Pekoe Trail Stage 22

Posted on

The Final Chapter to the Heart of Nuwara Eliya

Stage 22 of the Pekoe Trail marks the final leg of this iconic journey through one of the island’s most breathtaking landscapes. The Pekoe Trail is a scenic hike that also narrates the story of Ceylon Tea while unveiling the rich biodiversity and natural beauty of a tropical paradise.

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Photography Pekoe Trail Organization.



Tea estates unfurl along this stage, tracing the edges of the Piduruthalagala Conservation Forest.

Stage 22 of the Pekoe Trail, stretching 10.8 kilometers from Kandapola to the Pedro Estate in Nuwara Eliya, is described as moderate intensity. It’s also one of the liveliest stages of the trail, with frequent opportunities for human interaction.

The journey begins in Kandapola town and soon leads into a tea estate, where a path turns left into the Park Estate of Browns Plantations. A distinct feature of this stage is the extensive vegetable cultivation carried out by local communities. Their homes dot the landscape, and a morning hike reveals villagers at work in the fields,

offering hikers a chance for warm, authentic encounters.

Stage 22 is particularly popular among beginners and novice hikers, so fellow travelers are often found along the route.

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The Pedro Tea Factory framed by mountain backdrops.

The tea gardens are equally alive with activity, as women pluck tea leaves, their lively chatter carrying across the trail, adding to the sense of movement and life that defines this stage.

The trail begins in Kandapola at an elevation of 1,933 meters, gradually climbing to its highest point of 2,112 meters at the 6.4-kilometer mark. The ascent offers sweeping views over community settlements and their commercial vegetable cultivations. Yet, the tea gardens dominate the landscape – vast, enduring plantations draped across the hillsides, gracefully framing the smaller vegetable plots below. After reaching the highest elevation, the trail begins its descent, though the terrain remains lively and varied, undulating across several smaller peaks before easing downward.

Stage 22 is relatively straightforward. As the final stretch of the Pekoe Trail, its terrain is dominated by tea estates, much like the trail's beginning. Yet, it offers intriguing glimpses of history along the way. At the 1.5-kilometer mark stands the old Kandapola railway station—no longer in operation but once a stop for trains travelling from Udapussellawa to Nuwara Eliya. Its colonial appearance is unmistakable, a reminder of a bygone era.

From here, a sharp left turn leads to the Assistant Superintendent's bungalow perched atop a hill, while a right turn returns the hiker to familiar paths of tea estate roads. What lingers most, however, is the lushness of the tea fields – vibrant leaves stretching endlessly across the horizon.

At 2.2 kilometers, still within Park Estate and at an elevation of 2,015 meters, the landscape takes on a truly eclectic character. The tea-clad slopes roll gracefully in a seesawing rhythm, stretching into the distance until they meet the green hedge of trees that marks the boundary of the Piduruthalagala Conservation Forest. This is the same forest one passes through for nearly 1.5 kilometers back in stage three. Here, the estate and the forest press closely against one another, their boundaries blurred. So, encountering wildlife straying towards the tea fields would not entirely be unexpected, although the hikers are too far away for such a brush.



Tea gardens cascading like green waves across the hills.



Rolling tea gardens embrace the hilly horizon.

Interestingly, the climb to the highest elevation begins with a descent. At 2.8 kilometers, the trail rises to 2,033 meters, before reaching the end of Park Estate at 3.4 kilometers, marked by a tree Kovil – a familiar landmark often found along the Pekoe Trail. From here, the path enters Courtlodge Estate at 1,995 meters, a descent, continuing the undulating mini-peak terrain.

It’s within the Courtlodge Estate that the ascent resumes, rising nearly 120 meters to reach stage 22’s highest point. A sharp right turn brings hikers once again into view the Piduruthalagala Conservation Forest, its slopes rising dramatically in the distance beyond the tea fields. From this point, the trail stretches into a long, scenic walk through Courtlodge Estate.

At 4.5 kilometers, near a field rest room, the trail takes a left turn onto an estate road that leads towards the Piduruthalagala Road before winding back through tea fields. A notable landmark appears at the 5.7-kilometer mark—the Government Seed Production Farm, commonly known as the potato farm, from which the path again turns left.This stretch offers sweeping views of the Hakgala Mountain Range and its surrounding peaks. Within the Courtlodge Estate, perched high at 2,070 meters, stands the Kurinji Kumaran Hindu Temple. Still an emerging edifice, it rises prominently atop a mountain and can be seen from the trail in the distance.

At 6.4 kilometers, the trail reaches its highest elevation of 2,112 meters. From here, the next 4.4 kilometers trace a gradual descent of about 120 meters. This is not a simple downhill stretch; however, the path undulates over several mini-peaks while winding steadily downward.

Soon after beginning the descent, hikers will come across a small waterfall cascading beside village homes, where residents ingeniously use its waters to grow their vegetable plots. A little further along lies a striking viewpoint that opens to a 360˚ panorama, taking in the Courtlodge tea factory, the Piduruthalagala Conservation Forest, and nearby community settlements.

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As the trail continues, expansive vistas unfold towards the Hakgala Mountain Range, the Government Seed Potato Farm in Sita Eliya, and the rolling expanse of Sanda Thenna (Moon Plains). Further along, the scenery shifts once again to reveal the Hakgala Mountain Range from another angle, along with Thotupola Mountain and the distant peaks of Horton Plains.

At 9.2 kilometers, the trail passes the elegant bungalow of the Regional General Manager of Pedro Estate, its prominent chimneys evoking the colonial heritage of the island’s tea industry. The bungalow is an important landmark, helping hikers identify the correct turn among several estate roads. From here, the trail descends to the right, leading to the 9.9-kilometer point.

At this juncture, hikers can either continue less than a kilometer to the official end of the stage or veer right for a rewarding detour to the Lovers’ Leap waterfall, one of Nuwara Eliya’s celebrated cascades. The digression adds 2.4 kilometers to the round trip but is well worth the effort.

Along the way to deciding whether to change course and head to the waterfall, the scenery continues to impress. The Bomburu Ella reservoir brims against a backdrop of lush woodland, a scene worthy of a postcard. This vital reservoir flows through the Sita Eliya Kandapola Forest Reserve, before breaking into nearly a dozen cascades, culminating in the spectacular Bomburu Ella waterfall.



Every path in stage 22 is steeped in the timeless essence of Sri Lanka’s tea journey.



Enjoy a hike under the sunny skies while immersing yourself in the beauty of nature.

At the 9.9-kilometer mark, hikers can turn left on a descending path to continue along the Pekoe Trail or walk straight ahead for 1.2 kilometers to visit the famed Lovers' Leap waterfall.

Lovers' Leap carries with it a storied legend. As the story goes, a prince wandering the wild once fell in love with a maiden of non-royal descent. The royal household refused to accept the union, and in despair, the couple chose to seal their love in eternity by leaping together from the waterfall on a moonlit night.

Whether fact or fable, the story lingers, adding romance and poignancy to this striking cascade. The waterfall lies within the Lovers' Leap Division of the Pedro Estate. Interestingly, 'Pedro' is thought to be derived from Piduruthalagala, the highest mountain in Sri Lanka, once known as Pedro Mountain. The path to the waterfall winds between tea fields and the Piduruthalagala Forest Reserve's edges, offering a blend of cultivated and natural beauty.

On the return, hikers can either retrace their steps to the 9.9-kilometer point and rejoin the Pekoe Trail or follow an alternate estate road near the waterfall that eventually reconnects with the trail. Along the way, the scenery continues to delight, with views of the Pedro Estate tea factory framed by mountain backdrops. The factory itself is a quaint structure that harmonizes with the surrounding landscape.

Stage 22 then ends in the bustling town of Nuwara Eliya, bringing the Pekoe Trail to a memorable close. The Pekoe Trail ending in Nuwara Eliya is a fitting finale to a 300-kilometer hike through tea country. It celebrates a legacy that the island inherited from the British, and Nuwara Eliya is the ultimate capital of the island's tea story.

It's little wonder that Nuwara Eliya is fondly known as Little England. With its cool climate and abundant attractions, the town has long been a favorite holiday destination. The tea estates remain its most prominent feature, but Gregory Lake, landscaped parks, the charming old post office, and the historic golf course add to its character.

Accommodation options are plentiful, ranging from star-class hotels to secluded estate bungalows that offer a more intimate, nostalgic experience. Iconic landmarks such as the Hill Club and the Grand Hotel, built by the British in the 19th century, still stand as enduring witnesses to the island's tea heritage. The views are ever-present wherever one chooses to stay: rolling mountains, sweeping valleys, and lush green expanses stretching to perpetuity.

Tea was the catalyst that changed Nuwara Eliya into a development hub, and today it thrives as a bustling township. At the end of stage 22, hikers will find it an exciting place to explore, whether dining in its many restaurants offering a repertoire of cuisines or indulging in the town's fresh fruits. Nuwara Eliya marks a remarkable ending to the Pekoe Trail.