A City Getaway

Posted on



The calming ambience and scenic water features of the park

Chirping of birds and the soft breeze stirring the trees while alleviating the heat made it almost impossible for me to believe that I was in Nugegoda, one of the most congested towns in Sri Lanka. However, here I was at the Urban Wetland Park located in the heart of Nugegoda, gearing up for a jog along its well paved path.

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Urban Wetland Park or Weli Park – as commonly called – was a place utilised for selling sand and bricks before its scenic transformation. Spread across five acres, the park was constructed under the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and was recently opened by President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The intention behind the Park's construction lies in the city's need for better control over seasonal floods while

adding beauty to this crammed expanse.

Taking my first step into the Park, I stopped short and turned back to glance behind me to make sure that the main roads of Nugegoda were still intact. Yes, the roads were still there with a multitude of vehicles rushing back and forth. Looking ahead I gazed at the Weli Park that is complete with water features, jogging tracks, walkways and leisure spaces; it has something to offer for all who tread its paths. Wandering through the steps and walkways that wound around cascading waterways, a pond in the shape of a lotus and lush greenery, I alighted at a jogging track that is well paved with white sand presenting a pristine scenery. A row of lamps was situated in the middle of the broad track while the Pagoda-Nugegoda canal lined both sides.

Taking a deep breath and wearing my earphones with the music turned down low, I started to jog along joining the few that braved to jog outside in the sweltering heat. However, I was soon distracted by the many different scenarios that unfolded around me.

With the blazing sun scorching my skin, I soon stopped for a minute to catch my breath, watching as some sprinted along while many others leisurely strolled the length chatting animatedly. Settling in for a brisk walk along the 1.5km loop, I strode down the length peering at the water purifiers, birds and people that surrounded the area. Lingering on at one point, I watched as two of the five purifiers were turned on spraying water around, cleaning the murky canal waters while some egrets tried to scavenge food along the banks.

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Little children on bicycles passed me by giggling loudly at some secret joke that I was not privy to while the parents ran yelling behind them to slow down. Swampy areas aligning the two sides of the path served as remnants of the swampy grounds that encompassed the area while adding a natural charm. Half way through the track a seating area adorned with concrete benches overlooked the wide waters of the canal as it snaked away to far away locales. Many people occupied these benches, enjoying the refreshing gush of wind that swirled around as the clear sapphire blue sky overhead made way for a perfect day.

Coming to the end of the loop, I was yet again distracted by high pitched squeals of

delight and at once set upon to investigate the commotion. I did not have to look far as a war tank surrounded by young and old alike stood near the garden area with excited groups of people swarming about. Some heads peeped out from the top of the tank and two boys wound up sitting on top and taking pictures making the most of an otherwise rare experience. Many kept on weaving in and out of the tank sating their curious minds.

As the sun sets, the lights of the Urban Wetland Park were lit up creating an enchanting landscape while more and more people trickled into the Park. The lamps along the walking track blazed bright giving ample light to people. Famed as a leisure spot as well as a jogging track, the Park was soon overwhelmed with families, friends and joggers all enjoying a fun filled time at the end of a tiring day.

The lotus pond and the cascading waters were also lit up with spot lights that changed colour. Shades of blue, white, pink, green, red and more created an alluring setting and for a long time I sat down on a ledge bordering the walkways watching this entrancing backdrop. More and more people milled around enjoying the lovely garden while children revelled to their hearts content under the watchful eyes of their parents.

Listening to the chatter of the people in the Urban Wetland Park and the soft sound of traffic that congested the main Nawala-Nugegoda road, I was enthralled by the fact that a place dubbed as a leisure and health park exists in the midst of all this intense hustle and bustle of Nugegoda. It is a place where people can come to get away for at least an hour from the stifling city environment while indulging in a small haven complete with beauty and joy.

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