

A walk through the streets of Maradana



Tower Hall - the Mecca of Sinhalese drama

Each of Colombo's 15 divisions is unique. Some are highly commercial, some are purely residential. Maradana stands somewhere in between, a typical suburb of the Sri Lankan capital. Also known as Colombo 10, Maradana bustles with business, is a transportation hub, and contains myriad convenient residential properties. A worthy place for an exploratory stroll.

Words and Photographs Shyam Ranasinghe

In the midst of it all lies TRACE Expert City - "Technologically Re Awakening Culture of Excellence". The old Tripoli storage complex has been transformed into a modern IT and Technological park. This is one of Sri Lanka's premier centres, where you will find the best minds in their fields. The architecture of the colonial era has been well preserved with modernisation carefully blended in. Attention has been paid to detail in this blend, with bare brickwork and visible roof girders giving an artistic feel also stand vividly visible. Whilst TRACE Expert City is just a stone's throw from the busy streets of Maradana, the ambience on the compound offer a complete break from the zoom of ordinary city life. The ever imposing Lotus Tower, still under construction, presents an inspiring skyline to the otherwise serene environment.

A section of Maradana known as Panchikawatte is probably one of the most famous parts of the area well known throughout the country. The headquarters of all motor mechanic spares, it is a virtual "one stop street shop" for all the requirements your motor vehicle may present. Be it a luxury car or a tuk-tuk, you will find everything from the tiniest nut in Panchikawatte. A buyer can visit an established outlet or try his luck at bargaining from a street vendor. Where other areas have food stalls, Panchikawatte has spare part stalls, selling items to suit all tastes. The demand is so vast that areas in Panchikawatte have evolved to specialise. As such, one area will cater for motor bikes, another for cars, another

for buses and lorries, and so on...

Not so long ago, Colombo embarked on an ambitious plan to transform its outlook, thereby making the city an attraction that befits modern times. In line with this Maradana, or more accurately Panchikawatte contributed in its own unique way. Giving the usual mechanical ambience an aesthetic tone, a metallic horse constructed entirely out of rejected spare parts marks the entrance to Panchikawatte. Through careful craftsmanship, a host of pistons, crank shafts, rods, cylinders and many others combine to create a majestic equine form. The vividly expressive art work is a welcome sight in a street that bustles with virtually all types of motor vehicles. Across the road is the sculpture of an eagle spreading its wings for flight. Closer inspection reveals that this eagle is actually made up of thousands of spark plugs, an accessory commonly found in many motor vehicles. Together with the horse, the eagle adds to the artistic feel of the streets of Maradana.

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Maradana is also a widely acclaimed seat for the performing arts. A mecca of local Sinhala drama, the Tower Hall Theatre, can be found right here among the busy life of the suburb. Having started life as a stables, the building began staging dramas in 1911, and became the cradle for countless theatre artists. To this day, a generation of artists refer to themselves as the artists of the 'Tower Hall Era'.

This sprawling suburb is a busy transportation hub too. Maradana is one of the main railway interchanges in Colombo - the second largest after Colombo Fort. A number of rail lines converge in a metallic tangle that carries many thousand of Sri Lankans between home and work.

Along with industry and commerce, Maradana is also the location a number of renowned educational institutions. Leading schools such as Ananda College, Zahira College, St Joseph's College, Asoka Vidyalaya and Ananda Balika Vidyalaya are here. The fact that most of these colleges have been around for more than 100 years shows the strong influence that Maradana exerts on all walks of life. It stands as evidence that Maradana is truly multi-dimensional.

When it comes to the residential aspect of Maradana, one cannot ignore the Maligawatte apartment complex. Having been constructed over three decades ago, it has now evolved into a little city of its own. Just a few metres of strolling into the lanes of Maligawatte and all the hustle and bustle of the streets of Maradana are gone. Giving much needed safe sheltering for thousands of families, the Maligawatte complex is a time tested story narrating how those below the horizon of attention have risen up in life and are now second to none.

Whilst all the activity takes place in Maradana, ordinary life too makes its presence felt. The streets are never empty a river of motor traffic constantly flowing by. The proximity of, neighbouring suburbs such as Hulftsdorf means that the bright red roof of the Supreme Court complex smiles down on life in Maradana.

Maradana gave me a fresh new experience at every turn. Changing gear constantly, this is a neighbourhood that's always in motion. Try it yourself - a walk through Maradana is a walk to remember.

