately, the unforgiving blaze of the impending Ibiza sun glinting off your mirrored thong will only momentarily distract the indigenous population before they cower before the solar eclipse unwittingly engineered by your love handles, drooping down like Silence of the Lambs saddlebags.

I know, I know. I’ve been meaning to go to the gym, too, for the past four months. And I know that last summer you were a glistening tribute to Aryan supremacy. And I know that you’ve been desperately trying to go every day, so much so that your bedraggled gym bag has made more friends on the daily commute to work than you have. Yes, you’ve been snowed under. Yes, corporate lunches are a necessary evil. Yes, you are too tired to go after work. Yes, takeaways are forgivable when you are just sooo tired after a fourteen hour day. And, yes, I would be drinking every night too if I was under that much pressure. Yes, yes, yes.

Now move away from the nail scissors and listen up. You still have time.

I have a cunning plan. You need a kickstart. A bit of R & R – what you need is a holiday to prepare for THE holiday although, ironically, this one will cost more than your summer spunkfest but what price dignity, glowing skin and pecs that can crack walnuts or, at least, cause a spot of testicular trauma to a willing scrotum? So, we need somewhere hot, somewhere isolated from any distractions and somewhere with just the right balance of therapy and discomfort. This remedial combination is amply satisfied by Sri Lanka, the de facto destination for honeymooning couples and full body massage.

Destination sorted - how long to go away for? I'd allow for a nine day break. The flight over with Sri Lankan Airlines is a painless enough ten hour jaunt, contrasting somewhat with the rather more subsonic pace of life when you land at the airport. I had half expected to see Matthew Kelly selling videos from a white Ford Transit outside the terminal but I was spared that particular orthodontal travesty. I decided to stay at the Eden hotel in the South West of the island. This is the only spa resort in Sri Lanka although its claims of five star status and Kuoni’s reassurances were somewhat betrayed by an atrium decorated with plastic ivy and coffee tables, constructed of that particular type of chromium and etched glass that you find in Streatham Vale semis – this was five star as informed by QVC. Still, the power of spa normally smooths away those four star edges. Upon unpacking your multitude of haute couture lures (honestly, just take a couple of T-shirts and a pair of shorts), you should make a beeline for the teak decked tranquility of the spa. The various available treatments are too numerous to name but, suffice to say, much in Sri Lanka is informed by the island’s natural bounty. That is to say, natural growing herbs, oils and unguents. You won’t be receiving a back, sack and crack wax here but, in compensation, the Sri Lankans are light years ahead of the Thai’s in massage techniques. In fact, so skilled are they and so spiritual, that I am sure, if you asked them nicely, they could probably chant the unwanted hair out of your scrotum.

The full body massage is incredible – teams of masseurs pad into

your cabana and perform synchronised delights upon your flabby carcass. Admittedly, their thoroughness and attention to detail does border on the absurd when you receive a nose and eyebrow massage. However, my favourite treatment was the hot oil bath, where you lie naked on a stainless steel table looking like a dead extra in Silent Witness. For the next hour warm oil is drizzled upon your body from on high in a constant, sensuous flow whilst a masseur goes to work on the slithering mess on the slab. It is nothing short of exquisite.

The Eden hotel juts onto the Bantota beach and I suppose I should describe the scenery. Well, an isolated beach and a few palm trees is pretty much the same anywhere, especially if you are without eye candy to stimulate you. Think sand, cheap crap touted by beach boys and constant offers of the advanced sexual perversities normally practised by the more obscure cabals of the legal profession. So, onto the locals, well the imported fellow residents. Your less-imaginative companions, who have chosen to go to Sri Lanka simply for an exotic break, will provide your body toning impetus. So, let’s observe.

On your left as you recline by the pool you will find the tool hire magnate. He’s in his early forties, tanned within an inch of his life, enjoying the success and deep satisfaction that only a branch of tool hire franchises in the Home Counties and an outsized endowment can bring. He’s on his second marriage which has teamed him up with the better reared Kent wild girl (wild for Sevenoaks, anyway), who has been lured by his perma tan and permanent ten - in many ways she has made a rod for her back. At the other end of the spectrum, at dinner, you may overhear the successful blue chip accountant tentatively serenading his much younger accounts junior, brandishing his short-sleeve pinstripe shirt ostentatiously around the chardonnay and rustling his chinos in expectation. His cut glass accent jars with her deliberately elongated vowels which, rather than imitate Waterford, simply serve to betray her Bracknell, six for the price of three, Poundstretcher tumblers.

So why does the dedicated bottom burglar need



to know this parochial detail? Well, amidst these lifestyle frauds you will be utterly, irrevocably, consummately inspired. Inspired, invigorated, affirmed and even upholstered, well refurbished, in as much as you will be screaming headlong into the gym the next morning. There, but for the grace of God and heterosexuality, etc.

So, the gym. Foreign 'fitness centres' are not always as described in the brochure – sometimes a crash mat twinned with a steel sculpture, irredeemably rusted solid and rescued from the Spanish Inquisition's clumsier attempts at a mobile torture unit, is deemed worthy of a palace of muscular perfection. Fortunately, my hotel's gym was passable. Passable, in that it had just the right amount of equipment and it was underwhelmed with patrons. Like a butterfly in its pupal stage, we must regain our former perfection in the dark to return stronger and more powerful than ever before.

However, if old tool hire man does bluster in and start lifting bullock sized deadweights intimidatingly beside you, do not be perturbed. Turn up your walkman to maximum underground young cult hit volume, continue with your measured and, surely, correct muscular rectitude and wait for the next track to come breezing into your headphones. Just as the track reaches its uplifting chorus minutes later, tool hire man's stomach lining will uplift in perfect synchronicity to his pelvis and he will

hobble out in hernia-blessed agony as your, oh so painfully hip, Holmes Place pop socks continue to blur around the exercise bike, professionally adhering to your aerobic, pre-freeweight mantra.

Alone and at peace is not an epithet that could be applied to a trip to Sri Lanka. Sadly, poverty, with an awareness of commerce, and local culture, that unquestioningly accepts its own exploitation, is like dating a particularly twisted rape victim. Horrific, inducing pangs of pity but, ultimately, distasteful – and I mean that with every iota of Raj mentality. Bali has similarly descended into this hard-edged, insidious cattle market where you feel like a prize bull with rustlers shadowing your every step. For true peace you need to go somewhere where they don't understand the power of the pound – Southern India, Southern Italy, South America or even the South Pole – not, if you are stupid enough to extend the metaphor, South Ruislip – for that way lies in-car air fresheners and candlewick bedspreads.

However, if you do want to find Sri Lanka's innate beauty then venture inland to the ancient capital of Kandi. Here, magnificent hillsides coated with tropical forests brandish stunning wildlife and intoxicating smells at the more adventurous traveller. But do take a local chaperone. In my naivety, I've involuntarily emptied my bowels as a gang of natives attempted to rip off the metal grille of my hotel room window in Zambia in the

dead of night (my impression of Peter Gabriel's classic song 'Biko' in the bar earlier had obviously not been as much of a tribute to the dark yet glorious stirrings of Africa as I had hazily assumed). I have never felt as intimidated as when I walked alone to the local market in Sri Lanka. I felt as if I had dollar signs tattooed upon my forehead, but such are the trials and tribulations of being a lone traveller. Nevertheless, I would stick to the hotel compound.

However, for the now re-dedicated gym babe, all these negatives are positives. You won't be distracted from your crucial skin-toning and muscle resurrection by essential cultural trips or life-affirming brushes with the local community. You'll stick to the job. Just how effective Sri Lanka is in the pre-Summer flesh fest preparation I will have to tell you in September – I've already booked a villa with three close and gloriously debauched mates into Ibiza for August. With my gym-fit lids, lips and hips I am sure I will be tearing through a veritable host of boys all high on drugs and low on IQ. Alternatively, you could always just invest in a personal trainer once a week!

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An Audience with Yvette
5th July 2003

Maria & Yvette with the support of friends and colleagues were able to raise the sum of £1,035.35 for GMFA.

Special thanks to:

Sebastian Ryder	Steven & Tim (gay.com)
Sarah Hurt (Redhead)	Robert Koppeus & Martin Jay
Kino Naidoo (Cuts)	Marcus Woods (The Other Cinema)
Lisa & Sarah (G3)	Neil McBride (Costume Design)

Friendly SOCIETY

Basement, 79 Wardour Street W1D 6QB (entrance Tisbury Court)

WANT A FLIGHT? PAM ANN'S TOP TEN REASONS WHY SHE'S THE QUEER CARRIER OF CHOICE

- 1 British Airways may have flat beds and Virgin may have masseurs, but only Pam Ann Airlines have dark rooms.
- 2 In the event of an emergency, a row of lights will light up along the aisle, a disco ball will appear and a karaoke microphone will fall from the unit above your head.
- 3 Pam Ann can smile at 3am and fight fire with a full face of Mac, while disarming a terrorist with a full bottle of Clinique toner, thereby blinding the terrorist and exfoliating the skin at the same time.
- 4 When evacuating the aircraft in an emergency situation, Pam Ann Airlines insists you keep on your Gucci boots when jumping down the inflatable slide.
- 5 On Pam Ann Airlines, we don't stock just any life jackets - we offer Versace life jackets. They don't inflate, but my god they look great.
- 6 If you wait online, Pam Ann Airlines will give you a line.
- 7 Pam Ann Airlines got rid of all the nosy security personnel. Pam thinks it's more fun if you don't know who's got the bomb.
- 8 Pam Ann Airlines addressed the deep vein thrombosis problem by ripping all of her seats out of economy. She replaced them with treadmills that actually generate the electricity for First Class.
- 9 Pam Ann still accepts visits to the cockpit. She doesn't even lock the cockpit door; in fact, she took off the door and put in a beaded curtain.
- 10 Pam Ann Airlines is the world's most experienced airline. "We never make the same mistake more than three times! Okay, maybe four."

Pam Ann Want's You is on at the Soho Theatre, Dean Street, W1 to 26th July. Tickets can be purchased from the box office on 020 7478 0100 or at www.sohotheatre.com



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Pride Champagne Breakfast
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