

Kanneliya – A Magical Evergreen Destination

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Rays of the sun dribbling in on a misty day, through the jungle
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Every inch of the forest breaths life, from tiny insects that crawl in the undergrowth to the larger mammals, that leap and glide. Thick vines wind their way up around tall trees, while the colourful canopy is decorated with orchids and lichens. Drenched with constant rain, only a few rays of sun reach the earth of Kanneliya.

Words Nethu Wickramasinghe

The Kanneliya Forest Reserve is incredibly diverse and complex, home to an unimaginable life of flora and fauna. The reserve is the largest of the Kanneliya-Dediyagala-Nakiyadeniya Forest complex, which spans across a total of 12,216 hectares of land. Kanneliya alone is responsible for 5,276 hectares of the Galle district. Convenient accessibility to Kanneliya has resulted in a sudden spurt of visitors exploring this delicate territory all year round.

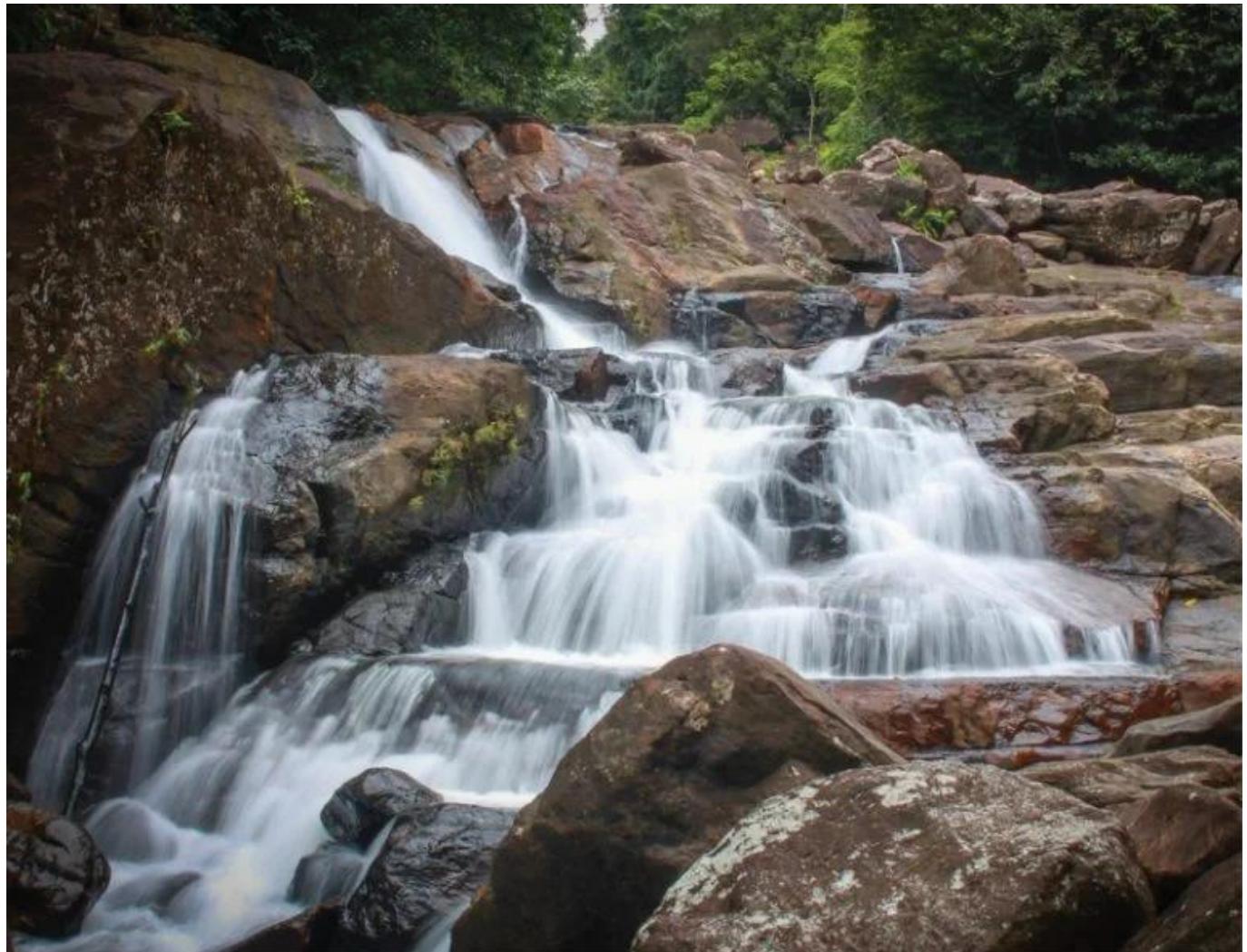
There are two main trails. One via Kabbala Kanda, and the other which leads to Narangas Ella. Both trails are connected to circular paths mid-way interconnecting significant sites such as the underground cave, and giant Navada tree.

While much of the terrain is flat with mild inclination, there are a few summits ideal for trekking, of which the Kabbala Kanda is the most hiked due to the awe-inspiring view from the top. Being a rain forest of the wet tropics, monsoonal clouds define the seasons. The wettest times are ideal to explore the two beautiful waterfalls whereas the dry season, is ideal for hiking and trekking.

Conserved for its sheer ecological importance, the Kanneliya Forest Reserve is an important watershed area of the Gin Ganga (river). Nanikitha Ella, Kanneliya Ella, Udugama Dola, and Homa Dola are just a few amongst nearly 111 streams that vein across the forest floors. Tiny droplets of water seeping from the forest floor from an unimaginable number of springs gives an idea of how water gradually collects. On wet and foggy days, either side of the paths drains pristine water, as if to quench the thirst of the passersby.

Much of these streams are well shaded habitats, which hold an unimaginably spectacular aquatic life. While some fish prefer the fast flowing waters others survive just under leaf litter on the river bed, specially in shaded areas. Amongst

many endemic fish, the golden rasbora, cherry barbs and black ruby barbs, are seen the most.



Anagimala Ella, waterfall captured during a non-rainy season

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The forest vibrates with echoes of the wild. Amongst many avian species, the calls of endemic birds such as the green billed coucal, spurfowl, grey hornbill and brown capped babbler can even be heard at the entrance.

This is a magnificent cascade which comes to life during the monsoons.

The most famous and the convenient trail is the one covering the Anagimala falls, which is a 2km hike from the entrance, followed by a trek few metres off the main trail. This is a magnificent cascade which comes to life during the monsoons. The echo of the gushing waters can be heard from a fair distance, while the remains of a wooden platform, scattered on boulders is evidence to just how strong the water currents flow when the waterfall comes to life. In the dry season the waterfall is a delicate dribble. It was on one such expedition that we were able to capture the shy and petite colourful 'jewel' of the rain forest. Seizing the magical moment of the three toed kingfisher was indeed a daunting task, as under wet conditions they prefer well shady areas closer to water bodies. Narangas Ella waterfall undoubtedly marks a wild and scenic stretch of the river, where three streams meet and cascade from the boulders. Despite the comparatively tough terrain to reach this magnificent spectacle, hikers must plan their journey well ahead and preferably begin in the early hours.

Many come here only for a day, yet to truly bask in its tranquility, it is best to spend a few days discovering the reserve. No matter how long you have explored, at the end of the journey, a piece of jaggery accompanied with a cup of beli-mal (bael) is all you need to relieve the weariness of the wild excursion.

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