Aruuugammm Bayyy!

Posted on



The view towards land from Arugam Bay Point

I guess you cannot help but think of Bob Marley when you arrive at this coastal town in the East of Sri Lanka, if not for anything else but for the laidback atmosphere, music, food and of course the surfers…

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda and Damith Wickramasinghe

Well, though I say surfers there were very few as the sea was quite rough. The surfing season actually begins in May and goes up to October, however there were a few who tried their skill as Arugam Bay is famous for its various surfing points.

Many of the locals would say that Arugam Bay has no season because whichever time you visit there are so many things to do.

The beach had seemingly expanded and there were many fisherman boats lining the shores. As we started our afternoon stroll, the beach was becoming a hive of activity. Boats were coming in and others were preparing for the next day. Rows and rows of colourful boats and there were larger ones too, these had come from various parts of the country. Though the boats seemed to take up most of the cove, it was a great way to see how community life was. Fisherman huts made of coconut fronds blended into the landscape.

The sand was soft beneath our feet, and as the evening sun receded there was a cooling breeze that enhanced our relaxed state of mind. At the tip of the bay was Arugam Bay point, the site where many international surfing competitions are held. Here the waves break over an old coral reef and this is visible as you step closer towards the water.

Many hotels line the beach, most of them are family run businesses and thus a simplistic ambience is maintained. Our eyes were drawn to a sudden burst of colour, which was actually the Arugam Bay Surf Resort. The walls were of vibrant colours and the signs displayed around the property added to its charm. Opened in 1960 this business had been passed from father to son and was now a property of 13 rooms, which included double rooms and cabanas. The common area which is also the restaurant is open and there is a rustic feel to the place.

Arugam Bay Surf Resort provides day trips to Kumana National Park, camping safaris, lagoon tours, eco safaris as well as camping near the Okanda Temple. Furthermore, motor bike renting is also available. The food at the Arugam Bay Surf Resort is mouth watering with an array of Sri Lankan, Mexican, Chinese, Italian and Seafood specialities. BBQs are held on the beach front during the weekend especially through the season. Calm and laidback as evening descends the spirit of the beach life engulfs you.

Walking along the main road in Arugam Bay is an experience of its own. Tourists walking along the road trying out the various restaurants on the way. Families on bicycles travelling to their destination, locals just doing what they have to do, there was an overall relaxed atmosphere, which you could not help but get absorbed into.

The Tsunami Hotel, which was built in 1999, somewhat differs from the rest with its

pine tree frontage on the beach. These trees had been there since the inception of the hotel and have stood the test of time. With ten double room chalets the hotel provides both AC and non AC rooms. Cool and charming this somewhat secluded property beckons you in the evening light as you walk along the beach. Serving Western, Eastern and Chinese cuisine, Tsunami Hotel specialises in seafood and BBQs. Other services include surfing tours to the various points in Arugam Bay and taxi service to and from the airport.

Whiskey Point and Pottuvil Point are a short distance away from Arugam Bay itself, in a place called Urani. Whiskey Point is more for beginners whereas Pottuvil Point is for more advanced surfers. This stretch of beach is much more calm and quieter than Arugam Bay. The sand is almost white and the blue of the sea contrasts beautifully. To access the beach you need to wind along residential area of the local community.

Acres of paddy fields line the road between Arugam Bay and Urani. There is an interesting site on the way. At first you wonder what it is because you see this hillside covered with igloo-type buildings. They look a bit like ice cream too in their pastel shades of blue, green and pink with white on the top. These are actually Tsunami housing. Curious we spoke with one of the families and looked inside. We were quite surprised as it was spacious with one main room, two bedrooms and one large kitchen. The centre piece of the building was a kitchen chimney. We thought it would be hot inside but no, it was actually cool and the house had been made using a clay mix brick.

As we were driving back towards Arugam Bay we saw a seaplane flying above, we stepped on our accelerator as we knew it was going to land soon. When we reached the Arugam Bay bridge people from around the area were all standing and watching. It was as if we had never seen a plane before. About 12 tourists disembarked from the plane and after a short break the seaplane started its engines, the propellors gradually increased its speed and with a splash the seaplane took to the air amidst the cheers of the crowds.

The Stardust Beach Hotel is situated closest to the lagoon and is unique in its design and presentation. Having started in 1984, the concept is different where the livelihood of the community is intertwined with the hotel, where the 22 staff who are from the area have been completely trained. The central building, which houses the restaurant is spacious and airy. Stardust consists of 15 rooms that include single and double rooms, cabanas and a villa. With coconut trees and other plants

providing much needed shade, the property ensures privacy for its guest. The rooms are unpretentious and comfortable with all the modern amenities. The cabanas are a combination of coconut leaves and wood with a brick floor. The interiors are cooling and spacious. The area where the cabanas are located is called Paradise Village. Villa Wonne consists of two floors with each level having two bedrooms and a common area with a kitchen.

With its layout Stardust allows people to have their privacy and relaxation even when it is busy and then go to the other end of the beach where they can party, listen to music and also see how the community engages in their livelihoods.

A yoga hall is part of the hotel, where guests can arrange their own yoga teacher. During the summer, the hotel conducts its own yoga classes, body massages, aromatherapy and reflexology. Other facilities provided by the hotel include jeep tours to Kumana, and also three wheeler tours to various other areas of interests such as the crocodile lake and the Panama tank and other excursions. They also rent a canoe for guests to explore the lagoon. Apparently towards evening elephants can be seen in the lagoon area.

Their menu consists of an array of tantalising dishes ranging from Sri Lankan to Italian, a variety of freshly made breads and salads, pancakes, home made cakes and ice cream, which are made using fruits and coconut cream. Milk is not used. They use only tenderloin meat to ensure hygiene of the meat and they also serve seafood dishes. Stardust truly provides a unique experience.

Coming from the West of the country, I could not help but feel how different the East was. Time did not fly, but merely moved at a slow pace. As the sun rose from the East, I could not help but remember Bob Marley’s, “Sun is Shining…”

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