

Pireeni Sundaralingam

Times Two

(found poem based on reports on Sri Lanka from *The New York Times*¹ and *The London Times*^{2,3})

Vacationers can lounge

on poolside hammocks

under palm trees

inside one camp

for five hours

queuing for food.

Or they can order

cocktails

urgently needed

medications

food and clothing.

Teeming with stylish guest-houses,

forced internment

four-poster beds

where more than a quarter of a million ethnic Tamils are detained

A place where the Queen of England might stay

guarded by the Army

Boutique hotels

tents fraying after 6 months use

mango courtyards

the controversial barbed-wire enclosures

with private terraces.

There were deep craters
miles of sugary white sand
where the lagoon had been bombed
a pristine coastline
a waterway strewn with mines
Snorkel its crystal-clear waters.

While a few military check-points remain
where refugees are being forced to strip
rich in natural beauty,
before they are allowed to pass
elephants roam freely
children snatched from the camps
monkeys swing from trees
minors being taken
with the tacit support of the Government.

Water buffaloes idle in paddy fields.

Among the most scenic
ground-impact mortars
cultural splendors
1,000 civilian deaths each day
flanked by bamboo groves
reduce trees to burnt stumps.

The majority perished under government guns.

Like one big tropical zoo.

Notes

1. *The New York Times*, January 7, 2010: "The 31 Places to Go in 2010."
2. *The London Times*, May 20, 2009: "Photographs Expose Sri Lanka's Lie on Civilian Deaths on Beaches."
3. *The London Times*, October 21, 2009: "Barbed Wire Villages Raise Fears of Concentration Camps."