

Gangaramaya Navam Perahera

Posted on



Over the years, Gangaramaya Temple has focused on embodying the spiritual experience that encapsulates the temple's legacy. The Navam Perahera of Gangaramaya Temple is one such grand cultural pageant that sets the path to exemplify the temple's cultural practice. During Navam Perahera, the Gangaramaya Temple turns into a picturesque sight decked with glittering lights and the sounds of the musical instruments resonating in the air. The highlight of the procession is the spectacular tusker bearing the sacred relic, and adding to the limelight of the perahera is the performance of traditional artisans who signify the importance of the traditional performing arts of Sri Lanka.



The beautifully decorated Gangaramaya Temple to start the Navam Perahera.



Ven. Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple, fondly known as Podi Hamuduruwo.

As February unfolds, the much anticipated religious event is yet to occur – the magnificent Navam Perahera, which coincides with the Navam Full Moon Poya Day. The revival of the cultural procession – Navam Perahera, has been the brainchild of Venerable Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple, fondly known as Podi Hamuduruwo by everyone. Since the seventies, under Podi Hamuduruwo's guidance, the Perahera has attracted people from various backgrounds and seen the participation of diverse cultures echoing harmony, faith, and unity. Tracing the roots to the origins of the Perahera, Podi Hamuduruwo's intention to hold the Perahera in February was to recall one of the most significant incidents of the Navam Full Moon Poya.

On one such Navam Full Moon Poya, 2,500 years ago – the Buddha laid down a code

of discipline for the Sangha, and the Buddha's Chief Disciplines Sariputta and Moggallana entered the Order of the Sangha on this special day. The Navam Perahera pays homage to the Sangha, which keeps the teachings of the Enlightened One alive. A novel concept was introduced to the Perahera, a sea of saffron-robed monks being part of the cultural pageant. Similarly, various types of Buddha statues, Dhamma scriptures, and chanting of suttas have been a feature of the Perahera.

The revival of Navam Perahera, has been the brainchild of Venerable Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple, fondly known as Podi Hamuduruwo by everyone.

Each year, a new concept was introduced to the Perahera, by Podi Hamuduruwo's advice. Initially, the Perahera was a one-day festival; later, it was extended to two days. From the beginning of the Perahera at the premises of the Gangaramaya Temple to the completion, there is much pomp and pageantry. The preparations for the Perahera usually begin several weeks ahead. Podi Hamuduruwo has continuously reinforced the island's brimming traditions and culture through the Navam Perahera. To display the finest tradition is the ultimate goal hence, the commencement of the procession and the schedule of the performing artists are detailed carefully.

Podi Hamuduruwo's vision to uplift the nation as a proud religious and cultural heritage is witnessed in the careful planning of the Perahera. Each aspect is meticulously curated to carry this tradition in the years to come. Podi Hamuduruwo instilled the idea to elevate the artisans' livelihoods who participated in the Perahera, where their skills were recognized and benefitted financially. The key positive outcome of the Perahera is the social impact on the livelihoods of the participants. The one-of-a-kind Perahera turns the Metropolis into a paradise, drawing on all communities together to witness the grand pageant that encompasses cultural performances and spirituality. Navam Perahera, throughout the years, has been a grand cultural pageant attracting thousands of local and foreign spectators. As years passed, seating arrangements and opportunities for tourists to watch the Perahera were introduced. Every year, the Head of State and other dignitaries have participated, making it an event of significance.

The Perahera begins with many performances, including percussion bands, conch shell blowers, drummers, and stilt-walkers, expressing a diverse cultural contribution. The celebrations commence in the evening hours as spectators gather to witness the grandeur of the Perahera. The whip crackers are at the forefront of the cultural pageant, followed by a fascinating lineup of dancers and caparisoned tuskers. A mélange of musicians and dance troupes are part of the grandeur. Spectators can witness several segments of traditional music and dance performances, including the hevisi band with horanwa and thammattam (trumpets and double drums), followed by upcountry and low country dances to Sabaragamu dances, Masked Dances/Ves Netuma, Naiyyandi, Hanumantha, Devol Dance, Raban Dance, and many more.

Adding to that flow of performances are the wind instruments – single melody in unison and the resounding reverberation of the traditional percussion instruments – daula, thammattama, udekki, and many more. Each group spectacles a stunning combination of traditional costumes and fine instruments that reflect the country's heritage. Adding to the beauty of the parade are the torchbearers, flag bearers and, sesath bearers. Then comes the symbolic appearance of the magnificently adorned tusker bearing the sacred relic casket. Part of the faithful celebration is the procession of serene Buddha statues meticulously taken on the tuskers with the three jewels of Buddhism – the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Devotees standing along the parade clasp their hands, chanting 'Sadhu Sadhu' in devotion to the Buddha on the spectacular tusker. Adding to the cultural pageant is the beautifully illuminated Seemamalakaya, upon the Beira Lake decorated for the procession to journey around. The annual pageant is a beautiful reflection of faith, perseverance, and culture. It is indeed a mesmerizing sight to behold as the procession displays a stunning curation of performers, musicians, and majestic tuskers, carefully disciplined and trained to perform in unison. This year, the Navam Perahera falls on February 15 and 16, 2022.



A majestic sight to behold – devotees worship the sacred relic casket upon the tusker.



The highlight of the Perahera is the appearance of the majestic tusker bearing the sacred relic casket.



Serene Buddha statues are part of the perahera.



Traditional drummers play in a rhythmic motion.



A sea of saffron-robed young monks are part of the cultural pageant.



Beautifully illuminated Seemamalakaya.



Traditional performance of Ves dancers.



Glistening statues of Buddha carried with devotion.



The performance of Naiyandi dancers.