

Mystical Dowa Temple

Posted on



The golden Buddha statue of the Dowa Temple on the Badulla-Bandarawela Road

The soothing sounds of gushing water reached us as the rock outcrop of the historic Dowa Temple came into view.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe

Photographs Menaka Aravinda, Geeth Viduranga and Anuradha Perera



The steep steps that lead to the famed cave temple

Situated along the Badulla-Bandarawela Road, at first one would only see the golden Buddha statue at the centre of the road and quaint white stupa within the temple premises. Entering the quiet environs, it was apparent that the temple buildings were located downhill. Along the path we went, passing the 'Bana Maduwa' (the sermon hall) and proceeded down the steps. The gushing water from the nearby river soon filled our ears.

The Bodhi Tree stood serenely at the mid level, with the Budhu Gey at the base. An open sermon hall was towards the side of the Bodhi Tree overlooking the flowing river. A massive jak tree came into view with its main branch almost at right angles to its trunk. We slowly climbed the rock, our toes gripping the rough grooves. We looked up to see the large carving of the Buddha in standing posture at 39ft etched on to the rock. The features of the face were serene and exuded a sense of peace and calm. It is believed that this cave temple was built by King Walagamba and it is also said that the sculpture of the Buddha was done by the King himself who had aimed to finish it overnight. However, the statue seems to be incomplete as if to imply that the King had to leave in a hurry prior to its completion. The cave was one of the many safe places that King Walagamba resided during his 12-years of hiding before reclaiming the Sri Lankan throne from the Chola invaders.

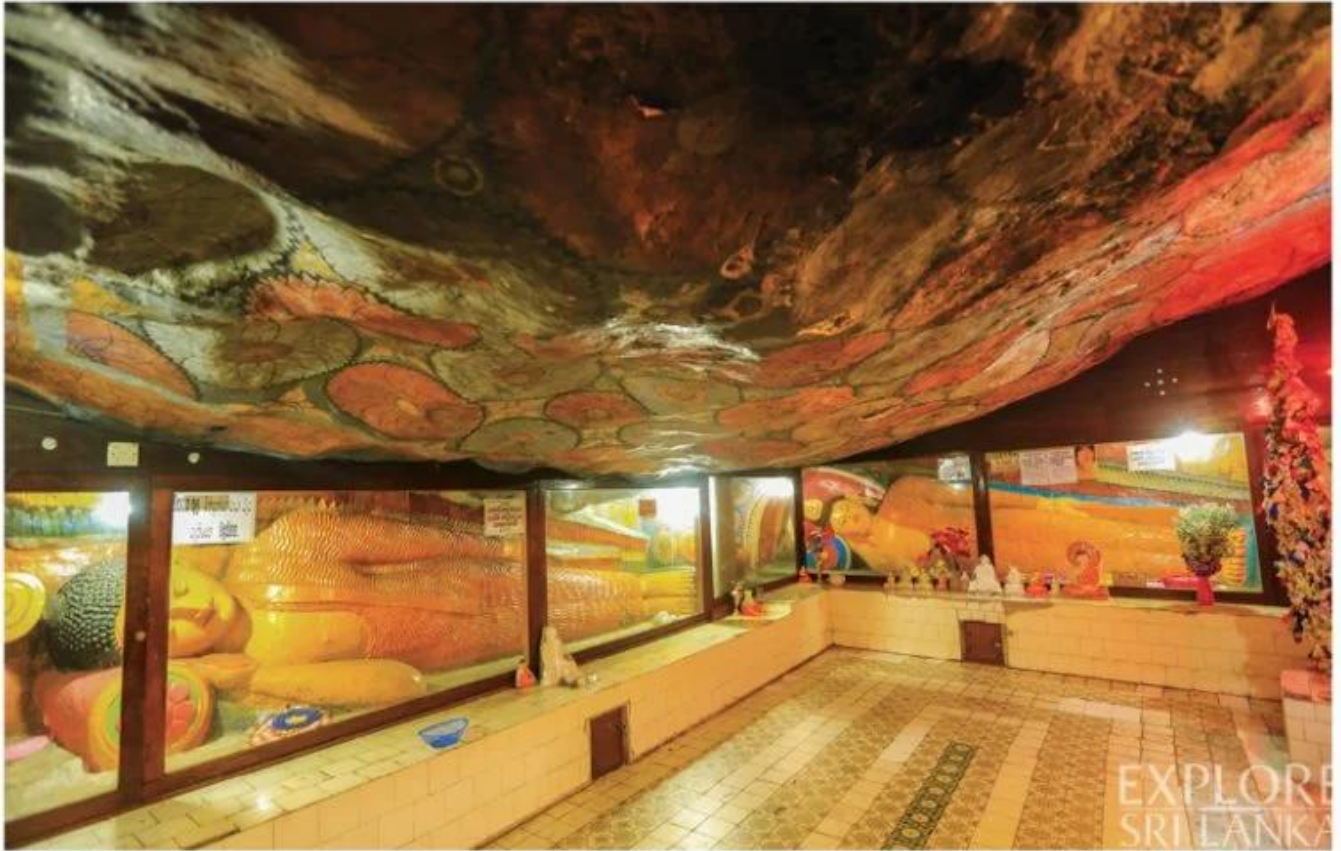
The statue seems to be incomplete as if to imply that King Walagamba had to leave in a hurry prior to its completion.

As you first enter the temple, you are immediately awed by the beautiful paintings on the cave surface and the colourful statues. The magnetic Makara Thorana as well as the murals on the walls are beautifully preserved. Though it is said that the construction of the temple was started during the Anuradhapura period, it was completed in the Kandyan period.



The 39-ft carving of the Buddha

Reflecting this, the Budhu Gey we see today depicts features of Kandyan era art and architecture. A large reclining statue of the Buddha can be seen within. The cave could be considered quite big as it consisted of a series of rooms, one leading to another. The interior was peaceful and calm making us reflect on the Dhamma as we walked through. The spiritual aura could be felt in our solitude.



The reclining statues of the Buddha inside the cave temple

The temple though seemingly small in size is great in significant due to its contribution to Sri Lankan history. Having provided refuge to King Walagamba, Dowa Temple has seen the world change around it but has maintained its spirituality and serenity that pervades through time.

