Along the Waters of Urani

Posted on



The Urani Lagoon banks lined with luscious mangroves

Just before Whisky Point in Arugambay, birds of the air, aquatic life and gentle giants gather by the waters of the Urani Lagoon for rest, food and shelter.

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Diya Kawas (Cormorants) overlooking the waters – our first encounter!

It was evening as we set off to explore the serene Urani Lagoon. We drove along the Pottuvil – Batticaloa road and arrived to the destination, which we were eagerly waiting to embark on an ecotourism safari. We strapped on our life jackets and were directed to the banks of the lagoon where our vessel awaited. It was a unique boat, two canoes joined to hold a deck and was operated by two ferrymen.

Wobbling about the boat we strived to find our balance before settling in comfortable spots on the deck, eagerly waiting to explore the biodiversity of Urani Lagoon. As our journey began, we were awed by the picturesque view of the

rippling water and lush greenery that lined either side of the tranquil lagoon. We spotted a flock of diya kawas (cormorants) perched on the extensive branches of a dry tree in the middle of the lagoon. White cranes stood on floating logs, above us fish eagles glided through the skies, almost as if guiding us along the boat trail. The lagoon banks are lined with thick mangroves, hosted above the water by entwined root systems, a vital component of the environment preventing soil erosion and providing a habitat for migratory and waterbird species.

As we glided along the lagoon, through a breach in the mangroves, we glimpsed a saltwater crocodile lying motionless and undisturbed just below the surface. After that surge of excitement we continued to enjoy a quiet boat ride with bird whistles in the air and small lagoon fish surfing the water for a quick breath.



Urani Lagoon Safari has become a popular ecotourism activity

Halfway through the experience, a returning safari-goer informed us about a sighting of a herd of elephants grazing by the lagoon. Upon hearing the news, it was with great impatience and excitement that we glided along the waters, surveying the landscapes for a hint of these gentle giants. After ferrying for around three kilometres, as we rounded a corner, an anchored vessel came into view, the occupants silently observing something in the distance. It was the moment we had been eagerly waiting for – the herd of elephants came into our view. There were three adults and two young elephants, munching on the leafy greens on the periphery of the jungle. A solitary elephant stood a little distance away, seemingly enjoying some alone time away from the herd. As the light started to fade away, the elephants gathered together and walked back into the jungle for the night. Indeed, the setting sun projected beautiful shades of orange and yellow that peeked through the mangroves casting shades of ember in the sky. The dimming light meant that it was time for us to head back as well.

We were careful to maintain a quietness throughout our safari, especially on our way back, to avoid alarming birds and other creatures. A majestic peacock was seen skipping onto branches on a group of mangroves with a distinctive appearance, possibly to gain more altitude to be safe from the predators that roamed below. On the contrary, the only type of bird that seemed to be active at this point of the evening were the kingfishers. Many of them were seen perched on low-lying branches with keen eyes stalking the water for their next meal.



Picturesque views of wildlife gather together

Some distance away we spotted a buffalo submerged in the water, relaxing with a cool evening’s dip. As we once again reached the tree that stood in the middle of the lagoon, we spotted two pied kingfishers perched on a branch, too busy relishing their catch after a fishing expedition to notice our boat. The birds were tapping the fish against the branch with their beaks. Throughout the scenic landscape pied kingfishers were spotted skimming the surface of the water.

The best times for a safari along the Urani Lagoon is at 6am and 3pm. It is a unique experience that should not be missed.

With the sky nearly sheathed in darkness, the end of our journey came to pass. Feeling satisfied with the wildlife we had witnessed, we thanked the ferrymen and bid adieu to return to our own night’s rest.





