

In the Protection of Devol Deviyo



The isle dedicated to Devol Deviyo, said to be the rock that provided the deity safe passage to Sri Lanka

As we approached Seenigama on the Galle Road, a small islet with a few coconut trees and buildings were visible from far. Venturing forward, we entered the realm of Devol Deviyo, the guardian deity of great power.

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Photographs BT Images

It is hard to miss, on the seaside of the main road, stands the impressive arch signifying the entrance to the Seenigama Sri Devol Maha Devalaya. Entering, we could almost instantly feel the divine force. The Devalaya consists of two sections, one on land and the other an islet in the ocean. The two are connected only by a boat service.

As Saumasiri Kapumahattaya explained, “Devol Deviyo hondata hondai, narakata narakai”, meaning that the Deity is good to those who are good, and bad to those who are bad. It is for this reason that Devol Deviyo is respected as well as feared. And, for those who believe in the power of the Deviyo, he plays a significant role in their lives.



The entrance to the Seenigama Sri Devol Maha Devalaya with its impressive arch

The story of Devol Deviyo goes back millennia, and it is believed that a shrine was located on the islet from ancient times. As the Kapumahattaya explained, Devol Deviyo is associated with King Ramasinghe of India and his seven sons. The king had to send the seven brothers away as the Yaksha tribe was creating issues. Each was provided with a ship. Devol Deviyo was known to be a skillful and talented naval officer and was thus known as Neelamani, his ship was made of pure gold. The brothers engaged in trade and as the seven ships entered Sri Lankan waters, they were caught to a storm and all ships were destroyed. Yet, Devol Deviyo prayed and asked for strength to reach land. Lord Shakra saw this through his sixth sense. He created a large rock in the sea for Devol Deviyo to cling on to, and entrusted the Goddess of the Great Seas, Manimekala to ensure safe passage of the deity to land. They travelled all around the island but were unable to disembark at any point as there were guardian deities for these regions. Devol Deviyo finally arrived at Seenigama, at first the residing deities of the island did not allow him to enter. However, he convinced them by explaining that Goddess Pattini, who was the residing deity of Seenigama at that time was his sister from a previous birth. He had to prove himself by passing the many tests that they set for him. From that day forth, Goddess Pattini stipulated that Neelamani would be known as Devol Deviyo and would be the deity of Seenigama and that she would make Nawagamuwa her realm.

The islet that we see today is believed to be the rock that provided safe passage to Devol Deviyo and is said to have moved over time to its present location. A beautiful statue of the Goddess Manimekala is located on the beach from which

the boats leave to reach the Devalaya on the islet.



Saumasiri Kapumahattaya reveals the statue of Devol Deviyo within the chamber. Devotees come with pooja watti laden with fruits to bequeath the Devol Deviyo with their requests and woes. The Devalaya on land has a spacious interior, with a beautifully painted ceiling. The gold plated door and arch leads to the inner chamber in which the main statue of Devol Deviyo is placed. The Kapumahattaya was kind enough to show us the interior, in which great divine power could be felt. Statues of other deities including Gods Ganesh, Kataragama, Dedimunda and Suniyam were also to be seen. No one is allowed inside from the doorway, and as such we stood at this point in deep veneration.

Devotees placed their pooja watti and coconuts on top of the altar and the Kapumahattaya chanted the mantra. Within this Devalaya there are chambers for Goddess Pattini, God Skanda (Kataragama Deviyo), God Natha and God Vishnu. Bells are rung to appease the Gods. Coins tied in red, yellow and white cloth are seen inside and outside the Devalaya where devotees have made bara to the God. Coconuts are dashed to dispel the evil eye at both Devalas. Devotees pray with great reverence. The Devalaya on the landside is open throughout the day.

The boat service to the Devalaya on the islet is available only twice a day, and that

is before 12 noon and after 12 noon. Two poojas are held on the islet and once completed the Devalaya is closed until the next day and is not opened for any reason. The boat ride is very short but bouncy over the waves. As we approached we could see that islet was surrounded by fish.



The elaborate statue of Goddess Manimekala on the isle

Devotees were in their numbers, the Devalaya on the islet is the place where those who have experienced injustice bequeaths the Deviyo to assist them. As you enter the first chamber there is a statue of Devol Deviyo with Suniyam Deviyo and Diviyakshaya on either side. In the second chamber there is a statue of Devol Deviyo and a painting of his journey to Sri Lanka. A unique aspect of this islet is that there is a fresh water well that has not been infused with seawater. Furthermore, a footprint believed to be that of Devol Deviyo can be seen here as well. The Devalaya on the islet performs rituals where devotees seek redress for problems.

Arriving back on land, we were deep in thought, the Seenigama Sri Devol Maha Devalaya has remained in the beliefs of the islanders over thousands of years as the great power of the Devol Deviyo continues to provide protection to those who seek his blessing and help.

