



Calm waters of Maha Divulwewa - a mirror of natural beauty

**The Wannu jungles, spanning across the vast Northern-Eastern plains across Sri Lanka is known for many things. Left alone for a good portion of its recent past, the forest plains hold many treasures waiting to be discovered, explored and experienced.**

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This was the deep rooted call I heard as I was whizzing along the resurfaced A12 highway from Trincomalee to Anuradhapura. Approximately 30km into my journey from Trincomalee, as the road was wavering through trees and navigating through mild gravel hillocks, passing the occasional heavy machinery site, the road suddenly dropped and the jungle parted. The breathtakingly beautiful sight was hard to ignore and hard to pass by. This was Maha Divul Wewa, a place unto its own.

The history of Maha Divul Wewa is obscure. Whether it was built by kings, the British or by the State is not certain. There are no stone inscriptions, no archaeological discoveries, no public information placards anywhere to find any of that. The tank holds the story to itself and I was more than happy to allow myself to be enticed by it, despite the threat of an impending downpour as the North Eastern monsoon was threateningly active.

The drop of the road and the lacing of the asphalt across the tank, splitting the edge into two, are unique and soothing to the eye. It is not an uncommon sight to see a speeding vehicle suddenly exhaust its speed and come to a moment's stop, so that a quick snap of the scenery can be treasured.

Walking along the waterline, which was evidently swelling under the influence of the monsoonal rains and the associated water flow, I found it didn't take much to lose oneself. Had the highway been non-existent, there would definitely be no noise indicating human habitat. Every turn, every step, showed nothing but pristine, raw, virgin nature - uncontaminated by the presence of humans. I was quickly put on track when I came across the signature of Sri Lankan's inland waters - the lake fishermen. A row of fibreglass rowing boats dragged up along the tank shore indicated that a small fisher folk community had conquered this gem of a tank.

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Walking further along the tank's bank, the isolation was mesmerising. The occasional chirp of a bird, the lonely wail of a solitary peafowl, and the rhythmic orchestral stridulations of crickets were the only things to break the silence. The lonely and meagre sluice was modestly open, allowing a good gush of water to flow through a narrow canal, which then snaked into the jungles so that it could be the life blood of a paddy cultivation zone barely visible through the jungle canopy.

The track took me further down, with the tall shrubbery arching over me giving an eerie feeling that was soon taken away as it revealed the tank, the same Maha Divul Wewa, with a different perspective. Each and every time, it did not fail to mesmerise me, literally sending my knees to a grinding halt. Every moment, every angle, every look, was certainly worth a lifetime's wait to watch. How the waterline has advanced and how the trees bow down in perfect harmony; this was nature at its best.

The jungly embankment would occasionally give into small footpaths and literally, in a few feet, I found myself under a lush green jungle canopy where the sunlight had to force its way through the tiny loopholes that the trees forgot to cover. The leaves gently parted revealing the placid waters of Maha Divul Wewa again to lead me into numerous outposts, which one could easily call its own private lakefront. Be it sandy gravel, be it thick grass, Maha Divul Wewa offers everything, but not on a silver plate - one must get to it, and discover it.

Further down, a jobless spillway sits bare. For the moment that is. The rubble and gravel patterns clearly show that at the climax of its activity this waterway would have its plate full. There was plenty of evidence to show that this was a playground for a good company of elephants. I later learnt that most of the time elephants mind their own business, but the jungle pachyderms are never known to pre- announce their mood swings and arrogance. Fortunately or unfortunately, therefore, I did not come across any. Perhaps the rains have brought water to them, negating their need to come to the lake's edge.

As egrets and cormorants were having a field day smoothly sailing a few feet above the waterline and jostling under the water to meet their next snack, schools of fish remained concentrated at different places. Predators and prey were engaged in a constant battle between one's hunger versus another's breath.

With its tranquillity, isolation and virginity, Maha Divul Wewa can be philosophically awakening. It doesn't take long to show how little one is; how easily isolated one can be; how much jungle beauty one has missed. For the hard-core camper, Maha Divul Wewa is a paradise. Plenty of space and plenty of opportunity to explore, this is truly a unique place.

Be prepared, for the nearest grocery store is miles away as is the nearest human habitat, precipitating the need to carry everything from scratch. Then again that is what camping is all about. It was not uncommon to see a villager take a leisurely plunge. For the lack of a kit change, I found it a pity that I could not have my own dip in the cool and calm waters of Maha Divul Wewa - a place unto its own.

