Hikkaduwa: Watersport Haven

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A glance at the map of this pearl-shaped island will indicate that its location, smack in the middle of the warm Indian Ocean, will ideally suit an aqua enthusiast; so plenty are the country’s ocean resources, it certainly will not take long for even the most demanding traveller to find a favourable corner somewhere along the beaches of Sri Lanka.

One such favourite corner is Hikkaduwa, a quaint little sea town along the southern coastal belt. Just 98km from Colombo, on the south-bound Colombo-Galle highway, you are likely to completely pass it by if you don’t pay much attention, for Hikkaduwa remains largely inconspicuous within the framework of the daily hustle and bustle.

Hikkaduwa is a guarded secret with the few who visit it year after year, seeking a

unique type of pleasure perhaps unavailable an) place else, if not the world over then certainly in Sri Lanka. Situated along the southern coastal belt, after Bentota (one of the island's better known sea resorts) and just 18km from Galle (the ancient southern port cit). Hikkaduwa is indeed a resort by itself, equipped with all the amenities catering to the fun and sun seekers. But it is more than that... for what it has to offer i beyond all the other resort capabilities. The village of Hikkaduwa ha long been known for its great coral reefs, undoubtedly the best place in Sri Lanka to observe underwater life. Originally, the village attracted serious foreign water-sportsmen who had heard of the virtues of this place in their own countries.

Hikkaduwa still offers the island's best snorkelling or skin diving, and with its clear blue waters. deep-diving (scuba) is said to be excellent as well. Serious fishing was a sport the village offered its earlier guests, with westerners being treated to a first hand experience of colourful, indigenous local fishing methods and practices. Regular visitors to Hikkaduwa will point out that the village, being a traditional fishing village, does not have to put up a show for the foreigners. "It's a village of serious marine activity. We blend in very well with these vi !lagers," said one such German regular, himself a serious man of the sea. From a serious fishing village, Hikkaduwa grew into a resort during the 1980s when more and more tourists began to realize the beauty of this lonely spot they were passing by. Today, Main Street, Hikkaduwa, (still the only street in town) is lined with hotels, motels, restaurants, and bars. From fine three and four star Tourist Board approved hotels, the town holds claim to many inconspicuous smaller motels and beach huts, guaranteed to cater to any type of visitor.

The old coral reefs can now be explored by glass bottomed boats. available for rent at the hotels and from the aqua sports outlet that have sprung up in town. These outlets also offer deep sea fishing charters and wind surfing, Hikkaduwa's latest attraction.

Aqua sports experts have pointed out that with year round warm water (26 to 28 degrees Celsius) and seasonal winds (25 to 40 kmph), Hikkaduwa has the potential for excellent water-sports of very high standard.

From its original claim to be one of the island's best seaside locations, this old fishing village has today diversified into shopping, fine dining, entertainment and dancing, the type of stuff in high demand amongst vacationers.

By dusk, the town's coloured lights are lit, restaurants prepare their candlelight

dinners and calypso bands roam the sidewalks serenading the scantily clad visitor who have abandoned the beach for the day to shop, to drink a beer or walk-about. Hikkaduwa offers more… for example, ebony carving, stilt fishing and weaving among the many traditional southern livelihoods, can be witnessed throughout the village, walking distance away from bustling Main Street and the hotels. In close proximity to Hikkaduwa is the village of Ambalangoda, where devil dancing has been practised for centuries. A quick drive to Ambalangoda can put the visitor on a different plateau, as that of Hikkaduwa, where they may get to witness ancient superstitions of Lanka, still being practised by people who believe in them. Walking distance from the village of Hikkaduwa is the ancient Seenigama Devalaya the island home dedicated to a powerful mythical god who reigns over the people of the South. During low-tide, visitors may walk over to the tiny temple on the island and experience the power behind the curtain. Though crowded with foreign tourist and local who cater to their e ery need. Hikkaduwa has still managed to retain most of its southern charm and hospitality. Most of all, it continues to be the village it always was: real, ancient and free! How to get to Hikkaduwa. The fun way is to go by express train for the two hour trip from Colombo’s Maradana (better for getting a seat) or Fort stations, at a cost of Rs45.25 for 2nd class. By road, there are mini-buses and Sri Lanka Transport Board buses which take about two and a half hours for the journey south and cost Rs/7.50. A chauffeur-driven car from Colombo would cost about Rs2,000 for a drop or a day trip. Accommodation ranges from Rs50 to Rs/.000 per person per night, room only.



Visitors abandon the beach to shop