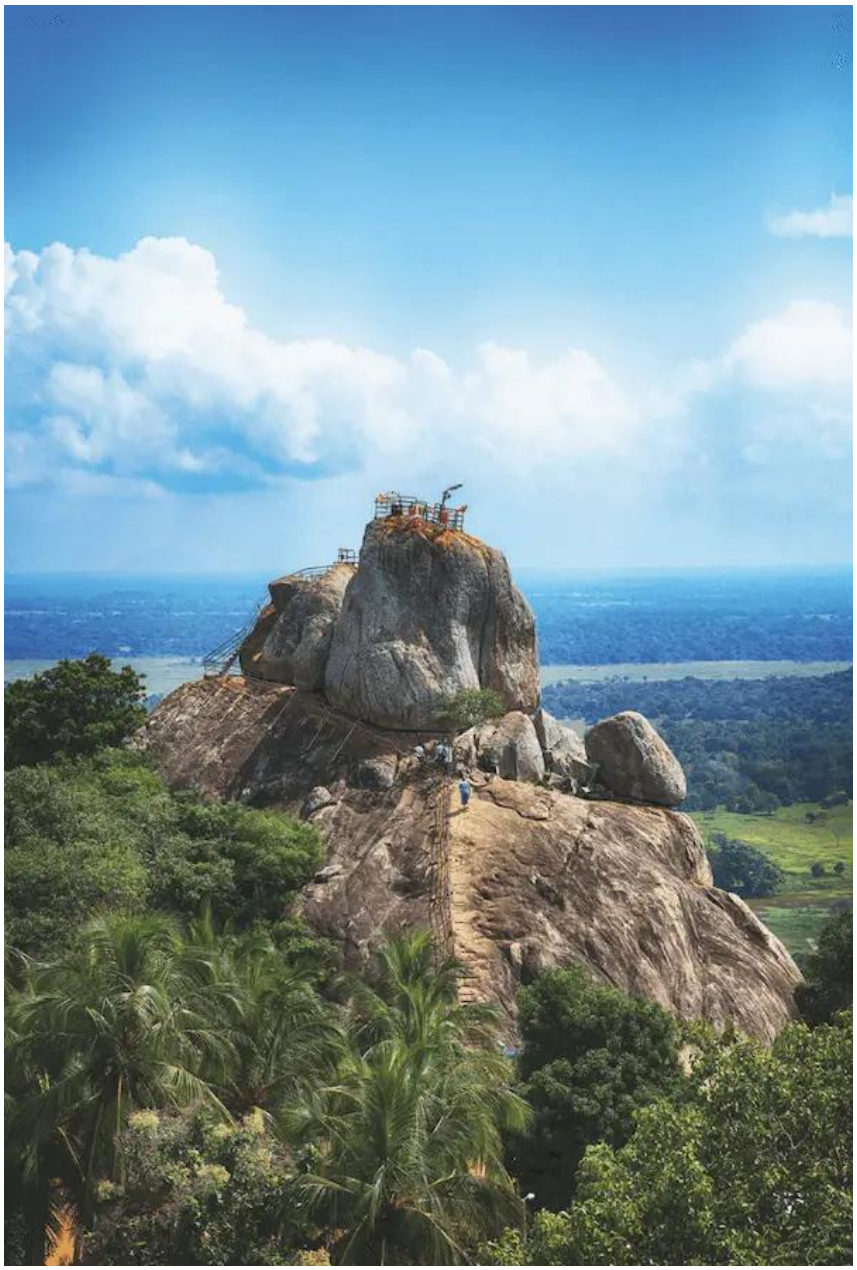
Poson and the Mihintale Season

Posted on



On Poson, flocks of devotees ascend this sacred mountain – Aradhana Rock with great reverence..



Mihintale Maha Seya is located amidst picturesque surroundings.

It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for Buddhists. Many pilgrims take this as a wonderful opportunity to plan and visit with families. En route to Mihintale, there are many exciting features to experience and cherish. It is interesting to watch a wonderful kaleidoscope of millions of butterflies flying in the northern direction, similar to that near Sri Pada. There is a belief that the butterflies pay homage to the Buddha, and they eventually perish kissing the rock. Towards the end of migration, the mountain is smeared in yellow due to countless butterflies.

At the foot of the sacred Mihintale, while the sun shines brightly, make-shift stalls offer Beli Mal a healthy and refreshing beverage to beat the heat. After a tiring journey, travelers can stop by for a cooling drink to revitalize.

It is beyond an ordinary spiritual journey, allowing one to immerse in the country’s extraordinary experiences while paying homage to the iconic landmark that has helped preserve the Dhamma.

Poson is the historical and significant occasion that recalls the arrival of Arahat Mahinda and his disciplines bringing in the word of the Buddha to the nation, which changed the island’s history. This significant event took place at Mihintale. Thus it is called the ‘Cradle of Buddhism’ in Sri Lanka.

The ancient ruins in Mihintale with stone inscriptions speak volumes of historical significance.

Mihintale is also called the ‘rock of stupas’ as it is studded with numerous stupas, some renovated and immaculate, others left in original molds of brick. The area of Mihintale is surrounded by dense jungle and rock boulders scattered around the mountainous region.

Upon reaching the foot of the mountain, one will be mesmerized by the views, and the ascent begins with the grand staircase, fringed by araliya trees (temple trees). With the gentle breeze, the aroma of the flowers gently pervades the air accompanying a surreal feeling as the devotees begin their pilgrimage.

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Every year, on the full moon day, Buddhist devotees trace the steps to the summit where Arahat Mahinda first preached the wisdom of the Dhamma to King Devanampiyatissa. It is known that the King was the first follower of the Buddha’s philosophy in Sri Lanka and thus transformed the entire area into a Buddhist monastery, consecrating the site as a religious landmark.

For hundreds of years, Bhikkus lived, meditated, and provided the spiritual teaching of the Buddha to the people. This historic site was a well-organized network comprising a relic chamber, an alms hall, an assembly hall, ponds, and an intricate water system. The caves in the surroundings have been used by monks for meditation.

The Kantaka Stupa is famous for its four Vahalkadas (frontispiece), facing four directions. They have been preserved through the ages, and each vahalkada has stone carvings of an elephant head, horse head and monkey head, and dwarfs and birds. In the vicinity of this stupa are 68 caves, which have been once a shelter for meditating monks.

The Medamaluwa Monastery has the remains of the monastic buildings. Nearby is the Sinha Pokuna, or Lion’s Pond, with a lion’s head spouting water to a square stone bath.

The alms hall is a rectangular area and at the back is a long stone vessel in the shape of a boat, which was used to contain rice for the monk’s mid-day meal. It was called the Rice Boat, which could serve 2,000 resident monks.

Next to the alms hall on a higher elevation are the ruins of a building considered Mihintale’s main shrine. There are two large stone slabs etched with ‘Mihintale Inscriptions’ in the entrance of ancient Sinhalese. Believed to have been laid down by King Mahinda IV (956-977 AD) shortly before the 1,400-year-old capital of Anuradhapura fell in early 10AD, and the monastery itself began its period of decline. The Dharma Sala is the following site, an open building constructed with 48 stone pillars. Within this edifice, the monks would congregate and discuss various aspects of the Dhamma.

Next is the lead to the upper terrace, the plateau called Ambastala. On this historic

site, King Devanampiyatissa looked back when he heard his name Tissa being called by Arahat Mahinda. With his thumb on his bowstring and the arrow's flight targeting the deer stopped, he turned to find the source of this voice. Here, the Arahat explained the doctrine of the Great Teacher, the Buddha, to the King. Significantly, Emperor Asoka of India, who spread Buddhism to nine countries, sent his son to Sri Lanka. The site where this momentous meeting took place is today marked by a golden fence, and the Ambasthala Stupa was built by King Mahadatika Mahanaga (9-12AD).

The Aradhana Rock is right ahead, perched at the end of the mountain, where Arahat Mahinda delivered the 'Deva Aradanawa' (Invitation to the gods). On Poson, flocks of devotees ascend this sacred mountain with great reverence.

The Maha Seya, which enshrines the Buddha's 'Urna Roma', a hair relic, is the holy beacon that guides the pilgrim to the top of the mount. The Mihindu Seya nearby was built to encase the remains of the Arahant Mahinda after his passing away.

Shrouded in an atmosphere of utter tranquility are two ponds – Kaludiya Pokuna (Black Water Pond), with dark water even on the brightest days. It is 200 feet long and 70 feet wide and roughly rectangular in shape. It is known to be one of the most extensive ponds in the sacred area of Mihintale. The Naga Pokuna is almost the same size and more elliptical in shape. It has the name due to the huge five-headed Cobra carved out of the cliff at the back of the pond. At the foot of the Mihintale is the ancient hospital; the ruins reveal a medical hall with separate cubicles in a row and a well-dug cavity for medicinal oil baths and stone inscriptions and stone utensils for storing medicines, which have also been unearthed from the site.

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The Mihintale Maha Seya is built on the site depicting the arrival of Arahat Mahinda in Sri Lanka. The surroundings are serene. From whichever road you are traveling to

Mihintale, your first sight is almost this pristine white stupa.

Sunset views from Mihintale are mesmeric, and at night, especially on Poson Full Moon Poya, with twinkling lights illuminating the environs of the sacred site, the views are an awe-inspiring beauty to indulge in. As Mihintale glistens under the moonlight, thousands of pilgrims clad in white attire take a flight of 1840 steps to venerate, and it is a surreal moment to capture.

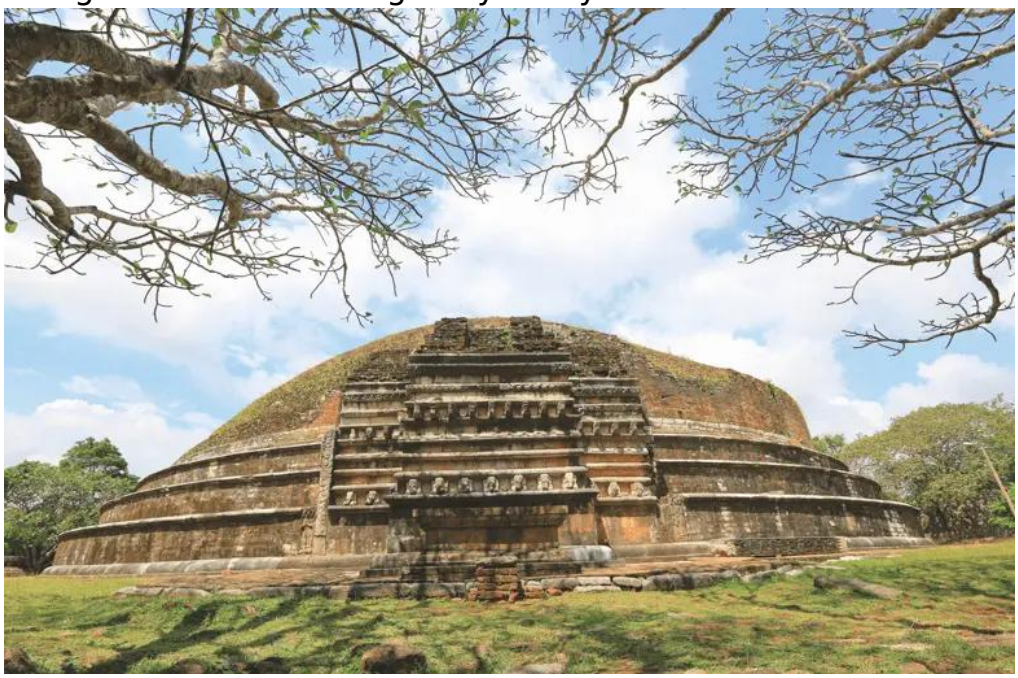
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After a tiring journey, re-energize with a Beli mal drink.



The grand staircase fringed by Araliya trees evokes a sense of spirituality.



Kantaka Stupa is famous for its four Vahalkadas and expresses artistic heritage.



Kaludiya Pokuna with somber reflections of trees and boulders of the neighboring forests and mountains.