A Trail of Beauty

Posted on



A breathtaking view enroute to the waterfall, which is visible in the backdrop

The cool high altitudes meant we had approached the central hills. However, before venturing along the scenic 18-hairpin road to Kandy, a turn off from Hasalaka would take us on a journey on foot, to be ensnared in a rare beauty.

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Our guide from Udu Dumbara was to take us to Ratna Falls – a journey of three kilometres on foot. A journey along a winding unknown path amidst scenic beauty was what urged us to take the detour, rather than to seek out the cascading falls.

The vehicle took us as far as it could go just beyond a terraced paddy field. Already we were amidst a remote charm surrounded by mist glazed mountains and the pastel shades of terraced paddy fields. We alight here and head to the footpath and within moments enter an environment that feels reborn after the morning rains. The footpath is narrow and is accompanied by an enticing stretch of a spring water canal.

Breathing was different here. It was more like elixir seeping into the lungs. With the air light and cool and the canal rippling beside, we felt a new energy ignite for the journey. As we traversed the narrow path, sometimes along the canal boundary, other times along grass and gravel, a sudden impulse took hold and we all found ourselves knee deep in the chilly water of the canal artery. We waded and sloshed blissfully ahead in the fresh spring water as it flowed with urgency to an unknown destination.

If one were to seek picture perfection this was it

Alternating glimpses of paddy fields and gnarly-treed forests prolonged our trek as we stopped to admire our surroundings. Halfway along the path to the waterfall, we were rewarded with the first view of it. And if one were to seek picture perfection this was it. The billowing white waterfall, the mountain ranges, thick white mist grazing heavily and below, the stairway of paddy fields where a lone farmer toiled left us watching in silence. One could have wondered if the farmer ever felt fatigue as he toiled amidst such beauty. It became apparent that in spite of the hilly terrain, paddy farming is a way of life here and the fresh water provides ample irrigation.

Rest of the way we walked almost meditatively, succumbing to a rhythm of our pace as moist shoots of plants grazed our legs, and boughs of trees weighed heavily. At long last, the babbling of water reached the airwaves. And soon we were upon a bund that allowed an opening to enter the Ratna Falls. The water gushed from high above and rushed over and around rocks and we edged our way to a safe spot of dry rocks facing the plummeting falls. We sat on our ‘island’ soaking our feet in the cool water as we drank in the surroundings. A more perilous trek lies from here to reach the top of the waterfall however, the view we were treated to, proved close enough proximity to the Falls to curb our thirst for adventure!

Ratna Falls at a little over 100m in height is the tallest in Kandy and is formidable in its width as well. Its name Ratna or ‘precious’, it is said, has been derived from a belief among villagers that seven pots filled with precious gems or riches are buried

in the region. Whether or not any truth lies behind the legend, the Falls with its indefinable natural beauty and continuous supply of fresh spring water to nourish the many paddy fields make it a precious resource on its own.

The stealthy mist added an indefinable beauty to this winding journey

Another three kilometres of walking amidst the verdant nature and we were back to our beginning. In spite of the energetic walk back none of us experienced fatigue – a result of fresh air we thought. In these parts it is only the scenic beauty that will leave you breathless!

Back on the Kandy-Mahiyangana Road, from Hasalaka we were now upon the 18-hairpin road. The stealthy mist added an indefinable beauty to this winding journey. After the rains, the greenery of the mountainous landscapes around appeared lush as it peeked through the white cloaks.

As we approached the 18th post marked at the first hairpin, we engaged our eyes to the scenery around. This was by no means an effort as the green carpets of paddy, the canopies and the lakes gleaming mysteriously in the foreboding weather were transfixing sights. We watched as the panoramas enlarged with each turn, and by the 12th hairpin we could see the Hasalaka Wewa and Sorabora Wewa beyond as well. While the foggy weather only added to the charm of the surroundings, the road ahead too became curtained with light mist imparting an ominous atmosphere around. However, the further we travelled the receding mist afforded clearer views and halfway through our journey we spotted Ratna Falls in the distance. From the 18 hairpin road it appeared inaccessible, trickling down the treacherous hillside.

All too soon the smooth cruise came to an end and we exited the hairpin road with the cold chill of the morning still tingling our faces and warm memories of scenic beauty etched in our minds.

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