Shopping Galore

Posted on



Straw hats, bags and batik clothes hang in colourful array at these wayside stalls.

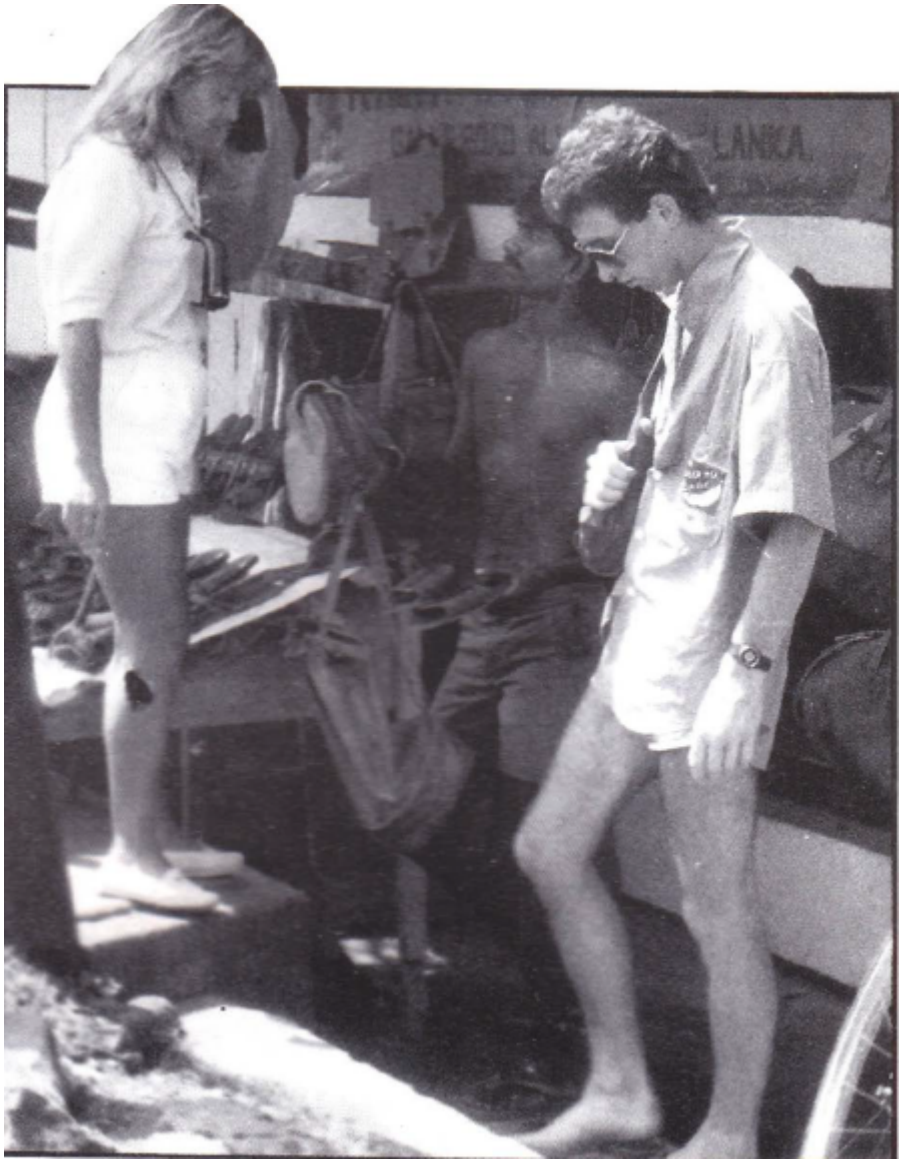
The Galle Road runs south from Colombo to Galle with the never ending view of the infinite stretch of blue sea of the Indian Ocean, through towns such as Beruwela, Aluthgama, Bentota, Ahungalla, Ambalangoda and Hikkaduwa. Lining this principal motorway are many beach resort areas with a variety of shops offering a tantalising range for the shopper. Garments, gems and jewellery, batiks, leather goods, masks, wood carvings, antiques and a collection of handicrafts are some of the more popular purchases. Chances are you get most items at lower prices in these shops than in the city, as the supplies come from craftsmen from neighbouring villages and labour is cheaper in the smaller towns.

The grotesque and colourful masks for which Ambalangoda is famous for, decorate the craftsmen’s shop, to attract the eye of the passer by. Made out of Kaduru and Rukaththana – a soft wood – and painted into faces of demons and characters from folk tales, these masks are used in rituals, dances of exorcism, harvest festivals and similar traditional rituals and ceremonies. A puppet and masks museum with a collection of brightly clothed puppet characters from folk lore is an added attraction to the larger than life masks, skilfully crafted by master craftsmen. The intricately carved and beautifully designed pieces of antique furniture, brassware, old lamps, traditional weapons, symbols of heraldry and interesting china from the Dutch period are among the stock in trade of many antique shops along the southern coast. Precious and semi-precious stones mined in several parts of the island, set into beautifully designed items of jewellery or by themselves tempt the most fastidious tastes. Traditional jewellery such as the chunky pendants, kandyan

bangles as well as bead chains are on display in the many gem and jewellery shops of the beach resort areas, in separate shopping bazaars or the shopping arcades of hotels.

A very appropriate memento of this island of exotic splendour the miniature caparisoned “Maligawa tusker” carved in ebony and studded with gems, complete with the jewel encrusted casket, on its back.

Leather goods of the finest quality are made into bags, ponchos, cases and sandals. These handmade pieces are most popular with visitors and the local shoppers too. The readymade clothes hung out in colourful creations are made specially to beat the heat and for comfort. Baggy pants, ponchos, cotton skirts, sarongs, shirts, Kaftans and dresse are very good bargains. The brilliant batiks, hand done in eye catching designs, allure the most discerning eye. Most handicraft items available in the shops are turned out by craftsmen who live in neighbouring villages. They are made of leaves, bamboo, eke!, wood and clay with intricate designs and colours. These are inexpensive buys and contain a simple beauty and charm of their own. The impressive array of goods displayed in the many and varied shops provide a storehouse of surprises. The typical warm welcoming smile will lead you to a rich variety of choice of each shop you step into.



Trying on some leather foot wear. Suresh de Silva