

Bathing of Pinnawala elephants at Ma Oya resumes after clean-up

Bathing sessions for elephants from the Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage at the Ma Oya have resumed following the removal of debris caused by recent adverse weather. The Department of National Zoological Gardens said the activity had been temporarily halted after flooding left the river muddy and the bathing area covered with sand and silt. Officials also found hazardous items, including glass and iron

fragments, embedded in the sand, posing a safety risk to the animals. Elephant movements to the river were restricted as a precaution. After receiving approval from the Irrigation Department, an excavator was used to clear the affected area. The department confirmed the elephants returned to their regular bathing routine on 24 December, restoring a daily practice closely associated with Pinnawala.





Ringling in the new year

● What’s your favourite new year tradition?

BY APSARA RODRIGO

New Year’s Day has always been something we have looked forward to. Whether it’s gathering with our friends and family to welcome a new time in our lives or getting some New Year’s resolutions set, the New Year is a time to renew, and for many, a time for tradition.

“The New Year comes with its own set of traditions, customs and rituals,” Suranganie Dayaratne, 85, told *The Daily Morning Brunch*. “These New Year traditions tell stories of a person’s personality, tastes and backgrounds.”

In order to explore how people celebrate New Year, Brunch spoke to our readers on the different New Year traditions they have, from a kiribath breakfast to more unconventional ways of ringing in the new year.

A celebration of achievement

To a lot of people, the New Year symbolises hope. Many of us

look forward to new beginnings and experiences while learning from our old ones.

“My husband and I buy six bottles of our favourite spirits on New Year’s Day and label them on things to achieve next year,” Shasuni Ruwanpathirana, 27, said. “And when we achieve them, we open the bottle. If we don’t have six things in mind, we keep the bottles and label them as we figure our goals out.”

Ruwanpathirana said that her New Year’s traditions help her focus on her future and goals, while also strengthening her bond with her husband.

“It’s not about doing something new every year. It’s about returning to what feels like home — *Nadeesha Fernando*

“This year we opened five out of six bottles that included celebrating my MSc graduation, buying a vehicle and home renovation and moving in,” Ruwanpathirana said. “It’s fun and it keeps us going.”

She said that these gestures remind her of the beauty of life and moving forward despite adversity.

Moving towards a cause

While some of us find meaning in celebrating our achievements and lives in the New Year, others prefer to express

their desire to help others by contributing to a cause they are passionate about.

“I know the New Year is just another day but I think it’s a good time to celebrate life by thinking of others,” Senuri Weerasekara, 27, said. “I try to give something of value like food and clothing to an orphanage every New Year.”

Weerasekara said that giving to the less fortunate has been something that has been important to her and her family.

“Ever since I was a child, my family would always donate to and visit either an elders home or an orphanage every New Year’s Day,” she said. “Helping people at the start of a new year helps me feel grounded and grateful for what I have while also helping me put a smile on someone’s face.”

Weerasekara said that giving to the less fortunate has also helped her connect with her family and get to know them better.

“I get to know what causes each member of my family is passionate about,” she added. “And it shows me how each of them are good people in their own way.”

A quiet reset

For some, New Year’s Day is less about celebration and more about peace and quiet. Amidst fireworks, music, and countdowns, there are those who prefer to welcome the year quietly.

“I spend New Year’s Day completely offline,” Anuki Perera, 26, said. “No social media, no WhatsApp and no emails. I wake up early, clean my room, and sit with a cup of tea.”

Perera said that this tradition began unintentionally but has since become something she looks forward to every year.

“A few years ago, I was just exhausted by everything,” she explained. “The expectations, the pressure to celebrate a certain way, the need to post something meaningful online. So I just didn’t.”

What started as a break slowly turned into a ritual.

“I reflect on the year that passed, write down things I want to let go of, and things I want to carry forward,” Perera said. “It’s not about resolutions. It’s about clarity.”

She said that starting the year



“Helping people at the start of a new year helps me feel grounded and grateful for what I have — *Senuri Weerasekara*

slowly makes her feel more at ease with herself.

“It reminds me that I don’t have to rush into becoming a ‘better version’ of myself overnight,” she added. “Change can be gentle too.”

Food, family, and familiarity

In many Sri Lankan households, New Year’s Day is inseparable from food. Whether it’s a simple kiribath breakfast or an elaborate lunch spread, meals often sit at the centre of the day’s celebrations.

“Our New Year always starts in the kitchen,” Nadeesha Fernando, 29, said. “My mother wakes up before everyone else to make kiribath, lunu miris and a curry or two, even if it’s just us at home.”

Fernando said that while her family doesn’t follow many formal rituals, food has always been their way of marking the day.

“It’s comforting,” she said. “No matter how chaotic the year has been, sitting down to the same meal reminds us that some things don’t change.”

She added that New Year’s meals often become moments of reconnection.

“We talk about the year gone by, laugh about things that went wrong, and sometimes even argue,” she said. “But it’s real. It’s us.”

For Fernando, these moments matter more than grand celebrations.

“It’s not about doing something new every year,” she said. “It’s about returning to what feels like home.”

Letting go of the year that was

For others, New Year’s Day is about closure. It’s about acknowledging the weight of the past year and consciously choosing to leave parts of it behind.

“I write letters to myself every New Year’s Eve and read them the next day,” said Ishara Jayasinghe, 21. “One letter is about what hurt me that year and the other is about what I’m grateful for.”

Jayasinghe said that this practice began after a particularly difficult year.

“I had lost someone close to me, and I didn’t know how to process it,” she said. “Writing helped me put words to feelings I couldn’t say out loud.”

On New Year’s Day, she tears up the letter filled with pain and keeps the one filled with gratitude.

“It’s symbolic, but it helps,” she explained. “It reminds me that even in the hardest years, there are moments worth holding on to.”

She said that this ritual has changed how she approaches the New Year.

“It’s no longer about pretending everything will be perfect,” she said. “It’s about accepting that life will always be a mix of joy and loss.”

A day, many meanings

What these stories show is that New Year’s Day means different things to different people. For some, it’s a celebration of milestones and achievements. For others, it’s a moment of giving, reflection, rest, or reconnection.

“Life will always be a mix of joy and loss — *Ishara Jayasinghe*

Despite the fireworks, countdowns, and social media posts, many New Year traditions are deeply personal, shaped by family, experience, and individual values. As Dayaratne reflected, traditions often reveal more than we realise.

“They show us who we are and what we value,” she said. “And sometimes, they change as we change.”

Whether it’s opening a bottle marked with a dream, sharing a meal with loved ones, donating to those in need, or simply sitting in silence, New Year’s Day continues to reflect our hopes, our losses and our desire to move forward no matter what happens.

And perhaps that’s why, year after year, we keep looking forward to it.

Sri Lanka to host Rotary Institute 2026 after 21 years

Sri Lanka will host the Rotary Institute 2026 from 18–20 December, marking the country’s return to hosting the event after a 21-year gap. The Rotary Zonal Institute is the yearly leadership gathering for Rotary International Zones 4, 5, 6, and 7, covering India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives. This



esteemed event brings together current, former, and incoming Rotary leaders and senior Rotary officials to discuss trending issues of humanitarian nature, latest trends and best practices in the region and feature outstanding personalities in leadership

Singing sensation and former Rotaract President Yohani flew into Delhi to perform at the official launch of Rotary Institute 2026 in partnership with Cinnamon Life. Yohani invited the 1400 Rotary leaders of India and invited delegates to attend the 2026 conference in Sri Lanka. The launch was held in the presence of Rotary



International President Francis Azzezero and was a highlight on Day 1.

Rotary International Director Muruganandham M (MMM) and convenor of

the event, a leading business personality from India, said: “We will be discussing several trending topics with eminent personalities invited to the event, and we hope to make a

greater impact on humanity.”

Gowri Rajan the first female Governor for Rotary Sri Lanka and Maldives has been appointed as the Chairperson of Rotary Institute 2026 which is



another significant milestone in the history of Rotary Sri Lanka.

The event will attract over 1,000 Rotary Governors from across South Asia, meaning that the contribution to Sri Lanka tourism will exceed one million dollars, said Chair of the Rotary Institute 2026, Gowri Rajan.