Preserving a 150 Year Legacy

Posted on



Façade of the Ceylon Tea Museum, previously the Hanthana Tea Factory

The Ceylon Tea Museum, a tribute to the 150-year long journey of the brew that sustained the nation for decades, welcomes you to the delightful world of tea.

Words Keshini de Silva | **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda and Vishwathan Tharmakulasingham

100th anniversary
souvenir

We turned towards the little village of Hanthana from Kandy city, where nearly four kilometres later one encounters the Hanthana Tea Estate. The factory of the plantation, built in 1925, has since the year 2001 been the Ceylon Tea Museum, which illustrates the legacy of the world famous brew.

A quaint colonial aura continues to surround the factory with timber paned casement windows. The tour, usually a duration of half and hour to one hour, follows the order of the tea manufacturing process. Therefore, the first stop of the tour is the Engine room, which exhibits metallic beasts, some diesel others using liquid fuel, that powered the tea factories before electricity was widespread.

The subsequent museum room is almost a chamber of treasures, which showcases machines of the past and their modern descendants allowing visitors to draw their own informed comparisons. Here, the most iconic exhibit is the Little Giant Tea Roller, the first tea rolling machine in the Island. The country's first Tea Dryer Machine is also on display. Today, tea is sifted into Tea Grades through sophisticated machinery, though the founding planters used traditional hand sifters; these too are on exhibit. On the upper floor, visitors witness the old nylon and jute hessian tats that have currently been replaced by withering troughs. The production process of tea is demonstrated in its entirety through a miniature model factory that whirrs to life.

Once familiar with all the core activities in tea factories, it is time to pay tribute to the Father of Ceylon Tea himself. The James Taylor Room is adorned with illustrations of the strapping Scottish planter. Long glass cabinets preciously display Taylor's belongings including a tobacco pipe and old walking sticks along with tea manufacturing equipment of his own invention. These had been recovered from James Taylor's log cabin at the Loolecondera Estate; where the tea industry began in 1867.

From valuable porcelain tea ware with fine floral designs to the now redundant laboratory equipment, these museum showpieces jointly tell the story of Ceylon Tea. Possibly, one of the most priceless items here is the oldest package of Ceylon Tea, packed by the Tea Propaganda Board in 1944. An undated marble bust of Queen Victoria who is credited for popularising the concept or trend of afternoon or high tea and portraits honouring Sir Thomas Lipton who made known the name 'Ceylon Tea' throughout the world, capture one's attention.



Objects retrieved from James Taylor’s log cabin

The Library at the Ceylon Tea Museum is one of great value, with shelves stacked with volumes of the Ferguson’s Directories, heavy books which contain trade information on the Ceylon Tea industry. Therefore, UK nationals seek out this library to trace their ancestors who were once a part of the noted planting fraternity in Ceylon. In addition to the ancient photographs, there are many glass plate negatives depicting Ceylon Tea from the early 1900s as well as old Ceylon Tea advertisements tinted with colour. Similarly preserved is a souvenir published in celebration of the centenary year anniversary of the Ceylon Tea industry.

The museum tour ends with a tea tasting experience, as visitors are introduced to the many unique characteristics of Ceylon Tea. They can purchase a brew to their

liking from the tea and souvenir shops at the museum. A variety of brands of Ceylon Tea ranging from estates and many elevations are available.

The Ceylon Tea Museum, in the future, expects to introduce the concept of ‘priced teas’ where the visitors could purchase the very tea that they savour at the Tasting Section. A model factory, where visitors can pluck tea themselves and witness the tea manufacturing process is also in the pipeline.

After an enthralling adventure in the fascinating world of Ceylon Tea, the visitors are served a cuppa at the Ceylon Tea Museum Café. Be it a rich hot tea or flavoured iced tea, one can relish the brew of their choice at the café while enjoying the picturesque views of cold mountain peaks as well as tea fields.

Opening Hours: 8.30am – 3.30pm, daily except Mondays

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