

Navam Perahera: The Grand Perahera in the City



The Gangaramaya Navam Perahera preserves Sri Lankan culture and tradition

As the majestically caparisoned tusker of the Gangaramaya Temple rhythmically walks through the streets around the Beira Lake, heartfelt cries of 'sadhu sadhu' fill the air as the city of Colombo experiences the wonder of the Navam Perahera.

Words Gayathri Kothalawala

Photographs BT Images



Devotees anticipate the arrival of the majestic tusker bearing the Sacred Relic.

During the month of February, the streets of the city come alive as the Perahera offers a unique pleasure to the visitors. The grand procession has been a highly anticipated event for the people in the city, as well as devotees and spectators from all corners of the world.

The casket bearing the Sacred Relics of the Buddha is enshrined within the structure carried by the majestic tusker. A fire cracker sets off to mark the moment, and the perahera officially commences.

Over 3,000 participants and more than 50 elephants set off from Park Street, travelling through Sri Jinarathana Road and Hunupitiya Lake Road to circle around Beira Lake, returning to the Temple premises.

Whip crackers announce the arrival of the Perahera by cracking their whips on the roads. It is followed by the vibrant dance of the fire jugglers creating elaborate patterns in the air with fire. Behind them, divided into nearly 150 segments, comes an eclectic collection of dancers who stun the crowds with intricate performances from Kandyan to Sabaragamu to low country dance styles. Next to arrive are the hewisi bands, coaxing their horanewas and thammattams to create pleasing sounds. Bare-bodied pantheru dancers recreate the dances that have pleased ancient Sri Lankan kings.

The sight of the udekki troupe holds the spectators spellbound. More wonders are yet to come as the dignified Ves dancers follow behind. The famous dance amazes the crowds as the dancers somersault into the air, flip and tumble.

Mahasana - a devil - heightens the excitement of the spectators. The monkey king Hanuman and lions are symbolised within the procession, and Kolam dancers never fail to amuse the onlookers.



The procession journeys around the Beira lake and the beautifully illuminated Seemamalakaya

As the segments pass, everyone is on the lookout for the chief tusker, who is flanked by two bedecked tuskers. As the casket comes into sight, a reverent hush falls over the gathered crowds. Palms clasped in worship, devotees pay homage to the Buddha as the tusker walks measuredly through the streets.

Several dance troupes follow in the wake of the Sacred Relics as the grand procession moves onwards. The perahera concludes at the temple premises.

The Navam Perahera revived in 1979 by the Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya

Temple, Ven Galboda Gnanissara Thero will be held on February 18th and 19th at 7pm.



Ven Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple.



The traditional performance of the Ves dancers reflects the rich heritage of the island.