On the Road to Kankesanthurai

Posted on



The road to Kankesanthurai is now open after decades
The ancient Maviddapuram
Kandaswamy Kovil

The sweltering afternoon heat beat down on the snaking flat tarmac. Our eyes glinted with excitement as we passed the Kandaswamy Kovil in Maviddapuram. Now we were on a road that had not been used in decades!

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We had received news that the final two-kilometre stretch of the Jaffna – Kankesanthurai Road was open to the public and were on our way to explore. A brown gopuram with intricate carvings soared into sight. It was the Maviddapuram Kovil, a 5,000-year temple dedicated to Lord Murugan. Once we cruised past it we were on the look out for the junction. From here it was straight on to the coastal Kankesanthurai on the new road open to all.

The balmy air, fresh with the salt of the sea mingled with the smell of scorching tar. Save for a few eateries, administrative buildings and service centres that peeped from the thick foliage and carefully pruned hedgerow the road to Kankesanthurai or KKS was desolate. A few turns later we came across a group of women. Chattering together with enthusiasm they revealed they were looking for their ancestral homes. The ladies pointed down the path they were planning to head down. A typical gravel lane, it seemed to lead to the thick of the jungle. They were merely waiting on the side of the road for the rest of their group supposedly arriving in the second bus. Bidding our goodbyes and good tidings we continued on our journey to the Northern-most coast of Sri Lanka.

The houses scattered along the route were remnants of the lost architecture of Jaffna. Arched doorways, balustrades, slightly peaked roofs and Spanish slat windows. These buildings are a fusion of British colonial architecture, which draw inspiration from neoclassical and baroque architectural styles. With communities now living in peace, the peninsula’s unique style of architecture can flourish.

> With its pristine beach stretch, KKS is placed for great things and of course is keen to play its part in Sri Lanka’s burgeoning tourism industry.

After a winding ride, the striking gold tipped Kankesanthurai Lighthouse was a beacon that signaled we were close to the coast. The simple masonry tower built by the British was restored to its original glory in 2014, guiding vessels to the KKS harbour with care. A quick turn to the right and at the coast we were.

The Kankesanthurai Railway Station gleamed with a new coat of peach paint. Its interior was quite modern, as was the re-laid track. Yet, just opposite a little history remained. The old warehouse built by the British remained untouched. Carriages decommissioned during the war also decorated the station. With the road closed, the only mode of travel to the area for tourists was through train. Re-opened in

2015, today this is the final destination of the restored Northern Line. At the turntable the trains change their course and head on back to Colombo through Jaffna.

The digital clock signaled 13.45 pm as we heard the screeching call of the afternoon express coach. It was running a little late. At the sound of it, tourists and residents alike scattered onto the platform and scrambled onto the train. Their happy and relaxed faces motivated us to explore the beach stretch from where they emerged.

Beyond the Thalsevana Hotel the beach shimmered with golden sands constantly kissed by pristine calm waters. On a rampart, clearly left behind by the Dutch, people lounged taking in the invigorating sea air. Our eyes danced with glee as it captured the never-ending seascape of the Indian Ocean. These crystalised waters would be ideal for snorkelling, yachting or water-skiing.

An area that experienced the full force of the conflict was now at peace. With its pristine beach stretch and turquoise waters, Kankesanthurai is placed for great things and of course is keen to play its part in Sri Lanka’s burgeoning tourism industry.

I looked on towards its serene landscape where people were returning to their homes and tourists lazed about. It was easy to imagine how Kankesanthurai would flourish in the years to come.