Fresh Pickin’s All Around

Posted on



Spoilt for choice: the choicest selection early in the day

Amidst the frenetic bustle of the main street, the new Wellawatte Market Complex looms as a striking edifice. After decades-long wait the market was finally opened by President Mahinda Rajapaksa earlier this year. It takes a moment to realise that this is indeed a public market as it is bereft of the haphazard maze of open air stalls, distinctive of such markets. Instead, here was a five-storeyed complex for a far less harrying spell of daily grocery shopping.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara Photographs Indika De Silva

Early in the morning trishaws, trucks and piaggios line-up outside its entrance. In quick succession, sacks, craters and bags full of fresh produce keep streaming in to fill the swelling stalls. Inside the tiled-interior shoppers amble along the aisles, spoilt for choice among the flood of stalls with the freshest produce you could ever find. Rebuilt to its present condition the new complex, was opened on January 31, 2012 complete with more than 80 stalls, which are accommodated across the ground floor and four floors for ample parking space above. This was a far cry from the chaos that the outdoor markets succumb to.

“It’s far more organised and our produce is protected from the sun, rain and dust,” says one of the sellers as perishables are prone to damage from exterior elements. This is a sentiment echoed by many sellers here who also add that it allows them to sell their produce with no intrusion by unauthorised vendors. With an abundance of vegetable stalls at the fore, shoppers are at ease to pick and choose as they make their way across the aisles. Aside from every vegetable imaginable – fresh greens, fruits, spices, dried fish are all allocated at the front section while at the rear section are the fresh fish and meat stalls. Buyers can find not only the comfort of the buildings’ shelter, but also the convenience of all stalls under one roof. Recently the allocation for fish stalls increased to 10 from the initial three and with it more competitive prices.

Shoppers too voice their preference for the more organised set up of the market complex and often go in search of their customary vendor. Here there is no trace of pungent smells, hot sun and the overbearing hubbub associated with public markets. Instead at each corner are piles and piles of neatly stocked fresh goodness – a melange of bright reds, greens browns and yellows. The produce here has been transported from Pettah to where the stocks arrive from various parts of the island. Much of the fresh vegetables are from Nuwara Eliya, where the produce is of the freshest quality and preferred by sellers. Each stall is managed by the respective vendor often found either arranging the shelves or lodged at the centre of the stall busily weighing or handpicking goods for customers.

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Open Monday to Saturday as early as 6:30am till 8:30pm and on Sunday till 2:30pm, the market complex makes for an ideal place for weekly restocking of groceries for the household or even a quick buy of dried fish or spices any time during the week. While Saturdays and Sundays are easily the busiest times of the

week, customers are often seen venturing out with bags full of goods anytime during the week – be it morning, noon or evening. Ease of access, comfort and fresh produce – particularly those juicy red tomatoes – this is certainly the place to market to your heart’s content!

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