

Nilani: Following a Gem of a Tradition

Posted on



Sri Lanka has had a centuries-old reputation as the source of some of the finest gems in the world. In a trade where age does not wither the beauty or quality of the object purchased, the gems of Sri Lanka have always held a special allure for the making of crowns, wooing of beauties, or the paying of royal ransoms. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is hardly a crown in the world which does not have a gem from this resplendent island. Similarly, the best collections of gems in the world include prize exhibits from Sri Lanka. Bank vaults in the global capitals have fine pieces of jewellery set with gems from Sri Lanka, and the nerve centres of the gem trade -such as London, Amsterdam, ew York, Tokyo, Brazil and Bangkok, all deal regularly in rare gems mined in Sri Lanka. That the fame of Sri Lankan gems was known from earliest times is evidenced from the many fables of old which refer to priceless gems of this country, and are part of the folklore of many peoples and nations.

Travellers of old have never failed to record and comment on the size, beauty and plenitude of the gems of this country. The Scheherezade's story of Sinbad the Sailor refers to the daring sailor's visit to the City of Gems, which many an expert today identifies as Ratnapura, Sri Lanka's well-known city of gems. It is also a strongly held tradition that it was from Sri Lanka that King Solomon obtained the gems with which to woo the Queen of Sheba. With such a long tradition in the supply of cherished beauty and value to the world, it is no surprise that the very name Sri Lanka is a reminder to many, of a place for the best of gems. The opportunity to buy a gem of lasting value is one of the principal reasons for many visitors preferring Sri Lanka to another holiday location, and for those in the gem trade worldwide, making Sri Lanka a special destination.



An array of Srilankan gems on display at Nilani Gem Exports. Photo Fred Malvenna



Some of the exhibits on display at the Nilani Gem Musuem Ratnapura.



A skilled craftman making fine jewellery at Nilani Gem Exports.

With the smallest of gems being an object special value, quality is the most important element in the purchase of one. It is in the assurance of good quality on which the reputation of a good gem trader depends, an aspect of the gem trade which is uppermost in the business of Nilani Gem Exports, which has what is the only One-Stop Gem Emporium in Sri Lanka. The result of many years of close involvement with the gem trade by its founder, Mr. Nimal Pathirana, himself hailing from a family with a long tradition in the gem trade, Nilani Gem Exports combines the best of modern marketing with the age-old belief in good quality being the best character in a gem and in the trade.

At Nilani's Ratnapura Gem Emporium, you find under one roof a Showroom, Museum, lapidary, laboratory, Souvenir Shop and Art Gallery. The Gem Museum here is the ideal place to get an understanding of the tradition and lore of gems and jewellery in Sri Lanka. Whether you are looking for a gift to remember, a rare and exquisite souvenir, a gem for profiting back home, or just the curious student of gemmology, there is plenty in the Nilani Gem Museum to capture your interest, from a variety of gems in their natural uncut state, to others with exquisite facetting to bring out the hidden beauty. The jewellery here shows some fine examples of the jewellers art and craft, as it was practised in Sri Lanka in the past. Pieces such as "havadiyas" or waist chains for men and women, necklaces and pendants, the special containers for lime called "killottes" used by those who had raised betel chewing to an upper class symbol. There is a lapidary where one could see the rough gems being cut, polished and facettted to bring out the best in them, such as the twinkle in the Star Sapphire, the fine line of the Cat's Eye, or the deep Blue of the Blue Sapphire. You could see the colour of wine-red rubies emerge, how garnets shed their red hue around in hands of a skilled lapidarist, using age-old tools or modern electronic lapidary instruments.

Nilani's Showroom has one of the largest collection of fine Sri Lankan gems and jewellery. Fully air conditioned, the baize covered tables with spotlights to bring out the beauty of each gem or piece of jewellery, it would at any time have millions of

rupees of gems spread on it to make your pick from. The Sales Staff of Nilani are all experienced in the gem trade, and could guide you in a purchase, ascertaining your special need and supplying gems of guaranteed quality. The Nilani guarantee is a special hallmark of quality. It comes with the assurance of recognition in any part of the world, and from lapidarists who work in a modern fully equipped laboratory. Of special interest is Nilani's jewellery Division, which employs skilled craftsmen who create beautiful designs in both traditional and vogue jewellery. Necklaces, pendants, chokers, rings, bangles, earrings, clasps, armlets and anklets are just some of the fine jewellery crafted here in gold and silver, many of them set in fine Sri Lankan gems. Mr. Pathirana has not forgotten that there are other needs of souvenir hunters besides gems. That is why the Galerie Nilani is also housed in the Nilani Emporium. It is an interesting gift shop where one could see and buy some of the best quality Sri Lankan handicrafts. The quality is unquestioned because they are obtained both from traditional craftsmen and modern artists who have pride in their skills and craft, and blended these skills with modern trends. From gorgeous batik wall hangings to small ebony elephants, fine handiwork in silver, copper, brass and other beaten metal, wood carvings and wooden ornaments, excellent rush and reed ware, the Galerie Nilani offers the choicest selection in souvenirs. All of this in one elegant premises at the Gem City - spacious, comfortable with experienced and reassuring sales personnel who could advise you on quality, value and the finer points of a gem. No wonder the people at Nilani say they follow a Gem of a Tradition, in the land of Gems.