

Ancient Technologies come alive in Polonnaruwa



President Maithripala Sirisena ceremonially opening the Ancient Technology Museum and Library. Sanuja Kasthuriarachchi, Director General, Department of National Museums, A J M Muzammil, Governor, Western Province and Sarath Ekanayake, Chief Minister, Central Province are also in the photograph.

Generally, a museum would bring to mind large halls with displays of artifacts. However, the Ancient Technology Museum and Library in Polonnaruwa is inherently different. It brings to life innovation and technologies that were used during the various periods of Sri Lankan history.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe.

Photographs Menaka Aravinda.

Polonnaruwa is the second kingdom of Sri Lanka, hence it is apt that President Maithripala Sirisena envisaged a museum and library that would inculcate a culture of learning to be established in this ancient city. Our forefathers displayed skills and technical ingenuity that enabled the creation of marvels that can be seen even today. The primary aim of the Ancient Technology Museum and Library is to preserve the technology for posterity. The visitor is provided with an audio-visual experience, where they can interact and gather knowledge not only from the displays but also in digital panels and audio aids that are provided to them. Each gallery displays objects, models of constructions, processes and technical features of the various eras of history in Sri Lanka by explaining the technology used.

There are seven galleries, an activity room, a library and an information center, a conference hall and an auditorium. The first gallery is dedicated to Polonnaruwa. Historical artifacts are displayed together with a few actual sized replicas of archaeological sites and miniature models. The visual experience is enhanced with the use of lit-up panels and videos that provide information. Gallery two features proto and pre-historic periods; where the techniques used at the Pomparippu burial site to models recreated of the manner in which pre-historic man lived is displayed. Gallery three focuses on Pottery and Metal Technology. A traditional potter's workshop is created with videos and a 3D sensor showing the process used. Replicas of the ancient furnaces used for metal extraction in Samanalawewa and Alakolawewa, Sigiriya and the internal hydraulic system seen in the Dedigama Ath Pahana (oil lamp) are displayed with various other features and processes of the metal industry.

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Gallery four displays the Agriculture and Irrigation Technology of the Polonnaruwa era. The miniature models featuring reservoirs, irrigation channels and agriculture provide a glimpse to ancient Sri Lanka and the technologies used. Ancient agrarian and harvesting tools are on display, along with an impressive replica of the Maduru Oya sluice gates. Gallery five on the first floor houses a range of models of ancient structures. The remnants of heritage sites are modeled into what they were in the past, and the experience of seeing these structures is awe-inspiring. Gallery six displays paintings, sculptures and wooden

technology while gallery seven is home to textile, naval and mathematic technologies. Prominence is given to the ancient arts and industries respectively. The highlight of the textile section is the recreation of Kuveni spinning yarn which is a story from Sri Lanka's history.

The activity room allows visitors to increase their impression of the museum: they can recreate what they witnessed on digital panels, they can take virtual reality tours to specific sites, like Sigiriya, and even experience augmented reality. The library is a treasure trove of information, and one can immerse themselves on the rich reading material.

With a wealth of knowledge and experiences, the Ancient Technology Museum and Library is gift to the nation and a blessing for the future.

Ancient Technology Museum and Library, New Town, Polonnaruwa;

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Opening Hours: 9am-5pm daily (closed on Poya days)

