And… We Are Off!

Posted on



The evening ambience of Diyawanna

It was the weekend and an afternoon too, I was bored and feeling a bit sleepy… yawn! Then, I got a call from my friend who was like “Shall we explore Colombo in a three-wheeler?” Do you think I would say NO? NO! Within minutes we were in our blue three-wheeler and… we are off! Here we come COLOMBO!

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We put together a haphazard route and it was a good thing that our three-wheeler driver was a patient and accommodating chap. We whizzed along the Galle Road zig zagging past vehicles and turned off at the Colpetty junction towards the Beira Lake. Our first stop was the Gangaramaya Temple.

The Temple’s individuality can be attributed to its Chief Incumbent Ven Galaboda Gnanissara or Podi Hamuduruwo

Spiritual

It was a pleasant afternoon and visitors to the Gangaramaya Temple both local and foreign were engulfed by the unique serenity of the surroundings. The Temple’s individuality can be attributed to its Chief Incumbent Ven Galaboda Gnanissara or Podi Hamuduruwo as fondly known by those who are close to him. Gangaramaya Temple is not only a place of worship to Buddhists but to those of other denominations as well.

The architecture of the buildings represent the old, the new as well as East Asian design. The Budhu Ge with its large serene statue of Lord Buddha in the posture of Samadhi and the elaborate sculptures of Devivaru (Gods) provides the calming space for prayer and meditation. The pristine white Chaitya (Stupa) stands as the centre-piece of the Temple with the Bodhi Tree being located at a higher elevation.

The Gangaramaya Temple also houses its own museum, a collection of old cars, an art gallery displaying photographs of temple paintings and many displays where antiques and artifacts are preserved and showcased for learning and knowledge for those who enter its doors.

I was mesmerised by the greenery. Could we possibly be in the centre of Colombo?

And, at the side but in front of the Temple is the little elephantine *upasika* – Ganga, who attracts all visitors to stand and watch her or feed her with a smile on their faces.

We came out of the Gangaramaya Temple and walked towards the Seema Malakaya, which belongs to the Gangaramaya Temple but is located on the other side of the road on the Beira Lake. Its calming presence provides a haven from the hectic pace of life. With statues of Lord Buddha placed perfectly around its periphery, it is a picture perfect setting.

A little farther is the small island on the Beira Lake where families and couples were spending their afternoon. The swan rides are quite hilarious and will definitely bring out the child in you. After observing a few joggers we decided to get on to the road again and head to our next location… Nelum Pokuna Performing Arts Theatre.

In the midst of a lotus

We tuk tuked along Dharmapala Mawatha, Sir Marcus Fernando Mawatha and Nelum Pokuna Mawatha, passing the Public Library and the Colombo Museum to reach the mammoth lotus shaped performing arts theatre. Having seen this building from the air I was thrilled at the prospect of venturing inside.

I was pleasantly surprised that visitors were allowed to walk-in and have a look. Of course one of the staff will accompany you. The design of the Theatre is said to have been inspired by the ancient Nelum Pokuna (pond) in Polonnaruwa. Consisting of seven floors – five above ground level and two below – the main auditorium covers three floors and has a seating capacity of 1,288. The massive theatre with its wood panelled floors and state-of-the-art lighting and sound systems is awe inspiring and standing at the front row and looking up made me feel quite miniature.

As we ascended the flight of stairs that wound around the side of the building the view of the city became increasingly better through the translucent glass panes of the exterior of the building. At the very top is the open air amphitheatre, which gives you a panoramic view of the surroundings.

The Colombo Racecourse, which beckoned us in the evening light shone in its brilliant white, looking new and showing a glimmer of its former glory

We hopped onto our little blue transporter and made a short stop at the Vihara Maha Devi Park to admire its new improvements but we were quickly chased away by the elderly security guards, who told us that photography was not allowed! Quite peculiar!

Let’s take a walk

Our next stop was Reid Avenue, we asked our ‘pilot’ to drop us off near the National Archives because crazy as we were we wanted to go on a small ‘walk’ along the newly paved walking tracks. And walk we did, from one end to the other passing the back of the National Archives, where the path is shaded by the massive tree through the periphery of the Racecourse and Olympic House. I was mesmerised by the greenery. Could we possibly be in the centre of Colombo?

Fitness enthusiasts and those who were out for an evening walk passed us by.

There were those who had brought their pet dogs on a walk too! The recreational area bordered by Independence Avenue, Independence Square and The Foundation Institute was a hive of activity with friendly football matches being played, something that looked like a photo shoot taking place and the regular walkers going through their exercise regime.

We did a turn back and headed towards the Colombo Racecourse, which beckoned us in the evening light. It shone in its brilliant white, looking new and showing a glimmer of its former glory. The racecourse itself had been lain with new grass and looked beautiful. I narrated to my friend how I tried to run the 1,500m during my school days at this very ground, which looks so much different now. And the Astro Turf – what memories of being 'whacked' with a hockey stick! Every element seemed interconnected with each other to create this beautiful green zone.

We walked into the Racecourse Pavilion where renovation work was still ongoing but I could imagine what it was going to look like. The elegant timber doors and windows were reminiscent of a past era. The Colombo Racecourse once renovated will be a space for leisure and relaxation with shopping and dining being key elements of the space. The staircase wound up to the next level, which was a corridor leading to the spectator stands.

And, the greenery… .breathtaking!

We came out and gave a quick call to our three-wheeler buddy and we were back on the road.

Along the…

…Diyawanna!! Through the traffic along the Colombo-Sri Jayawardenepura Road we 'puttered' to our destination with the wind blowing through the openings of our vehicle. We had quite a few things we wanted to do in this area and believe it or not it entailed another walk!

We started from the Madiwela end of the Japanese Friendship Road and walked along the path that runs parallel to the Lake. The sun was bidding adieu to the day casting a beautiful glow in the sky. One thing we definitely noticed is that Colombo seems to be full of fitness enthusiasts (I seem to belong to a very small number of fudges who procrastinate when it comes to exercise!). Here too, many were walking and jogging. My friend and I admired the beauty of the surroundings and also how

relaxed and free the people looked. Some were trying to manage their massive kites and with great difficulty were able to send it up, up and away.

And, the greenery… breathtaking! There is still much work going on as the path along the Diyawanna itself is not complete. We closed upon the round-about near the Parliament and on this side there is a boat house/recreational building, which has not been opened yet.

Our three-wheeler chap too encouraged us to walk, I was almost syncing with the joggers and I had created a mental image of myself achieving the perfect size… and we were at Parliament Grounds. Yes, it is green again and yes people were walking around its entirety though team games and matches are still not taking place as the green has to mature. The place was clean and well maintained. A group of tourists were enthusiastically photographing our beautiful Parliament.

We beckoned our three-wheeler to pick us up, I felt sad as we passed the memorial dedicated to the brave heroes who sacrificed their lives for us to enjoy this freedom and peace, if not for them would I even be able to do what I am doing right now? We should not forget how life was before May 2009.

Deep in my thoughts, my friend gave me a nudge to indicate we had reached our next stop. The recreational area in front of Waters Edge – lovely. It was quite dark now and the lights had been switched on. This gave an ethereal glow. The place was crowded but it was not uncomfortable as everyone was doing their own thing with friends and family. The place was well maintained and the Broadwalk restaurant provided the much required refreshments. People were walking, jogging, running, cycling or just sitting around drinking in the relaxing atmosphere.

This area is between two water bodies, the Diyawanna and the marshlands, which to me enhanced the cooling ambience.

Evening ambience

The grand finale of our three-wheeler ride around Colombo was the Dutch Hospital Shopping Precinct situated in Colombo Fort. It was quite a trip, we had done almost a full circle.

An elegant place, the 17th Century Dutch Hospital was renovated maintaining its original design and layout to encompass 12 Sri Lankan made/based businesses,

which include pampering oneself at the spas, a cooling tea, dining, simply shopping or just relaxing. Cement tables and chairs had been placed at the entrance as well as at the two courtyards making the Dutch Hospital a great place to visit. Everything is simple yet elegant and takes you back in time.

The Dutch Hospital is located in the epicentre of Colombo commercial district but once you enter you are transported through time and space… paradise.

As the evening drew to an end we hopped back into our trusty “wheeler” and headed home with our thoughts drunk with what we had experienced in just one afternoon.

It was quite dark now and the lights had been switched on. This gave an ethereal glow

A few days later when I relayed our escapades around Colombo to another friend while at the same time showing the photographs she was quite surprised at the beauty, greenery and relaxed nature of Colombo though she lived here too, well I told her “HOP INTO A THREE-WHEELER AND EXPLORE COLOMBO!!!!”

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