

# Taking water sport to higher level

By VINDYA AMARANAYAKE

Would you like to play in the water, when we are young and with no responsibilities. Frolicking in the sea, a river, a stream or even a muddy pool of water is something that we all have done in our youth. But, how many of us would continue the habit into our adulthood and take it on as a profession. Only a few.

With the end of the 30-year war last year and many countries withdrawing the negative travel advisories against visiting Sri Lanka, the tourist arrivals to the island nation have increased manifold. And, one of the most looked forward to event for most tourists is surface water sports.

The Nation caught up with someone who has taken up the sport professionally, to learn why so many tourists come here to engage in surface water sports and why the locals are not so keen about the sport. "More than 80% of the tourists who come here, are keen about water sports. Most of them are quite familiar with the types of water sports and some need training. But they are quite enthusiastic about the sport," H. Sujith Priyanandana, who provides training for those who love playing in the water.

One of the main reasons why Sri Lanka attracts so many tourists is the deep blue Indian Ocean that surrounds the island. And then there are hundreds of rivers cascading towards the ocean from the Central Hills. This provides ample opportunities for tourists to engage in various forms of water sports.

It was not long ago that two international surfing championships were held in Sri Lanka: one in the Southern town of Hikkaduwa and the other, the Eastern beach town of Arugambay.

"Sri Lanka is a tropical island. Here it is sunny all year round; no seasonal changes. Therefore we have a good opportunity to promote Sri Lanka as a water sport destination," Sujith pointed out.

However, how many locals are keen to take up the sport? Not many. Although there are some locals, mainly from Colombo, who show some interest in the sport, it is not a pastime that attracts many. And the reason is the expenses.

"There are some locals who are interested in water sports. They are mainly the rich folk from Colombo. There is a belief among the locals that water sport is an expensive pastime. It is true that certain kinds of equipment are expensive. For example, a good quality water ski board costs about USD 850. However, a beginner can buy one for USD 350," Sujith, who is conducting water sport training sessions in Aluthgama said.

He added that it is not entirely true that one cannot enjoy water sport if there are no expensive equipment. He uses innovative methods to engage in water sports. For example, the saucapan. This aluminium kitchen utensil is quite light in weight and can be used in water sports.

There are various forms of surface water sports:

- Skurfing is where the participant "skurfs" behind a boat on a surfboard
- Barefoot water skiing is waterskiing with no skis
- Boating is the use of boats

### Barefoot water skiing

- Bodyboarding is similar to surfing, but the board is smaller and the person (normally) lies down on the board
- Canoeing
- Flowboarding
- Kayaking
- Parasailing where a person is towed behind a vehicle (usually a boat) while attached to a parachute
- Rafting
- Rowing
- Sailing using the wind for propulsion
- Stand up paddle surfing a surf style board with a paddle, used in flatwater or waves
- White Water Rafting
- Wakeboarding is similar to water skiing, but using only one board attached to the feet
- Water skiing using skis to slide over the water while being pulled by a boat or other device
- Windsurfing on flat water using wind for propulsion in combination with



H. Sujith Priyanandana



(Pix by Isuru De Zoysa)



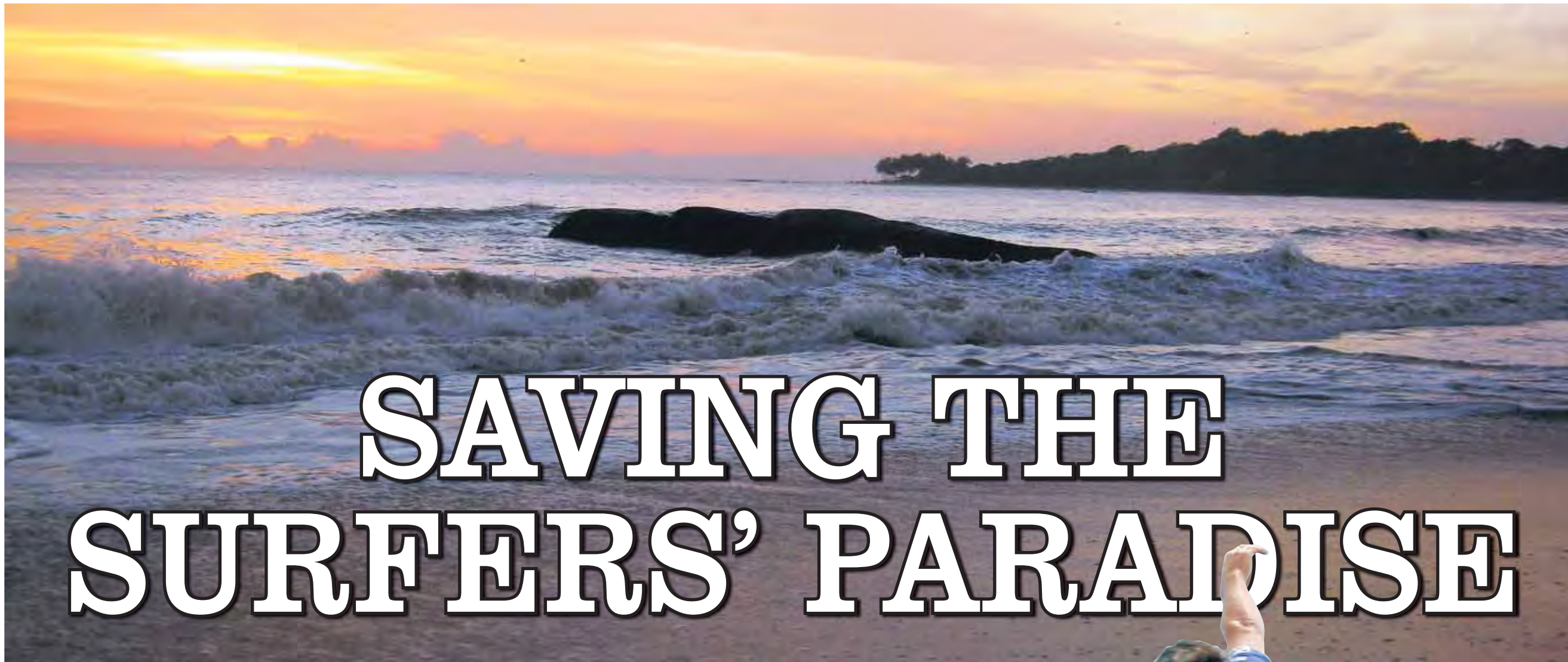
An innovative method to engage in water sports (using kitchen utensil)



Sujith, conducting training sessions



Kavindu Deshal in action



# SAVING THE SURFERS' PARADISE

By ANURADHA ALAHAKON

Shareef Nana is a long time resident of Arugambay. A devoted Muslim like many of his neighbours, he operates a small hotel. His rooms are simple. A thatched roof, mud walls and a simple bathroom. He depends on this beach destination for his livelihood. It was a lucrative business before the war broke out. Also, his small hotel was badly damaged by the tsunami. He tells me how dreadful it was when the wave came to hit him, "We saw the ocean recede and then, a big wave came roaring. Fortunately, I had the presence of mind to run for my life," he says.

Now the tsunami has gone and more importantly, the civil war is over. Foreigners as well as southern locals who had never seen the large stretches of sand such as in Arugambay are flocking to the beach on vacation.

While preparing the crab curry for dinner for us, he decides to stay in his 'resort' (as he calls it) Shareef tells me about the main speciality of Arugambay. "People don't come to this beach to bathe. The sea is always rough here. But there is something special. There is a special current here which helps surfing. People all over the world know this tiny spot for its speciality, and come here for one thing. That is to surf," says Shareef.

He is right. Situated nearly 200km east of Colombo on the coast, near Potuvil, Arugambay is a world famous site for surfing. It is one of the hot spots for this sport, and all surf lovers know the destination, though some of them do not know of Sri Lanka. If you happen to search the Internet for surfing sites, you would definitely come across Arugambay. Also, it is interesting to look at some of the historical snap shots of Arugambay and see how the landscape changed, and how still much of it remains. It is interesting to see how some of the elites in our society enjoy at Arugambay in the 1950s. I tried to visualise the surroundings of Shareef's humble resort to recollect the past which I have seen in the Internet.

Yes. Indeed there is something captivating in these surroundings. You can feel how close you are to nature, when you wake up early morning at Arugambay. It was one of the few sites one can remember for a lifetime. The sun was just emerging, and the whole horizon glows in colours of the rainbow. It is like a painting from a creative artist. This is paradise for the surfers, and how they wake up for a day. Now is the time to come to our senses to think more deeply about preserving this beauty for future generations.

### Grand Promotions and Grand Tourism

Surfers are in love with this destination. The affairs get more intimate. Nobody can blame them. It is their paradise to ride the waves. It is also a unique promotional attraction for Sri Lanka's Tourism industry. Sri Lankan Airlines held a "Sri Lankan Airlines Pro 2010", a six-star rated Surfing tournament in June. This was conducted by the Association of Surfing Professionals, the world's governing body of this sport. It was a grand event and the media coverage was massive. Some media quoted surfers saying, "What a destination to surf!"

All sorts of tourist promotions now have now created a demand in this area and hoteliers are looking forward to investments. Developments in the vicinity are coming day by day, and Arugambay is heading for a major tourist invasion. All this creates a challenge to Arugambay, though it is a hot spot for tourism, it is an ecologically important natural habitat. The all important debate and challenge comes to light in this scenario. De-

velopment versus Conservation. The challenge of sustaining both.

It is an undeniable fact that the small-time hotel operators in the area depend on tourism. Experts do agree that the question of sustaining their livelihood is an issue of concern, when talking of conservation. The people should have a livelihood, and their basic needs must be sustained, if we are to consider participatory conservation with the stakeholders. "When we go to the field to study elephant conservation, we sometimes wonder how to balance the livelihood of the people and protect the elephants. We know that the people's livelihood comes under threat in some areas. It is very difficult to get participatory action in such situations" says an Ecologist from IUCN. This same question applies to the coastal habitat conservation.

### Conservation

The coastal habitat is a diverse system which sustains a human community as well. This is a system where humans link in diverse ways with resources in natural surroundings. It may be the fishermen who get their daily 'bread' from the sea, coastal dwellers who depend on the land or the holidaymakers who come for a short visit to the beach. The diverse needs of each group must be taken into consideration when we talk of the coastal conservation.

The knowledge of the local community and their commitment towards conservation is very important for future planning. It is interesting to note the results of a study conducted by two researchers from the Eastern University of Sri Lanka - P. Sivaraman and M. Anas. They studied two villages in Potuvil, to find out their dependency on sand dunes and coastal villages. They found that there is a heavy dependency for their average family income of Rs 6,746 from fishing and coastal resource exploitation. Coastal resource exploitation activities included sand mining and turtle egg poaching. More importantly, villagers had a good knowledge of the importance of coastal resources. But a very poor understanding of the depleting resources due to exploitation.

The concern and the attraction of the coastal tourist is the beauty of the beach. That is why Sri Lanka now has become a competitor to other Asian beach destinations such as Goa in India. Though they have a coastline, the beauty of the Sri Lankan coastline cannot be matched. "We should think of the primary intention of a tourist first. Most of the tourists come to Sri Lanka not to



live inside a hotel room. They come to see the natural beauty. So, the justification of conservation is right there. We cannot sustain the beauty without conserving the ecosystem" says Vimukthi Kariyavassam a biodiversity coordinator from IUCN.

One problem here in Arugambay is the dumping of waste on the beach. Sri Lanka, people take the open spaces for granted. They will dump garbage in the nearest open space. Whenever a hotel is planned, there should also be a plan for solid waste disposal and sewage disposal. There are many ways to treat the waste and discharge. But seldom do our hoteliers adhere to this practice. As we could see, heaps of garbage were seen near some hotels, and were at the mercy of stray dogs to spread it along the beach.

### Sand Dunes

Arugambay and its surroundings are environmentally unique in one other aspect. That is because of the presence of sand dunes. Sand dunes are special regions which have been built naturally on the beach, which look like heaps or mountains of sand stretching along a large area. Sri Lanka's east coast is home to the longest stretch of sand dunes in the country. The sand dunes near Arugambay extends from Potuvil to the shores of Panama.

Sand dunes are less studied ecosystems in Sri Lanka. The writings and publications are little. But these are very important ecosystems too. The sand dunes are natural coastal protectors, just like coral reefs in shallow waters near the shore. Sand dunes protect the shore line from the erosive wave energy. Also these are important grounds for shore line plants to grow, and these become unique habitats with special adaptations.

Sand dunes found in the vicinity of Arugambay, adds beauty to the landscape and makes the

Arugambay region a picturesque site. Sand mining of the sand dunes for development activities, including building of hotels, is a major threat to the sand dunes in Sri Lanka. Nature once showed the importance of sand dunes by sending a tsunami! It is reported in many instances that the effect of the tsunami was less in regions protected by undisturbed sand dunes. Even the coastal hotels were protected from the tsunami by the natural cover from the sand dunes. The Yala Village Hotel was surprisingly protected from tsunami waves because of the undisturbed sand dune barrier. In contrast, Yala Safari Hotel which didn't have such protection, was wiped out by the tsunami. Also the Muhudu Maha Viharaya at Arugambay was saved from tsunami damage because of these sand barriers.

India is also home to sand dunes and they have evidence to show the importance of sand dunes for the coastal belt. In a recent media briefing workshop organised by the Centre for Science & Environment in Goa, India, scientists, policymakers and activists got together to debate on the coastal issues in India. Antonio Mascarenhas, a scientist from the National Institute of Oceanography pointed out how the removal of sand dunes intensified coastal erosion. He showed how he tried very hard to protect and recreate some of the sand dunes in the region, and got very little attention from the authorities. This is the common sad story throughout South Asia.

### Safeguarding Paradise

It is indeed a challenge to safeguard this paradise known to surfers



around the world. On the other hand, if we do not act responsibly, there will not be a paradise in the future. The challenge of the development and conducting environmentally friendly business has come to light. Destroying the sand dunes to build hotels will wipe out the investment in a future tsunami! Nature once showed us this.

Hoteliers should also realise that the modern consumer is intelligent and environmentally conscious. That is why terms like "green marketing" and "conducting environmentally friendly business" has come to light. Destroying the sand dunes to build hotels will wipe out the investment in a future tsunami! Nature once showed us this.

(Pix by Pushpakumara Matugama)



### HOTEL COMPETITION

The Nation EYE, together with the Mount Lavinia Hotel is holding a competition for our readers. Answer a simple question from the write-up about the hotel and stand a chance to win a dinner voucher for two from the Mount Lavinia Hotel each week.

Please fill in the coupon below with the correct answer and send it to: The Nation EYE, 742, Maradana Road, Colombo 10.

One person can send any number of coupons but photocopies of the coupon are not accepted.

Question: What is the name of the architect who completed the current classic wing in 1894?

Answer: .....

Name: .....

Contact number: .....

Email: .....

Postal Address: .....



## Tradition meets modernity at Galle Face Hotel

The Galle Face Hotel, established as far back as 1864, is world famous for being one of the most exclusive hotels east of the Suez.

The beautiful architecture, breath-taking views of the deep blue Indian Ocean and being in the centre of Colombo's commercial hub are only few virtues that bring thousands of tourists to this century-old hotel year after year.

The hotel was originally built by four British entrepreneurs. Its name derives from the stretch of lawn which it faces, known as the Galle Face Green.

It began as a Dutch villa called Galle Face House. Land for the hotel's expansion was purchased between 1870 and 1894.

In 1894, architect Thomas Skinner completed its current classic wing, its facade being largely intact until the present day, though with many refurbishments.

Mignonne Fernando and The Jetliners regularly entertained guests at the Coconut Grove, the night club attached to the hotel.

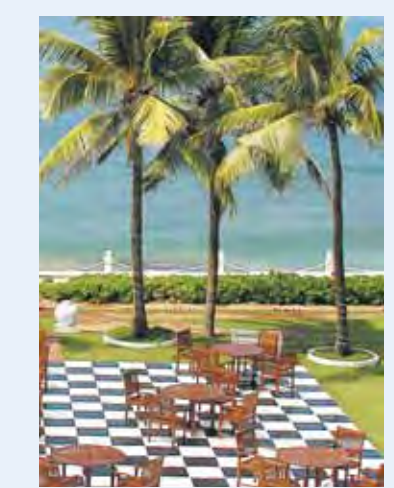
The venue was even popularised in a song. Radio Ceylon recorded music programmes from the Coconut Grove as well as the Galle Face Hotel itself, presented by some of the legendary Radio Ceylon announcers in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Livy Wijemanne and Vernon Corea.

"Thousands listened to the broadcasts, particularly 'New Year's Eve' dances from the Galle Face Hotel."

D G William (known as 'Galle Face William'), the Lanka Sama Samaja Party trade union leader, first worked and organised workers here. The Science Fiction author Arthur C. Clarke wrote the final chapters of 3001 - The Final Odyssey in the hotel.

The Regency, located in the restored southern wing of the hotel was completed in early 2006.

It is marketed as the luxury wing of the hotel.



The hotel also employs the world's oldest hospitality industry veteran and doorman, Kottarapattu Chatu (K.C.). Kuttan. Joining the hotel as a bell boy cum waiter in 1942, he continues to serve.

Many a celebrity client stayed at the Galle Face Hotel, when they visited Sri Lanka. Among the most famed celebrities were Yuri Gagarin, former British Prime minister Edward Heath, Princess Alexandra of Denmark, Prince Philip, journalist Eric Ellis and photographer Palani Mohan. The Prince Sadrudhin Aga Khan, Rigger Bone Scott, then-Prince Hirohito of Japan, Roger Moore, Carrie Fisher, Richard Nixon, Lord Louis Mountbatten, 1st Earl Mountbatten of Burma and Marshal Josip Broz Tito.

Having stayed at the hotel, Princess Alexandra of Denmark commented, "The peacefulness and generosity encountered at the Galle Face Hotel cannot be matched".

The Ceylon Hotels Corporation is now part of the Galle Face Hotel Group.

The hotel is a member of Select Hotels and Resorts International.

The current chairman of the hotel is Sanjeev Gardiner. He was appointed after the demise of his father Cyril Gardiner in 1997.

It is listed as one of the '1,000 Places to See Before You Die' in the book of the same name.

It received the 'Best Heritage Hotel 2010' title at the Presidential Awards for Travel and Tourism of Sri Lanka, held in June 2010.

