

Worth a Visit

Posted on



Ancient Cities

Anuradhapura

The best known of Sri Lanka's ancient cities, it was the capital of the island for more than a thousand years from the 5th Century B.C. A number of Buddhist monuments here date back to over 2,000 years. The better known of these are: the Thuparama Dagaba - 3rd Century B.C.; the Ruvaneliseya - 2nd Century B.C.; the Sri Maha Bodhi, the oldest historically documented tree in the world dating back more than 2,000 years; the seven-storeyed Lovamahapaya, also known as the Brazen Palace; the Abhayagiri Dagaha, the precincts of which are now being excavated under a special UNESCO project; and the Jetawana Dagaba.

Other ancient monuments at Anuradhapura include the Samadhi Statue, a serene statue of the Buddha seated in meditation; the Isurumuniya Temple where is found the sculpture of the Isurumuniya Lovers; the Twin Ponds, bathing pools gifted to the Buddhist order, situated near the Abhayagiri, in the precincts of which are also found several beautiful guardstones and a well-preserved example of a moonstone, the traditional sculpted stone at the entrance to temples.

Anuradhapura also has several large irrigation reservoirs dating back over a thousand years. Among them are the Tissawewa, Basawakkulama and Nuwara Wewa. A short drive away are the Kalawewa and Balaluwewa, a few km away from which is the Aukana Buddha Statue, a colossal statue of the standing Buddha, circa 5th Century AD. Mihintale, regarded as the cradle of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, is situated 13 km north of Anuradhapura. Here are also found" very fine ancient monuments including the Mihintale Dagaba and the Ambastale Dagaba and the cave dwelling of the Arahat Mahinda who was the first Buddhist missionary to Sri Lanka.



The Abhayagiri Stupa (Anuradhapura)



The Sri Maha Bodhiya at Anuradhapura

Polonnaruwa

The capital from the 11th to 13th Centuries.

The centrepiece is the Terrace of the Tooth Relic. The quadrangle here is a group of twelve magnificent buildings.

Places most visited include: The Vatadage, a circular relic chamber; the Hetadage, a former temple of the Tooth Relic; the Thuparama with stone work roof still intact; and the Galpotta or Stone Book with medieval inscriptions.

Other places of interest are the Palace of Parakramabahu, the Assembly Hall and two Shiva Devalas in honour of Hindu deities. Best examples of sculpture at Polonnaruwa are seen at the Gal Vihare, a monument with four beautifully carved images of the Buddha. A sampling of medieval Buddhist art is preserved at the Tivanka Image House.

One of the island's largest known irrigation reservoirs is the Parakrama Samudra, a veritable inland sea constructed in the 11th Century.



Seated Buddha statue at Gal Vihara Polonnaruwa.



Kiri Vehera in Potonnaruwa

Sigiriya

A rock fortress situated 66 km from Polonnaruwa, where King Kasyapa built his fortified palace atop and around a 600 ft rocky outcrop in the 5th Century AD. Sigiriya is best known today for the paintings of beautiful women found on a sheltered ledge on the side of the rock. These are considered as being part of the world's art treasures. On the summit are the remains of the vast palace of Kasyapa, complete with bathing pool and platforms for dancing girls.



Kandy

16 km from Colombo, in the foothills of the hill country, Kandy was the last capital of the Sinhalese kings.



Inside a greenhouse at the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens.

The sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha is preserved for veneration here at the Dalada Maligawa. Kandy is the venue of the annual Esala Perahera, one of the most colourful pageants in all Asia, held in honour of the Buddha's relic.

Places worth visiting include the Dalada Maligawa, preferably at times of "poojas" or daily rituals; the two Buddhist monasteries at Malwatte and Asgiriya; the Gadaladeniya Temple which is a rare example of rock-built dagabas; the Lankatilleke Temple built of brick; and the Degaldoruwa cave temple which has some of the best preserved examples of Buddhist temple art of the 17th Century. The Embekke Devale is famous for its wood carvings.

The Kandyan Arts & Crafts Centre near the Kandy lake, and Kalapura at Nattaranpotta (near Embekke), have special expositions of the arts and crafts of Kandy where traditional craftsmen demonstrate their skills.

The Royal Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya have a wide and rare collection of tropical and temperate, exotic and indigenous flora, and an orchid house with the largest known collection in Asia.

For tourists visiting or photographing the ancient monuments in Sri Lanka, it is necessary to obtain a ticket from the Cultural Triangle Office, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 221 Bauddhaloka Ave., Colombo 7; Tel: 587912.

A single round ticket for one month will cost US\$ 12 per adult and half rate per child. This will permit the holder to view and photograph monuments in all parts of Sri Lanka where photography is permitted in a way which does not cause disrespect to religious sentiments, and also to visit all archaeological museums.

Hill Country

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There will be separate charges at each site for those who do not obtain round tickets. The cost of entry tickets to Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa or Sigiriya is US \$ 4 per adult and half rate per child per site, while at Dambulla, Kandy or Nalanda it is US \$ 3 per adult and half rate per child. Flash guns will be necessary to photograph at the cave temple of Dambulla.

Tickets are available at the Archaeological Museum, Anuradhapura, and the Archaeological Offices at Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya.

These permits will not cover photography at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, Kandy, and Aukana Temple. Posing in front of religious statues and paintings is prohibited, as is the taking of rubbings from ancient sculptures.

Nuwara Eliya

180 km from Colombo, 77 km from Kandy, the best-known hill station of the island is in the heart of the tea-growing mountains. Situated at an elevation of 1989 metres above sea level, Nuwara Eliya is where the nostalgia of the British colonials is best manifest.

Most of the avenues, walks, houses, parks and public buildings are faithful recreations of old English originals. The cool mountain air, and the frequent afternoon rains which call for warm woollens, add to the feel of the English countryside, as do the temperate flora which thrives in the nippy mountain weather.

Nuwara Eliya is the ideal location from which to explore the tea country. Due to their high altitude the tea plantations of Nuwara Eliya are known to provide some of the best tea in the world. Visits could be arranged from here to spend a day at a plantation to see tea being plucked in the field, dried and manufactured in the factory, and also visit the bungalow of the planter usually situated in a prime location overlooking the mountain scenery.

The town is also well known for the excellent 18 hole golf course, St. Andrew's, claimed by many as being among the best challenges to seasoned golfers, which is open to visitors through membership in the Nuwara Eliya Golf Club.

Nearby is the Hakgala Botanical Gardens with its rare collection of roses, montane orchids, and a carefully tended fernery. There are trout streams in the vicinity, where fishing is permitted, and the Horton Plains nature reserve is only 29 km away.



Nuwara Eliya

Beaches of Sri Lanka

There is plenty of opportunity for enjoying the sun and sea at all beach resort areas, from Negombo in the North through Uswetakeiyawa to Kalutara, Beruwela, Bentota, Hikkaduwa, Aluthgama, Galle, Weligama, Matara and Hambantota in the South.

Negombo

A quaint fishing village cum beach resort about 35 km from Colombo. 17th Century forts and Catholic churches stand side by side with resthouses and luxury hotels with fresh seafood in abundance. A visit to the lagoon to watch the fishing boats is a popular attraction.



Mt Lavinia

The closest beach resort to the capital – 12km from Colombo. Numerous lodges and restaurants on the beach in the vicinity here have sprung up over the years to accommodate the flow of tourists who come for a taste of sun, sea and sand. On a calm day a dive off the beach will bring you a view of a variety of colorful fish.



Bentota

64km from Colombo facing the river and sea is this famous beach resort with a 100-acre National Holiday Resort complex containing several major tourist hotels, a marketplace and shopping centre, cultural displays and exhibitions. The lovely and calm stretch of sea at Bentota is at its best from October through April when it is safe for swimming. The rocky island off the Bentota resort complex is quite an interesting diving spot for a view of the multi-hued fish and other reef dwellers.



Hikkaduwa

99 km from Colombo, caters to the low-budget traveller as well as to the visitors to luxury hotels. Attracted by the lovely beach and the bright batiks, masks, jewellery and other crafts sold along this strip of Galle Road, visitors to the island have made this a tourist town. A haven for surfers, underwater explorers and water sports enthusiasts, the beaches also attract bathers right through the year. Glass-bottomed boats are available for hire to those not inclined to make a dive for a glimpse of the country's best-known coral gardens.



Tourists at Hikkaduwa



Wildlife

The majority of wildlife in Sri Lanka is to be found in the country's national parks. The primary park currently open to visitors is Ruhuna National Park at Yala, 305 km

south-east from Colombo. Animal sightings are frequent, especially elephants, leopards, deer, bears, sambhur and wild buffalo. The best time of year to go is between December and May. For accommodation, there are the Patanangala and Heenwewa bungalows which can be reserved through the Department of Wildlife Conservation, 40A, Galle Road, Colombo 6. The bungalows have basic amenities, but it is advisable to bring all food provisions with you for the duration of your stay.



Leopard at Yala



Elephants at Yala