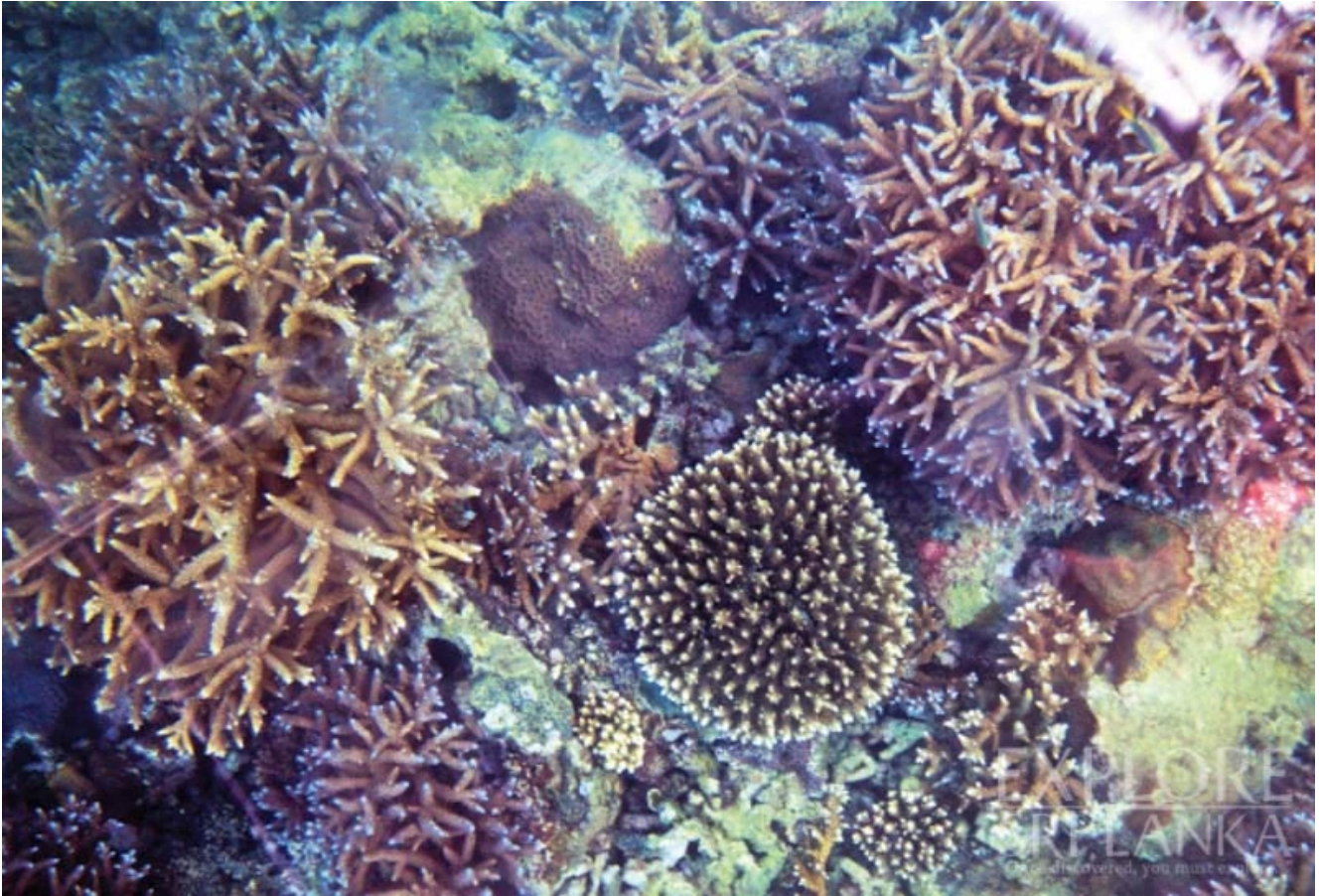


Under The Sea



Corals of Passekudah—little fishes darting in out

It was 7.30 in the morning, too early by the looks of still sleepy Passekudah. Only the imprint of footsteps of the countless people that must have walked the shores the day before remained as an attestant to how busy the stretch could be at certain times. Suddenly the tranquillity and the quietude of the area was broken by a loud roar. A boat whisked towards the beach and rather than being annoyed by the loud din, we eagerly made our way to the boat... It was time for some adventure among the corals of Passekudah!

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

Gingerly getting into the boat that was rocking against the waves, we tried to find a perch on the bunks arranged around the glass bottom set in the middle. As soon as we settled in as comfortably as we can with life jackets and holding tightly onto the seat or the edge of the boat, our guide whirled up the engine and off we shot into the horizon.

White foam trailed along the wake of the boat and we looked back at the Passekudah beach stretch scattered with countless hotels, their brown roofs and even light brown walls standing out amidst the greenery.

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Travelling about a kilometre or so into the ocean from the beach, our guide let the boat drift. As the waves gently rocked the boat we tried to catch a glimpse of the corals through the glass bottom while keeping a keen eye out for the little fishes that darted in and out of our vision. Here and there in the ocean bed were concrete boulders with holes and we were told that these were recent additions to regrow the corals of Passekudah that were destroyed due to the Tsunami in 2004.

White or purple tipped and various shapes and sizes—the corals that spread the ocean floor were fascinating to observe and we were guided to a few places along the stretch in the hopes of seeing more exotic life forms. However, we soon realised that snorkelling would be the best way to witness the wonders hidden amongst these corals as the loud noise of the boat seemed to scare the fish into hiding. A couple of hours chasing after corals and fish—it was time to head back ashore and once we were on land, reluctant to end our adventure just yet, we decided to walk the stretch of the beach to see where our feet would lead us...

By now the sun had risen high above the blue skies as white clouds drifted by making way for clearer skies dispelling all fears of rain. Another beach-perfect day awaited for those who planned to have a day out indulging in the soft white sands of Passekudah. As we continued walking towards the Kalkudah beach stretch, leaving behind Passekudah, we encountered a few people enjoying a splash in the shallow ocean waters. Reaching Kalkudah we manoeuvred our way along the beach over some rocks, an abandoned jetty in ruins with just its columns peeking out of the water and a wall. The further we wandered along, the lesser the structures and hotels became, as it seemed that this area is yet to be touched with the development that is clearly visible in Passekudah.

White sands unmarred by footsteps and the ocean glimmering aquamarine in the sun, lent an air of breathtaking beauty and tranquillity

White sands unmarred by footsteps and the ocean glimmering aquamarine in the sun, lent an air of breathtaking beauty and tranquillity. At one point, we observed a small boat making its way towards the shore, surely after a long morning's work. Two men were busy manoeuvring the boat with what looked like long poles. A little way ahead as we reached Kalmaduwa, we saw a few fishermen lounging about in the sand. They were staring into the ocean, at a another boat, fast approaching the shore. As soon as it approached the beach, the fishermen inside the boat quickly jumped out and hauled it to the sand where some other boats lay secured.

Having by now walked about four to five kilometres from the Passekudah beach stretch, we were feeling the effects of the relentless heat and our tired feet screamed for some respite. Sitting under the shade of a small tree, we relaxed enjoying the precious moments that would in a while slip away as we bade goodbye to this seemingly mundane adventure...

