Legging It Around Kandy

Posted on



The Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, Sri Dalada Maligawa — serene at the heart of Kandy’s vibrant rhythm.

Kandy is a city of contrasts where sacred chants drift above honking buses and misty hills rise beyond crowded streets. From the serenity of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic to the vibrant chaos of its markets, legging it around this hill capital reveals a rhythm uniquely and unmistakably Sri Lankan.

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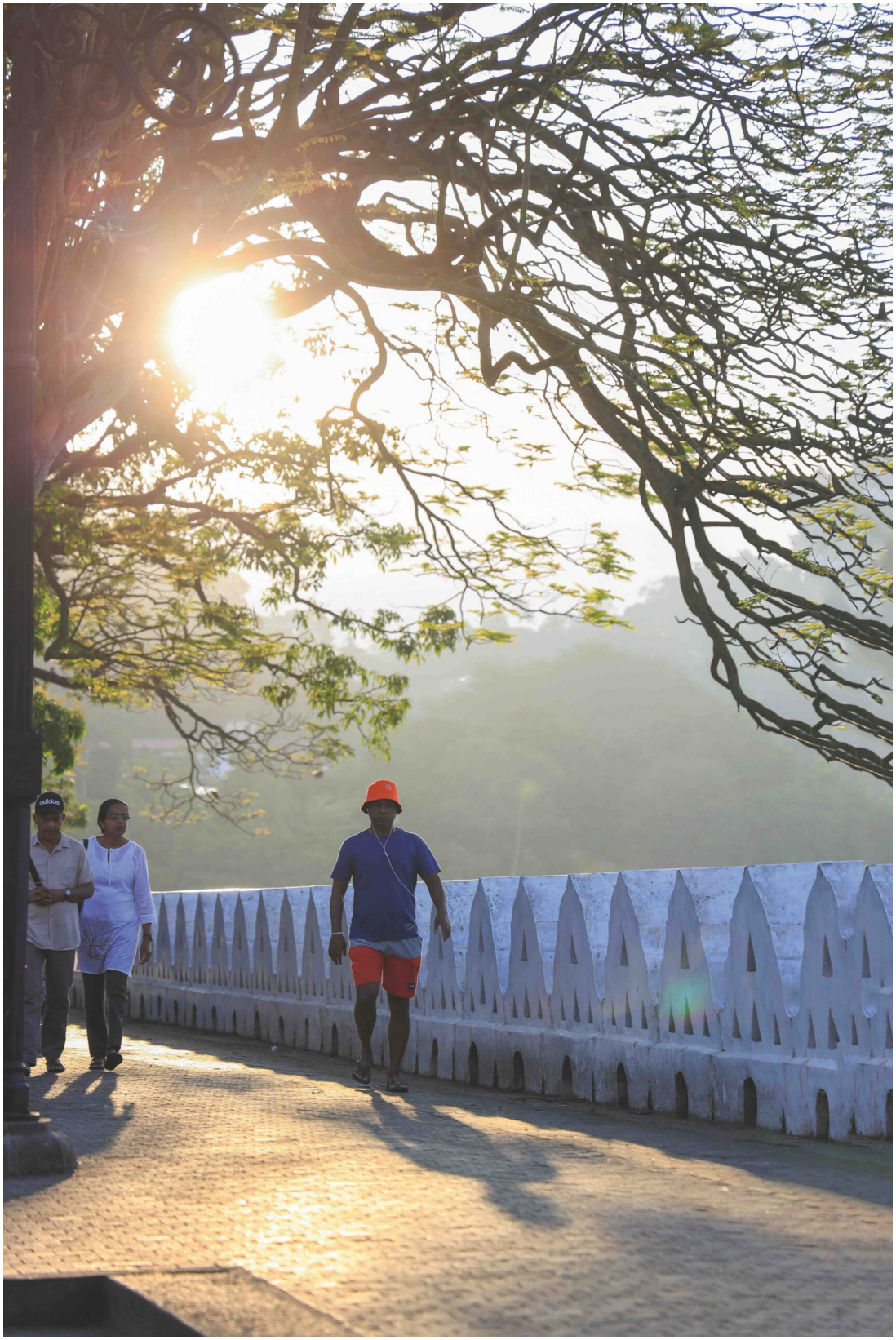
Dawn is unfolding gently over Kandy Lake.

There is something about Kandy that insists you slow down, even when the streets themselves seem determined to move at full speed. Perhaps it is the mist that rolls gently over the hills at dawn, or the way the waters of Kandy Lake hold the morning light like a polished mirror. Perhaps it is the echo of temple drums at dusk, carried softly above the impatient hum of buses, tuk tuks, and three-wheeled taxis weaving through traffic. Whatever it is, Kandy does not rush for anyone. It invites you to walk, even if you must first learn how to cross its spirited roads.

I begin at the edge of Kandy Lake, that quiet, blue heart shaped by King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe in 1807. At this hour, the city stretches awake. Monks in saffron robes walk in single file along the paved path, murmuring prayers. Elderly couples circle the lake for morning exercise. Students hurry past in crisp white uniforms. Across the water rises the white walls of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, Sri Dalada Maligawa, serene and steadfast despite the growing crescendo beyond its gates. But step away from the lake and into the main streets, and the rhythm changes entirely. Kandy’s roads are alive. Buses exhale clouds of diesel as they pull into tight bays. Tuk-tuks dart between lanes like determined dragonflies. Shopkeepers lift their shutters with a metallic clatter. Street vendors arrange pyramids of oranges and bananas while calling out prices in Sinhala and Tamil. There is no hesitation here. The city pulses with commerce and conversation.

Crossing the road becomes an art form. One waits for the slightest lull in traffic, then commits with purpose. Drivers are alert, calculating, and almost intuitive.



Morning unfolds in long shadows along Kandy Lake.



There is chaos, yes, but it is choreographed chaos. It feels like a dance learned over decades, perhaps centuries. Inside the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, the world shifts again. Drums beat in rhythmic devotion. Conch shells sound. Devotees clutch lotus blossoms and frangipani garlands. The scent of jasmine thickens the air. Although the Sacred Tooth Relic remains encased within golden caskets, revealed only during ritual, the energy is unmistakable. Faith settles over you like a quiet shawl.



Between tuk-tuks and traffic, the city moves.

Emerging back into daylight, the contrast is striking. Just outside the temple walls, traffic surges once more. Tour buses idle. Guides raise small flags to keep their groups together. Schoolchildren giggle as they squeeze into shared tuk-tuks. The sacred and the secular stand side by side in perfect Kandyan harmony. I wander toward the Central Market, drawn by the vibrant swirl of sound and color. Here the streets narrow and the crowds thicken. Vendors shout friendly invitations. The smell

of freshly ground spices mingles with ripe mangoes and damp jute sacks. The fish section hums with bargaining. The vegetable stalls glow in shades of green, orange, and crimson. A woman deftly weighs chillies on an old-fashioned scale while her neighbour stacks coconuts into neat towers. Above the market, textile shops display bolts of Kandyan saree fabric in jewel tones of sapphire and ruby. Gold jewellery glints beneath bright lights. The pavements are narrow and often crowded, forcing pedestrians to brush shoulders as they pass. Yet there is an undeniable warmth. Smiles are exchanged. Directions are offered readily. A stranger becomes a temporary companion as you navigate the press of bodies.

By midday, the streets reach their peak intensity. Office workers spill out for lunch. Horns beep in quick succession. Delivery vans double park while porters unload sacks of rice. The heat rises from the asphalt in shimmering waves. And yet, just a short climb up the hill leads to Udawattekele Forest Reserve, where the noise fades into birdsong and rustling leaves.



Beneath ancient trees, the city keeps walking.

It is the mist that rolls gently over the hills at dawn, or the way the waters of Kandy Lake hold the morning light like a polished mirror.



Streets that carry a thousand daily stories.



Where the journey feels as beautiful as the destination.

The forest feels like an exhale. Paths wind beneath towering trees. Sunlight filters through tangled vines. A troop of monkeys watches curiously from above. Somewhere deeper within, a monk meditates in stillness. The city continues its busy

negotiations beyond the tree line, but here time stretches and softens. Returning downhill in the late afternoon, I reenter the bustle with renewed appreciation. Kandy’s busy streets are not merely traffic corridors. They are living arteries. They carry schoolchildren, pilgrims, merchants, tourists, and office workers. They carry stories. I take a tuk tuk partway up to the Hanthana hills, where tea plantations ripple across the slopes. From above, the city appears gentler. The lake gleams like polished glass. The Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic stands luminous and white.



Kandy City Centre — A vibrant landmark in the heart of Kandy.

The roads below look like thin ribbons, their earlier frenzy reduced to faint movement. At the Ceylon Tea Museum, housed in a former tea factory, the story of Sri Lanka’s most famous export unfolds. Antique rollers and dryers stand silent. Photographs of early planters line the walls. Outside, with a cup of bright Ceylon tea warming my hands, I look back toward the town. Even from this vantage point, the faint hum of life drifts upward. As evening descends, I return once more to the lakeside. The streets are still busy, but the tempo softens. Office lights flicker off one by one. Street food carts glow under small bulbs. The scent of isso wade and achcharu drifts through the air. Couples pause at pedestrian crossings, laughing as they judge the flow of traffic before stepping forward together. Temple drums begin the evening pooja, their steady rhythm rising above engines and conversation. The façade of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic glows against the darkening sky. Reflections shimmer across the lake. I realize then that the busy streets are not

separate from Kandy’s serenity. They are part of it. The energy of the market, the determination of drivers, the chatter of vendors, the swirl of color and movement all feed into the city’s identity. Without the bustle, the calm would feel incomplete. Without the noise, the silence would not feel so profound.

Legging it around Kandy means embracing both worlds. It means weaving through traffic with confidence and then standing in quiet awe before sacred relics.

> Kandy does not ask you to escape its busyness. It asks you to walk within it. To cross its roads. To pause at its stalls. To listen to its drums. To find stillness not despite the movement, but because of it.



A burst of color and freshness at Kandy Market.



Sweet abundance at Kandy’s bustling fruit market.

It means tasting spice in a crowded market and breathing forest air moments later. It means understanding that history and modern life share the same narrow pavements. By the time night fully settles, the streets hum at a lower frequency. A distant train horn echoes through the valley. A final bus sighs into its bay. Somewhere, a temple bell rings. Kandy does not ask you to escape its busyness. It asks you to walk within it. To cross its roads. To pause at its stalls. To listen to its drums. To find stillness not despite the movement, but because of it. And as I finally step away from the lake, I realize that the true rhythm of Kandy lies not only in its sacred spaces or misty hills, but in the vibrant, busy streets that keep its heart beating.



Bottled aromas and golden hues — a glimpse into Sri Lanka’s spice culture.