

On The A32!

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The Sangupiddy bridge

We were at a point where the land met the sea, two paths lay in front of us, one to Mannar island and the other to Jaffna via Pooneryn and Sangupiddy Bridge. Well, guess which path we took? The Mannar-Jaffna road better known as the A32!

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The road ran ahead of us far into the distance, according to the sign post there was 102.5 km from this point to Jaffna. It was difficult to fathom what to expect but we were on an adventure. The road ran along the coastline and the landscape continued to change as the vehicle at times, sped, bumped and rocked according to the ever-changing nature of the surface of the road. At times our speed was such that walking may have been better or let's say faster, but the experience itself was

memorable.

The motley character of the semi arid region was quite apparent, the rugged coastal landscape soon became peppered with greenery and life. Occasionally we would meet fellow travellers; buses carrying passengers, lorries with goods, a three-wheeler taking a family on an excursion or a lone bicycle making its way home. The rains had come to this area and as such the waterways and natural ponds were full to their brim. The dryness and the heat that we associate with this area had disappeared to be replaced by lush green vegetation and comfortable warmth.

We soon reached a small town where people were gathering at the 'bus stop'. Makeshift tin shops sold goods to the villagers and weary travellers. Two monuments, one of a saint and another symbolising the freedom of the people stood side by side reminding those plying the A32 the importance of unity.

The vast open green plains were breathtaking and signified the blossoming of life after the rains. Cattle grazed the pastures and a group of women in perfect synchrony balanced pots of water on their heads while they chattered on their way home. The dust from the red earth stood in contrast against the green while shades of the autumn leaves created a picturesque setting against the waterways. A quick tea at a makeshift shop in a small village gave us much needed energy. People were rebuilding their homes and the road was filled with lively chatter, which was momentarily disturbed by passing buses.

The bridge, a mammoth structure of cement and steel, which resembled a miniature hill. A little bit more...a bit more and we were over the bridge and on the other side of the Jaffna Lagoon.

As evening fell, the sides of the road gradually became luminescent with the occasional silhouette of palmyrah trees. A dog on the road would signify that a village was close by giving us the assurance that we were not in complete isolation. Sooner than later, we reached Pooneryn, a busy hub as it is the central location where one could either proceed to Kilinochchi via Paranthan or travel to Jaffna via the Sangupiddy bridge, which forms the connection over the Jaffna lagoon. We chose the route via Sangupiddy.

The sea was a shimmering blue and the water was at a soothing temperature. We were told that the water was shallow but we did not venture out as we were preoccupied by the pristine beauty. As we drove along the narrow road towards the

jetty, the Sangupiddy bridge loomed ahead of us. Previously, travellers had to cross the Jaffna lagoon by ferry as the A9 was the only land route to Jaffna. But, now there is an alternative land route via Sangupiddy. This is the shortest land route to Jaffna from Colombo.

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Fishermen's boats created an impression of a painting. Fishing nets strewn on the side of the road signified that this was not merely a means of travel but also a support for livelihood. From the number of vehicles plying the road it was apparent that the A32 connection to Jaffna was also a means of connecting those from the rest of the country to the North. We took a bend and we were heading on to the bridge, a mammoth structure of cement and steel, which resembled a miniature hill. A little bit more...a bit more and we were over the bridge and on the other side of the Jaffna Lagoon. I could not help but wonder... 'one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.'

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