

TRAVEL

Ranweli's
golden
lure

by Pramod de Silva

So you want to get away from it all - away from the exhaust fumes, crowded streets and an endless nine to five schedule. Sure, this little island offers plenty of interesting places to blow your cares away. But if you do not want to travel a long distance or if you are pressed for time, a destination close to Colombo is ideal.

There are several spots along the North Western coast which cater precisely to this kind of traveller, but perhaps none with the tranquillity and charm of the Ranweli Holiday Village, Waikkal, just 53 Km from Colombo or 18 Km from Katunayake. It offers a welcome break from beach-oriented holidays, for the Ranweli focuses more on nature and environment than on 'sun and surf'.

Ranweli, one of Sri Lanka's foremost forays into eco-tourism, is located on a 22-acre peninsula bor-



dered by mangrove forests and winding rivers. The resort which has 72 bungalows and 12 family rooms was constructed in 1975 and refurbished to international standards in 1996.

"Our mission is to create an up-market eco-tourism product as our contribution and commitment to sustainable tourism in Sri Lanka," says Ranweli Director Chandra de Silva. Indeed, the whole resort is an eco-friendly breakaway destination that offers every visitor a chance to learn more about nature.

The hotel itself is set in idyllic surroundings. The first hint of the shape of things to come is the short ferry ride to the hotel across the scenic river. Its extensive garden has over 70 varieties of

tress and shrubs, not to mention the unique biodiversity of the surrounding mangrove.

If you simply do not have the courage to overcome the deadly sin of sloth, the cosy rooms are replete with all creature comforts. But then, you do not come all the way to a resort retire into your room.

This is where the Ranweli comes into its own, offering an array of activities to keep you literally on your toes.

According to de Silva, guests usually prefer to start their stay with a two-hour walk in the garden. They are accompanied by a horticulturist. This is complemented by a boat ride along the waterways around the hotel, during which one can spot over 30 varieties of wetland birds and aquatic plants including the rare palm *Nypa fruticans* (gin pol). If fishing is your forte, both deep sea and lagoon boat rides are available. Motor boats take guests up to six kilometres away from the beach.

Ranweli, a member of the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) Green Leaf environmental excellence program, has several in-house projects aimed at protecting the environment. All rooms are provided with solar equipment for heating water. The hotel is planning to minimise waste. For example, solid waste will be converted to organic fertiliser.

The purchase of plastic goods (ex: plastic water bottles) has been minimised. Hotel brochures and stationery are printed on recycled paper.

An eco-shop sells herbal cosmetics, pottery, reedware and other eco-friendly products. A meditation centre and an Ayurvedic centre will be added.

"Ranweli is an oasis to the traveller who seeks to soothe the senses and cleanse the mind," said De Silva. "And we aim to keep it that way."

