Colombo To Kandy And Back : The Thrill Of A Three-Wheeler Journey

Posted on

Ever considered doing a long distance trip in a three-wheeler? The initial reaction would be a brief hesitation with a mental image of a bumpy ride with your bones rattling but… and there is a big BUT, what if I tell you that it is not entirely true? We took up the challenge and made our maiden voyage to Kandy in a three-wheeler!

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And We Are Off!

We began our journey at the crack of dawn. We were high on adrenaline as we were excited at the prospect of making this long trip in a three-wheeler. The wind blew through the door size opening of the vehicle. The three-wheeler reverberated with a combined sound of a motorbike and a motorcar. 'Roooooooong tuk tuk' is what it sounded like. We crossed the Kelaniya bridge and were officially on the A1 highway (the main Colombo-Kandy road). We sped through Kiribathgoda and Kadawatha

with no hiccough at all, there were occasional bumps as we passed through grooves in the road but all of that was taken as part of the experience.

We zig-zagged through vehicles with the oncoming traffic whizzing past us. The best part about going in a three-wheeler is the constant wind blowing through. It was too early in the morning to eat Rambutan as we passed Horagolla but the petromax lamps were already lit and the Rambutan sellers had begun their day. Nittambuwa, Pasyala and the names go on, we were on a roll! We were travelling at 60km/h, which was a good speed considering the distance we were covering. We were quite astonished to reach Ambepussa within one and a half hours. It would take us almost the same time to reach Ambepussa by car!

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Galigamuwa: The Rubber Nursery On The Hill

As we turned the bend at Galigamuwa and started our ascent the multi coloured plastic toys on the side of the road caught our eyes. Pink, blue, yellow and so on in various forms of animals were hung in lines undoubtedly attracting the young traveller. We stepped out of the three-wheeler for a quick breather when a rubber nursery on the slope of the hills drew our attention.

The rubber nursery was a buzz of activity with the female workers watering the plants. The rubber plants were of various levels. In between the rows of relatively tall plants a man was seated on the bare ground. He was grafting the rubber plants. With well trained hands he made a swift cut and expertly continued with the process. One by one he meticulously grafted the plants.

The sloping hills had been cut into steps and the rubber plants were placed neatly. At the tip of the hill the view on the road and the surrounding was beautiful. As my friend and I slipped and slid down the slope, the workers stopped for a moment amused. We bid adieu and got back into our three-wheel steed and sped off.

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A Small Detour

At Ranwala we made a small detour and headed down the Kandy-Polgahawela

Road. The path was well shaded from the hot sun and as such was cooling. We were going in search of the Wattaram Raja Maha Viharaya. The name itself aroused our curiosity.

Said to be the temple where Maliyadeva Thero, the last Arahat Thero of Sri Lanka resided, Wattaram Raja Maha Viharaya has been renovated considerably and only a few historical elements can be seen. A group of children were on a school trip and they streamed into the temple.

A shrine room believed to have been built during the Kandyan era houses a Buddha statue and the walls are adorned with intricate paintings. It is said that the images depict the Buddha Vivarana, that is the confirmation received by a Boddhisatva from the Lord Buddha at that time that he would become the next Enlightened One. An eighth Century AD stone inscription describes that Suvara, Amal, Kasi and Vadur donated twenty Kalandas (gold) for the provision of meals to the monks of the temple.

Another building from the same era has beautiful woodwork with elaborate carvings which have been done using Araliya wood. The green and white contrast of the building was soothing to the eye. Also in the vicinity are the ruins of the Maliya Mahapaya, which was the abode of Maliyadeva Arahath Thero.

Saturated with history we left the environs of the Wattaram Raja Maha Viharaya and headed back towards the A1. As we were bumping along we came across a makeshift wooden tea shop. It seemed that it was a popular stop for vehicles travelling on that road. Hot, hot *pol roti* was being made on a stove which had been assembled using a cut barrel. With various home made goodies available, we could not help but comfort our rumbling tummies with the scrumptious roti with *lunu miris* and a hot cup of plain tea with a piece of jaggery and we were back on the road.

As we were bumping along we came across a makeshift wooden tea shop

Budhumawatta: The Village Of The Potters

Passing the bustling Kegalle town we soon reached Molagoda where the roadside was lined with pottery. Garden pots, cooking pots, wind chimes, ornaments and many more. On inquiring further we were told that the potters village was just a few minutes away.

Our three-wheeler scaled the steep hill, puttering… we had to get down as our weight was pulling it down. We had reached Budhumawatta, the village of potters. We stepped into the premises of the first house and the entire family was engaged in pottery. The raw clay had been first brought from Devalagama and then processed by adding sand and other material. This clay was then put on the potter's wheel and brought to life by the experienced hands of the potter. At this house the wife was making the first structure using the hand wheel, this stage of the product is then put out to dry. The husband would polish the dry product and give the finishing touches using the foot wheel.

This traditional skill has been passed down generations and almost every house has its own kiln made out of clay.

As we went from house to house we were able to see the kiln being prepared for a batch of pottery to be baked. First the items are placed on top of each other, delicately so that they do not break. Then it is covered with a mixture of clay and hay and subsequently the fire is introduced in stages.

Various designs, some with motifs and coloured in red were coming to life. It was indeed rewarding to see the potters of Budhumawatta.

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Pahala Kadugannawa And Kadugannawa

We continued on our journey passing colourful fruit filled stalls and at times 'siblings' of our 'trusty steed'. We crossed the Mawanella bridge and in no time reached Pahala Kadugannawa.

An ancient travellers' abode or ambalama had been preserved for posterity and seemed almost part of the natural environment. Bible Rock – so named due to its shape – was visible in the distance. The view from this point was magnificent. A corn seller at the side of the road informed us of a cave temple which was just a 50-metre climb down from the road.

We began our descent. The noise of the road receded as we descended farther. The sound of dripping water soothed our senses. We came to a small waterfall and crossed the bridge. We had reached the ancient rock temple said to have been built

by King Walagamba in 103 BC. The environment was tranquil and we felt as if we had been transported through time and space. The surrounding green hills and the view added the charm to the place. As it was around noon, the temple was deserted but this only heightened the sense of spirituality of the place. The quaint structures of the temple with small stone doorways blended perfectly with the environ. There were points where water from natural springs dripped from the overhead rock and collected. These natural sounds and the tranquillity of the place made it ideal for meditation.

We were quite breathless after the climb and once we regained our composure we were on our way. Reaching Kadugannawa entailed a steep climb for the three-wheeler and we chugged through the rock tunnel better known as the Kadugannawa Pass. During colonial times the British had drilled through this massive rock to create a passage to the Kandyan Kingdom.

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Pilimathalawa: Aroma Of Nutmeg

A short distance away our attention was drawn to ‘something red’ being dried on the side of the road. We quickly hopped out to investigate. We were pleasantly surprised to find nutmeg being prepared.

The red membrane of the nutmeg is removed and dried separately. The raw nutmeg is placed in the sun and dried till it is hard. Then the outer shell of the nutmeg is cracked using a wooden utensil and the inner seed is selected and packed to send for processing. The cracking of the ‘nut’ was done by female workers as well as family members. It was indeed interesting to see them working industriously. The aroma of nutmeg filled the space. With the fragrance sticking on to our clothes we continued on our journey.

‘Rooong…… Tuk tuk’ we went and finally reached the sign board welcoming us to the city of kandy

Reaching Kandy

At Kiribathkumbura the giant size tea boiler drew our attention as it loomed above the building. We were at the Mlesna Tea Fortress, which encompasses a restaurant,

jewellery store and tea centre. It is an ideal place to stop and relax before resuming a journey.

‘Rooong….. tuk tuk’ we went and finally reached the sign board welcoming us to the City of Kandy. The atmosphere changed significantly from the greenery of our journey to the more crowded and metropolitan environment of the city. Tourists and locals alike were bustling to and fro. We went around the Kandy Lake which was relaxing even though the roads were bustling with traffic. Visitors were thronging into the Dalada Maligawa, the Temple of the Tooth. We scuttled through the many lanes within the town drinking in the sights and sounds of this vibrant city.

The best thing about going in a three-wheeler is that you can stop and get in at any point – well that is for the more adventurous but it is one of the conveniences of traveling this way. We said our goodbyes to Kandy and headed back towards Colombo sans any body aches and pains (which we imagined would be many). With memories of a great trip we tuk tuked back to Colombo. What a great way to travel!!!

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