# A Fishy Discovery!

Posted on



A fresh catch

**If someone asked me to name the varieties of fish in Sri Lanka, I probably would have said Seer, Mullet, Tuna, Sardine and thrown in a few other fancy names like Snapper and Garoupa. Little did I know that the world of fish in the Sri Lankan marine waters was one yet to be discovered!**

***Words Amali Peiris and Achini Athukorala  Photographs Prabath Chathuranga***

Our early morning start took us to Wennappuwa, a town in close proximity to Negombo. We were guided on to Beach Road, a road parallel to the Western coast. Lined with small houses belonging to the local fishermen community, on either side of the road stalls were set up selling the freshest fish possible – only a few hours if not minutes out of the Indian Ocean.

On first glance we could see the variety. Different shapes, sizes and colours, translucent and at times still breathing. The most eye-catching and fascinating discovery for us was of the ‘Kalinga’, belonging to the Swordfish family. With its long pointy nose and blue tinge it was one of the most intriguing and curious looking fish we came across. Its freshness could be seen with the three blue dots appearing on its tail. The Sawalaya or Ribbon Fish was also a common sight. With its long silver body, looking more like an eel, the Ribbon Fish were present in abundance. As the community went about their daily routine of selling the fresh catch, the excitement of discovering so many new creatures, noting down their names and trying to identify them for ourselves,we blended in quite well with the hustle of activity down Beach Road.

As we moved along from one stall to the other so many names were thrown at us. Kobeiyya, Ranna (Snapper), Nagariya, Pituwa, Siriththa and even Kukula (direct translation meaning chicken!). This colourful assortment of fish was comprised of some that were caught in the reef only a few hours earlier. Their colours were so vibrant and eye-catching, from the deep sea green Parrotfish, known as the Girawa, with a turquoise tail resembling the feathers of a peacock,

to the small Boraluwa (Sri Lankan Sweetlips) with a yellow outline and prominent black stripes. Most of the names were those the local community had come up with to identify one fish from the other. The Kukula or Blue Ring Angelfish seemed almost out of place with its companions, having the appearance of an aquatic fish with its large flat body covered in yellow and prominent blue stripes. A not so pleasant sight was the Kaakka, a black fish with greyish spots all over its body, a close resemblance to its feathery namesake, the crow.

Cuttlefish or Squid have several varieties. The Zebra Striped Squid was bigger than its common cousin, with a prominent brown body and white stripes.

Then there was the giant Tuna! My experience with Tuna prior to this day has only been of the canned kind. Huge Yellow Fin and Skip Jack Tuna were lined side by side, with their pointy fins and fleshy bellies, larger than I ever imagined they would

be! Lying nearby was the belly of a Milk Shark. Unfortunately we were not able to see the entire shark as parts of it had already been sold to eager customers. We also stumbled upon a basket of small Sting Rays, known as Maduwa. With their flowing bodice and long tail,one cannot help but imagine its smooth journey, slithering across the deep blue ocean.

The rarer species which were among the day's catch were the Patha Madiya – a curious looking brown creature with eyes on top of its body and no tail, Meewatti (Mullet), Kossa (Garoupa), Raddhalla – a radiant bright red fish, the only catch for the day of its kind and the more popular Angilau (Seer) and Paraw – commonly known as Jack or Trevallies. We were also able to see some Angulawa or Cat Fish piled up in a basket of their own. Only a few fish appeared in stalls, owing to the colder weather conditions the locals were experiencing. We were told that a drop in temperature tend to send fish away from the shore,reducing the days haul.

As we continued down Beach Road we met a few locals carefully untangling prawns and small fish from fishing nets. The nets are usually spread out closer to shore and drawn in every few hours.Small white prawns or Butter White Prawns were a more common sight in comparison to the Giant Tiger Prawns with their brown stripes, and more difficult to harvest, hence, a rare sight. The more common fish were of course the Wella Sudhayas (White Sardine), Kumbalawas (Jack Mackerel), Hurullas (Sardine) and Bollus (Indian Mackerel). We could see huge piles and baskets full of these varieties in almost every stall, an easy catch with the fishing nets.

Cuttlefish or Squid have several varieties. The Zebra Striped Squid was bigger than its common cousin, with a prominent brown body and white stripes. Bound tightly with strings yet ready to escape was a large Mud Crab. About twice the size of the common crab, the Mud Crab had a deep green shell with orange tipped claws. There were only two Mud Crabs, another result of the unusually low temperature.

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On our return trip down the Beach Road, we could see that most of the fish had already been sold. As prices were bargained and people filled fresh fish into the boxes on their bikes, large shopping bags or baskets, the nets were being drawn on shore. Another bountiful batch of Sardines, Mackerels, Prawns, and the few odd fish

trapped here and there will soon be visible along this narrow road.Had the weather been warmer I wonder what other creatures we would have stumbled upon. So much to be uncovered on this small Island and in the immense ocean that surrounds it, our fishy discovery being only a tiny part.

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