

Sorabora We Saw!

Posted on



Boats stationed at the embankment of Sorabora Wewa

Its still waters lay rippling lazily oblivious to the many keen gazes upon it and the frenzy of activity caught in the air. This was Sorabora wewa in all its glory. A vast body of water fringed by seemingly miniature landscapes, and it has been here for thousands of years... thanks to a giant named Bulatha.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara Photographs Prabath Chathuranga and Indika De Silva

Just about half an hour's drive from the Mahiyanganaya town, Sorabora Wewa is a popular pitstop among pilgrims, and holiday makers. This is made evident by the 'touristy' feel at the gateway to the tank with stalls cropped up selling everything from sweet meats and bright coloured toys to sun hats. Many of them called out

enticements of their wares but on this dry sultry day, we made a beeline towards a *beli mal wathura* stall.

With nearly singed tongues from the steaming cups of the drink (freshly brewed – straight off the stove), we headed through the gateway that led directly to Sorabora. Even along this path were stalls that seemed to sell an unusual collection of everything. Beach balls, wooden spoons, woven mats, hats and handbags, mortar and pestles, flutes, drums and head massagers! Making a mental note to make a stop on our return we made our way towards a rock elevation.

Reaching the top of the bund a panoramic view of all 1,440 acres of water stretched lustrously beneath a clear sky. Momentary chatter lulled as we stood enveloped in its serenity. Snowy egrets held still on a farther end like props in a display while other feathery visitors circled the air. The Archaeology Department dates this ancient engineering feat back to 120BC and adds a note on its folklore. Bulatha, a name derived or inspired from betel chewing, was said to be a giant during the time of King Dutugemunu who built the original dam to harness water along with a rock hewn anicut that incidentally is still preserved and in use today. With a few renovations during present times, the old anicut can be seen along the west embankment of the tank. A fact-list signpost further revealed its many stupendous dimensions including that it feeds 3,000 acres of cultivation lands.

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It is apparent that the waters are rich with fish as fishing birds hovered, plunged and splashed across its surface. Serpent Eagles and Brahminy Kites sailed back and fourth with fleeting dives to retrieve fish while egrets scoured the waters in an awkward dance. Eventually we ventured down to the embankment which served as a parking spot for wooden rafts hoisted upon two fishing boats. Even at the water's edge 'hunga' or stinging cat fish swirled restlessly and we were duly warned as we climbed aboard the raft.

Sorabora Wewa... still, clear and calm graciously invites a peek into a silent reverie of its own making.

Sailing silkily across the Sorabora offered much to meet the eye. Open vistas of its waters all around, the many birds diving and swooping at closer range, people making their way across a suspension bridge in the distance, cast us all to

meditative gazing. Our silent observations were only punctuated by our boatsman's own reminiscences of the past, of life around the tank which was then home to crocodiles, some as large as 400 kilos! And how pilgrims flock to the tank during season. Today though, Sorabora Wewa was still, clear and calm graciously inviting a peek into a silent reverie of its own making.

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