Spirituality Amidst Na Trees and Pink Quartz

Posted on



An interesting blend of colours – lush green shrubbery and soaring clouds create a stark contrast against the quartzite rock

Tall, canopied trees provided shade to the grey, cobbled path that ran through the National Ironwood Forest (Jathika Namal Uyana). We were on our way to climb the Pink Quartz Mountain. Hushed and serene, the very air of the forest seemed to whisper in our ears.

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Wanawasi Rahula thero advocates unity between men and nature

It was late in the day when we reached the gates of the serene Namal Uyana, and thus we rushed to collect our tickets. Thereafter, it was a simple matter of crossing the road and stepping on to the cobbled path that stretched through the towering trees and creeping vines.

Within moments of entering the forest, a sense of peaceful serenity descended upon us; the air was quiet. Only the rustling of the leaves, the chirping of crickets and the chatter of monkeys broke the stillness. Amidst the calm, we could feel our minds slowly relaxing, letting go of everyday concerns so that we could better enjoy the tranquillity.

The ironwood tree, colloquially known as the ‘na’ tree, is considered to be sacred among Buddhists; it is believed that several Buddhas have attained enlightenment under the shade of this stately tree. Sri Lanka’s biggest concentration of ironwood trees are found within the premises of Namal Uyana, which derives its name from the flower of the na tree.

Under the leafy canopy, there were several species of plant life to be seen, although the predominant tree was the ironwood. Occasionally we would spot a ‘humbahak’ (a termite mound) near the path.

The smooth cobbled road bordered by beautifully luscious trees afforded us numerous sights of monkeys. In all likelihood accustomed to the presence of humans in their home, they were not shy about darting through the path ahead of us, foraging for food or playing pranks on each other while we stopped to take pictures.



The stupa is surrounded by tranquility

Soon enough, a sign ahead informed us that the ‘awasaya’ or the lodging of Wanawasi Rahula Thero, who identifies himself as merely a protector of the forest is nearby. In front of the awasaya lay a humble chamber which housed a golden statue of the Buddha in the Samadhi position.

After paying our respects to the Buddha image, we were once again back on the path. So far, we were diligently following the pathway, but a simple track tempted us with the promise of an ancient stupa, Bodhigaraya and ruins. The track created by numerous footprints led us off the path a bit further into the wilderness around us.

Ahead of us, an ancient brick stupa stood surrounded by trees. Elevated above the ground by a brick terrace with patches of moss growing on the surface, the stupa is a monument of a time gone by. Leaving behind the stupa, we continued on the track and came upon a rectangular Bodhigaraya. A young Bo sapling stood on middle of the Bodhigaraya, taking this ancient relic to a new era.

Having admired the scenery, we made our way to the original path. Soon after, we came across a vessel carved out of stone. This was known as the ‘Gal Pathraya’ (stone alms bowl), a steady trickle of water fell on to its depths. As we passed, there were signs of a dried stream bed with a few pools of clear water.

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So far, we were travelling on a well-constructed path. However, nature soon took dominance as the path came to an end. From there onwards, tree roots became our stair way. We were leaving behind the forest for the beautiful Pink Quartz Mountain Range – the largest of its kind in Asia.

Coming out of the forest cover, the mountain range spread out before us. At an elevation of 180 to 300 metres above sea level, the pink quartz mountain was bathed in the light of the evening sun. Occasionally dotted by stubborn shrubbery resisting the pull of the wind, the mountain was jagged and stark against the verdant hues of the trees.



Capture the unparalleled views of the landscape seen from the mountain

The climb up the quartzite rock surface was slightly jarring, as there were no handrails or stairs carved into the rock. Thus, we faced the challenge of finding secure footholds. Although the rock surface was jagged, mapping out a path to the top was an engaging task that we took up with enthusiasm.

At the summit of the mountain, there was a gleaming white statue of the Buddha. With the statue beckoning us, we began the climb. However, we were constantly distracted by the panoramic views of the surrounding landscape; a vast lake stretched away beyond the ironwood forest. Distant mountains and hills rose out of the otherwise flat landscape.

Since it was in the evening we were not hampered by the harsh glare of the sun. Thus, we eventually made our way to the Buddha statue. At the summit, we were buffeted by strong winds while we admired the scenery. By then, the sun had begun to set, and cast a golden light from the west that added to the experience.



Pay homage to God Dedimunda
on your way up the path

Rather than the baby pink shade we were expecting to see, the surface of the stone had a grey tinge to it. Archaeological research estimates that the mountain range was formed over 550 million years ago. The rock has been exposed to the air, humidity, sunlight and carbonic matter as well as weathering chemically since then. A heavy number of impurities are also contained in the quartzite rock. It is believed that the discolouration of the rock is largely caused by these factors.

As we were climbing down, we reflected on the fact that the Pink Quartz Mountain Range is a perfect testament to the impermanency of matter. Despite its beauty, the pink quartz was aging and its colour was fading.

Wanawasi Rahula Thero, with whom we spoke with after our descent further expounded on the subject. Having resided within the tranquil Namal Uyana for the past 27 years as its protector, he has seen the land change and adjust to the times. “The four elements of patavi (earth), apo (water), thejo (fire) and vayo (air) have come together to create the nature. As all things, it too is impermanent, and nature

is destroying its own creation” he said.

Namal Uyana is not just a place that abounds with natural beauty; its tranquility and stillness encourage visitors to search for spiritual fulfilment as well. Surrounded by the ironwood trees and other valuable trees and plants, you can learn to be at one with nature.




