Puranagama: a village experience of a bygone era

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Puranagama reflects the concept of Sri Lankan heritage amidst nature.

Inspired by the Nuwarakalawe Gammanaya of the British period, Puranagama has been envisaged as a real-life village that provides authentic Sri Lankan hospitality to those who wish to experience the rich culture and traditions of the country.

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Photographs Menaka Aravinda.

‘Ayubowan’ says Arachchi warmly welcoming us, as we approached his residence surrounded by lush green paddy fields. We felt like we were entering a village belonging to a bygone era. Everyone came out to greet us in true Sri Lankan style. Our contemporary clothing seemed to set us apart from the rest, and we were soon presented with Sri Lankan traditional attire so that we too became a part of Puranagama.

A novel concept by Baladurage Chandrasiri, Owner/Managing Director, the idea was to present an authentic Sri Lankan village experience to the guests. The Nuwarakalawe Gammanaya had been associated and based around three

reservoirs, Kala Wewa, Tissa Wewa and Padaviya Wewa. It had been in existence towards the latter part of British colonial rule. It is in villages such as Nuwarakalawe that the culture and traditions of the country had been protected. The building structure of vertical wooden lattice filled with clay, and high roofs are reminiscent of the latter part of the British period, which had also been known as the Mati Yugaya, as explained by Chandrasiri.

Puranagama adopts the same structure of a village. The leader of the village is known as the Korale, and the Arachchi is his deputy. The other members of the staff also have their respective roles to play in the village. The layout of the resort, furniture, interior décor and the preparations of meals reflect the simplicity of village life.



The Arachchi of the village welcomes guests to his home.

Once the guest has been welcomed, they are taken in a bullock cart to their rooms. Along the route, they will pass the Sanghinda, where blessings are bequeathed from the deity. After that, guests will witness the Ambalama with the pinthaliya, Kamatha and the reservoirs built in the cascading system. The journey is scenic, and you soon reach the Kaele Kadamandiya, where daily produce from the village such as maize, bananas, fruits and vegetables are made available. In doing so, Puranagama has provided an opportunity for people of the area to sell their fresh goods.

A short distance away is the Kande Kadamandiya, which in fact comprises the restaurant of the resort. Bath Kade serves lunch and dinner, and the Roti Kade and Thae Kade serves breakfast and snacks. All three Kade restaurants have a common sitting area outdoors. Guests can watch as their meals are prepared. All dishes are served in a traditional way. In traditional villages, the practice was that villagers would be able to purchase their requirements at the homes of skilled artisans. In a similar manner, at Puranagama along the Aeley Kadamandiya, a series of houses named as Ra Gedara, Walang Gedara, Kammal Gedara, Wewal Gedara, and Athkam Gedera showcase the livelihoods during the Nuwarakalawe period. Guests can get involved and gain knowledge on these various types of livelihoods.

Accommodation at Puranagama is in a separate area, and here too the houses are named according to the residents of the village; Korale Gedara, Badderala Gedara, Wele Gedara, Govirala Gedera and Arachchi Gedera, which also serves as the reception of the resort.

Guests can select the house they would like to stay in. The respective ‘owners of the house’ will be their hosts. Yet, they would make sure that the privacy of the guests is not affected. Each house is furnished in a manner so that it has the furniture and utensils of the respective occupants. The number of rooms in a particular home varies, but all have a sitting room, verandah, kitchen and bathrooms. There is a total of 16 bedrooms in the property.

Other places of interests at the resort are the Gamey Pansala (temple), Guru Gedara (school) and the open-air theatre, Gamey Nadu Sabhawa and the Vee Bissa, where paddy is stored. The swimming pool is unique and has been created as a canal of fresh water with its associated tank and sluice gates. Aquatic plants with soothing and medicinal properties have been grown around the pool.

Chandrasiri’s main aim was to provide guests the opportunity to experience the beauty of living with nature; respecting the environment as our forefathers had

done centuries ago. He stresses that there always needs to be a balance between the built and natural environment. As in all his properties, Chandrasiri has ensured that his love for nature is highlighted at Puranagama as well.

Puranagama

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