A Little Bit Of Dutch In Kalpitiya

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The single entrance to the Kalpitiya Fort

Designed in 1666, the construction of the Dutch Fort in Kalpitiya was completed in 1676. As the entry point to the Puttalam lagoon, the Kalpitiya Fort was key in the trade of cinnamon reflecting the might of the Dutch East India Company.

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This unique fort has only one entrance, which faces the lagoon. The pediment is in the shape of a pandol with the belfry at the top. The VOC emblem though preserved takes a while to actually see. The two elephants represent strength and the palm tree depicts the fertility of the region. Upon entering one would be met with a large wall, this was actually a security mechanism so that intruders would not be able to enter in one go. The yellow bricks that make the entrance arch is said to

have been brought down especially from Holland.

The layout itself is very simple. The fort has four bastions with the two on the lagoon side being smaller than the two on the land side. The fort walls are massive, where the Dutch had used coral and limestone from the sea and sand and soil from the land. The guard posts atop the bastions are quite small. It is said that the Dutch had brought down soldiers from India who were quite small in size yet fierce to guard the fort.

> The view of the sun rising in the East, above the remnants of the Fort with the lagoon far away can take you back in time

The buildings are at the periphery creating an empty space at the middle of the Fort. The gables of the buildings that remain are similar to a church, which again seem to have been a tactic by the Dutch to dissuade enemies. However, there are the remains of an actual church, which had been built by the Portuguese. Furthermore, the large hall adjacent to the church is thought to have been the dining hall for the inhabitants of the Fort.

A ramp with an incline takes you up to the rampart. Again, the use of slopes indicates a defence strategy, where pouring of hot water or a form of chemical could be used against the advance of an enemy. The fortification of the Fort shows that the Dutch were prepared to face any attack where canon fire would be used. Further, while there was only one visible access point into the fort, there were two tunnels that could be used in case of a withdrawal. One led to the sea, while the other to the Dutch Reform Church, which was about 400m away. Today, these tunnels are blocked and cannot be used.

> The unique architecture of Dutch buildings is much evident with arches and massive doorways

Walking along the rampart, especially early in the morning is breathtaking. The view of the sun rising in the East, above the remnants of the Fort with the lagoon far away can take you back in time. Though the roofs of most of the buildings are not there, the unique architecture of Dutch buildings is much evident with arches and massive doorways. In some cases the door frame is still intact. It is assumed that

buildings that initially had a certain function were later converted to storerooms where the windows had been sealed to provide good storage not only for ammunition but also for spices, pearls, cinnamon and much more. There are two wells in the premises, which are thought to have been there during colonial times to provide water to the residents of the Fort.

With the advent of the British, the Kalpitiya Fort was handed over to them. The British used this Fort mainly for trading along with the Fort in Mannar.

Today, the Kalpitiya Fort is conspicuous in the sense that it stands massive amidst the hustle and bustle of the village life. Undoubtedly this edifice will continue to weather the changes of time...

