

Beyond the Placid Waters



The Sangupiddy Bridge

Clear blue skies, at times interrupted by flowing white clouds, and vast open fields on both sides... Rolling down the window, we let the wind stream through as we sped along the A32, towards the Sangupiddy Bridge on our way back to Colombo. Little did we know that this seemingly unremarkable road will provide quite a unique journey for us to remember...

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda and Indika De Silva

As we departed the town of Jaffna, the sun was brightly shining overhead basking the surrounding area with a life of its own. The road lay ahead of us, resembling a grey hued ribbon as we snaked our way through its length. By and by, as we moved forward, the number of houses thinned and the sight of people travelling either on bicycles or talking by the side of palmyrah fences became less.

Soon nothing but, vast open fields surrounded the sides of the road and we eagerly peered around taking in the beauty that was mainly dominated by greens,

blues and browns. At certain points the soil held a reddish hue, an attestant to the area being ideal for cultivation. As such some of the fields have already been turned into paddy fields and here and there we spotted people hard at work. At one particular plot of land, two people who were busily clearing away overgrown weed, quickly shot up to stare at us as we passed by. Maybe visitors are not a common sight in these parts.

As we drew closer to the Sangupiddy Bridge, the fields gave way to arresting waterways

A sign by the road announced that we had entered Thanankilappu, one of the many small towns that we passed by in our journey. However, though the changing sign boards gave us an inkling that we were indeed entering and passing different terrains, the scenery remained vastly unchanged. As we drew closer to the Sangupiddy Bridge, the fields gave way to arresting waterways, presenting a much needed change for our starving eyes. Now the road was framed with the Jaffna lagoon on either sides. At one point, unable to resist the allure of the lagoon, we stopped, bent on treading the softly glimmering waters. As we steadily made our way to the waterfront, a strong gust of wind nearly knocked us over. Undaunted, we continued first stepping on some grassy area and then crossing a small lagoon inlet to reach the desired shore. Already having experienced the warmth that the waters presented, having treaded the small inlet, we let the crashing waves wash over our feet.

Unable to resist the allure, we stopped, to tread the softly glimmering waters

Looking down we were intrigued... A strip of black, deemed to be minerals, then the soft brown sand, the white of the crashing waves and the sea green of the lagoon created a reel of colour at our feet. Beyond, the light blue sky flecked with white clouds further added to this appealing palette of colours.

Reluctantly we left this enchanting sphere to continue our journey. Presently, the elegant arch of the Sangupiddy Bridge loomed ahead. Besides the road large rocks were artfully arranged to give a more paved appearance. We were at the Sangupiddy Bridge!! Held up by six columns, at a distance they were reminiscent of a torri, a traditional entrance commonly found in shrines in Japan. However, upon closer inspection the similarities faded and we were impressed by the slabs

of concrete skillfully placed to ensure the strength of the bridge. On the sides of the bridge, the aquamarine depths of the lagoon shimmered in the sun and the colour of the water here was particularly stunning.

Sangupiddy Bridge reduces the travel time between Colombo and Jaffna by three hours

The Sangupiddy Bridge is a 288-metre-wide two-way bridge along the A32 and is considered to be the shortest land-based route to Jaffna connecting Pooneryn, Killinochchi to Karaitivu, Jaffna. The other route is via Elephant Pass on the A9 that connects Chavakacheri, Jaffna to the mainland. Spanning a length of three kilometres, it is said that the route via Sangupiddy Bridge reduces the travel time and distance between Colombo and Jaffna by three hours and 110km respectively.

The bridge gently rose and then dipped, before connecting to the rest of the causeway that stretched to the land mass, situated in the far distance. Reaching the top, we took a moment to look at the contrasting yet beautiful colours and at the shrimp farms that were similar to pinpricks in the distance.

After, inching forward slowly over the Sangupiddy Bridge, with a burst of speed we hastened to Pooneryn and continued our way along the A32 passing small towns such as Chunnivil and Kalliyadi. Road construction was underway, showcasing the rapid development taking place in the area, and we noticed signs that showed plans for future towns along the way. Feeling a bit adventurous, we decided to take a road that went through the Madu Road Sanctuary. We were informed that cutting through this particular road would reduce the distance to Colombo by nearly 30km. Wilderness flanked both sides and at times we swayed and bumped on the red hued gravel road. The wear and tear of normal roads were not visible here as it could be deemed that not many people travelled on this road. As such we did not meet many people, except for one or two motorcyclists. After sometime the gravel path turned to a carpeted road, signaling the end of the Sanctuary.

Having enjoyed our solitarily ride through the Sanctuary, we emerged near the Shrine of Our Lady of Madu and continued our way home...

