

Hike On in Nuwara Eliya



A mesmeric panorama of Nuwara Eliya town as seen from Single Tree Hill

The beautiful ‘Garden City of Sri Lanka’ sprawled before us. The rolling mountains towered over, its splendid green casting a shadow over the glistening still waters of Lake Gregory. It was a gorgeous and transfixing scene.

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A shrine for Lord Shiva on the cliff edge

Good fortune was on our side. The sun shone bright, despite the rainy weather that dominates the central hills during the final quarter of the year, its warm rays piercing through the mist. It was the ideal weather to hike to the vantage point that provided a spectacular view of serene ‘City of Lights’ – the summit of Single Tree Hill.

We journeyed through the Nuwara Eliya town, and then onto the Badulla road. Soon we reached the turn off to Single Tree Road. It was a scenic route, bumpy and winding, yet one that soothed the soul with mesmerising sceneries of the verdant mountainside. On taking the bends, our bodies swirled towards the height of the mountain, our eyes were transfixed by the beauty of the valley below.

Suddenly our flanks were dominated by neat, emerald tea fields. Like a carpet of green, the fields curved and rose hugging every feature of the gradient terrain. At times the fields towered around us like great walls, its edges fringed with ferns that looked like Father Christmas beards with a tinge of green. They danced to the tune of the wind in good humour, as if heralding the joyous festive season.

From above the verdant landscape an exotic oriental roof emerged abruptly. Beyond it the charming pinnacle of a dagoba shone in pristine white. These were the beacons of the quaint Swarnagiri Maha Viharaya. The ascent from there onwards was bumpy and soon the trek was made on foot. The chilly air pinched our cheeks to a rosy pink and froze our nostrils. Yet, our lungs felt refreshed by the sharp, clean mountain air. A foliage-wrapped path tunnelled before us, an enchanting space of dangly vines. Tall grass flanked the barely foot-wide walkway where we pushed aside ferns to forge ahead. After about ten minutes of trekking, we finally reached the summit of the hill.

Tea bushes surrounded us at the summit. Muddy wild boar hoof prints greeted us as we tried to locate a path to the viewing point. Near the cliff's edge, a large tree sheltered a shrine for Lord Shiva, a shimmering scarlet clad 'Trishula' marked this area as sacred. Was this the 'Single Tree' that gave this peak its name? Despite our queries there was no one who could offer an accurate answer - it hung in the air, open to our own interpretations.



A bird's-eye view of Lake Gregory above which lie the Moon Plains

There were no words to describe the panorama. From the characteristic English architecture to the glistening Lake Gregory; everything wonderful about Nuwara Eliya was before our eyes. We could make out the colourful boats and jet skis near the lake. The Tudor-style cottages and flower gardens amidst modern buildings expanded throughout the valley with pockets of thick green. The Nuwara Eliya Racecourse stood quaint and beautiful. The Piduruthalagala and Hakgala mountain ranges were before us, a dark blue silhouette lost in the thick mist. Lush tea fields rolled off the mountain slopes like a neat carpet and the rays of the morning sun shone on Moon Plains like a spotlight.

We were over 2,000 metres above sea level and, indeed, this was the perfect place to experience a bird's-eye view of Nuwara Eliya.

