

A Drive to Panama

Posted on



The green paddy field glows in the evening sun

There was a sense of peace and calm in the evening light as we drove along the road to Panama, the farthestmost village on the southeastern coast.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe | **Photography** Menaka Aravinda



The antique copper boiler – source of our sweet tea

We journeyed into the deep interiors of Panama to discover the way of life of this intriguing village.

Panama is situated close to the Kumana National Park and is considered to be the farthestmost village in this area. Consisting of five divisions, it is believed that the inhabitants of Panama are the descendants of those who sought refuge here after the Uva – Wellassa uprising during the British era. Yet, it is said that there were settlements in this

area even before that. At the time that the Kumana village had to be abandoned to the wild, these villagers too made Panama their home. However, what is unique about Panama is that its inhabitants though predominantly Sinhala are all Tamil speaking and they have a good relationship with the surrounding villages. It is also interesting that many families in Panama actually have a mixed heritage, where the parents are either Sinhala or Tamil. Thus Panama epitomises the rich cultural diversity of our country.

Along village roads we drove and soon reached acres and acres of peanut cultivation. At times the road itself was not visible as the growth had claimed its hold. The plants were still small, but were beautifully spread across the land. The road led us to a small home garden and we decided to explore; we walked along the narrow path shaded with greenery and were pleasantly surprised to reach the blue ocean of the East Coast. Here, we were told was a secret surfing point named Panagala, which was also 'coincidentally' known as Secret Point.

We journeyed back to Panama town, which is quaint and small. The main road leads on to a gravel road that soon becomes a sandy terrain. Sand dunes loom on both sides with coastal plants providing the intermittent green. You feel as if you have been transported to another realm.

The sights and sounds were mesmerising. A family of grey langurs relaxed in the evening glow, one especially seemed to be intrigued by our presence. Flocks of birds gathered around pools of water and took flight as we approached.

The evening sun was glistening as we approached the Panama beach. A picture perfect moment met our eyes; catamarans were beautifully aligned on a stretch of sand and holiday makers were bathing in the shallow waters. A little farther and we were on the golden sands of Panama. The beach was quiet except for the lulling sounds of the waves...



Cooling water bodies with resplendent water lilies and bulrush

We were on the road again, heading back to Arugam Bay and Whisky Point. Cooling water bodies with resplendent water lilies and bulrush swayed in the evening breeze. Paddy fields with young growth, some still filled with water and others a beautiful green epitomising the fertility of the rich soil. The sights and sounds were mesmerising. A family of grey langurs relaxed in the evening glow, one especially seemed to be intrigued by our presence. Flocks of birds gathered around pools of water and took flight as we approached. Herdsmen gathered their cattle into paddocks for safety during the night.

Green paddy fields spread out as far as the eye could see. As the evening sun began its descent spreading its orange hue across the land, the sight of a farmer's hut in the midst of a paddy field, with the path leading straight to it, conjured images straight out of a story book.

We crossed the bridge and were no longer in Panama. We ended our drive with a hot cup of sweet tea and reminisced about the spellbinding evening we had just spent.

