

Sri Lanka's better halves!



by Nilma Dole

It was just another breezy Galle Literary Festival session when I happened to meet the effervescent Daisy Perry. Dabbling in some journo pow-wow with me, she then proceeded to uncover a gem of a guidebook she wrote with Juliet Coombe about Sri Lanka's Northern, Eastern and Central provinces. Aply titled 'Sri Lanka's Other Half', even I was surprised to know about our crazy superstitions and secret hideouts neatly packed into nearly 300 pages of witty and completely idiosyncratic bliss.

An experienced writer and photographer, Juliet says that "More than Sri Lanka's diversity, it is your complexity that is the real attraction." A Lonely Planet photographer and co-founder of La Belle Atrare travel media in 1989, Juliet has published four travel compendiums. She launched the Get Lost! travel magazine in April 2004 and chairs industry talks in Australia and the UK, including the Telegraph Adventure Travel Show. Quite an armful considering the fact she has mothered two cute and naughty children who literally have ants in their pants!

Pix by Vipula Amarasinghe

Writer Daisy Perry, on the other hand, is deliciously single and has co-authored 'Around the Fort in 80 lives' with Juliet. She loves her Galle Fort life and came back to stay after doing her English Literature degree at UCL (University College London). She says, "Travel is about all generations and it caters to everyone." So it's no surprise that Daisy's best friends are senior citizens who send her letters all the time.

Born in England, having lived in Australia and now married to a Sri Lankan, Juliet said that it was in her stars to come to Serendip. "When I was young, I used to read all the books in the library voraciously that my father asked my mother what would happen if I ran out of books to read. She replied that I would write my own," smiles Juliet who travelled with her two-year-old son Samad and younger baby Amzar during the making of the book. "In fact, we got to know more about the superstitious side to Sri Lanka by talking to the nannies and women who kept asking to take care of the baby so it was an eye-opener" said Juliet. Together, they ventured to ancient cities such as Nalanda, Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and then to Jaffna and Kalpitiya. On the Eastern front, Pigeon Island, Batticaloa and Trincomalee make appearances. "We took a look at the human-interest angle to write essays about what the locals would do," said Daisy. No doubt the guidebook offers much more where you get a 360 degree angle of our lesser known Sri Lankan counterparts. "We were happy to say that we got full cooperation from the armed forces in our mobility around Jaffna just as it was opened up after the dawn of peace" said Juliet.

More than writing and publishing themselves, Juliet and Daisy are keen to publish Sri Lankan authors to an international audience. In fact, they are even looking into publishing some Gratiaen prize entrants too and are happy to help those with ideas to tackle writing. The dynamic duo will see themselves on their next book called 'Generation Tea' where they will ven-

ture into the hidden depths of our nation to uncover the secret of our staple beverage. Daisy is also cooking up another delight in the form of a home-made rice and curry recipe book and a street food guide. Daisy Perry and Juliet Coombe are fitting examples of how foreigners can be enthralled by Sri Lanka and how, without warning, they can add to better our diversity

and complexity! Please check them out on www.srienderipity.com. You can even get 'Sri Lanka's Other Half' signed by them at ODEL (Alexandra Place) on 15 May from 10am to 7pm.

Location: Nuga Gama, Cinnamon Grand Clothes courtesy Prasanna Batiks



(L-R) Juliet Coombe, Baby Amzar and Daisy Perry