Thai Temple In Mabima

Posted on
The elaborate entrance accentuated by gold, blue and red

A structure with multiple roof tiers, doors and windows in red and an atypical architecture in striking colour and design interrupts the serenity of the surroundings. This intrusion of vivacity adds a character of liveliness to the stillness and tranquillity of a Buddhist temple. A departure from the familiar minimalism associated with Sri Lankan temple design and decoration, the Thai-Sri Lanka Buddhist Cultural Centre in Mabima, Heiyanthuduwa, is a display of the exuberance of Thai culture.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena **Photographs** Isuru Upeksha

This temple is the first ever vihara built akin to Thai temple architecture in Sri Lanka and came to being as a fulfilment of a Thai Buddhist Monk’s desire to build a temple as an offering to the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha in Sri Lanka. It was established in 2011 under the stewardship of Ven Rassagala Seewali Thero. Having served in Thailand for many years, it was also Ven Seewali’s wish to establish a temple in Thai architecture in recognition of the religious ties that the two countries have had for centuries. The temple, thus edifying Thailand-Sri Lanka friendship also allows Sri Lankans to see and appreciate foreign temple architecture on local soil.

The dominant edifice in the nearly six acres of temple land is the ordination hall or the uposathakara built in true Thai style. It stands at an isolated elevation, thus giving it the prominence it deserves. The designs decorate the outer walls of the building in gold, red and blue and stand out amidst the beige base of the structure. The two-tiered roof is most significant for the decorations attached to the bargeboard; a mythical serpentine figure resembling the naga, facing away from the roof is another common aesthetic feature in Thai temples. The entrance to the ordination hall is dominated by a large symbol of the King of Thailand, considered a great patron of the religion in the country. The Thai numerical for nine adorns all other designs along the outer wall of this structure, a reference to the current monarch, who is the ninth to ascend the throne. Lotus floral patterns enhance the top of door frames and windows, while sculptured designs in cement and painted in gold embellish the exterior walls of the building as well the window and door frames. The Dharmachakra is yet another Buddhist symbol that has received a

skilful stroke of styling in accordance with Thai culture.

> The Artistry Of Thai Murals Etched On The Slender Structure That Ascends Like A Steeple With A Spire And A Belfry.

A sculpture of a bell-shaped stupa in gold is embedded just below the roof in the rear of the ordination hall. It faces the stupa in the temple under construction. The stupa will be a replica of the Phra Pathom Chedi, the tallest stupa in Thailand, situated in the city of Nakhon Pathom, a revered site where Buddhism was introduced to Thailand.

The altar inside the ordination hall has several images of the Buddha in different postures. Following the practice in Thailand, the images of the Buddha in the shrine are all made of bronze and painted in real gold. The main statue of the Buddha at the centre of the hall is placed on a large dais, crafted by hand by Thai artisans and embellished with uniform designs in coloured glass. An ornate stupa with a glass globe covers a smaller stupa that reveals a Sacred Relic of the Buddha, which remains exposed like the convention in Thailand. Smaller Buddha images, including a replica of the Jade Buddha Statue in Thailand also adorn the shrine.

The sermon hall is an open pavilion, another replica of Thai temple architecture. The high roof and the serpentine figures stand out yet again. Large bronze images of the Buddha coated in gold and gifted by Thailand have been placed in glass casings. The images of Seevali Maha Rahathan Wahanse, a disciple of the Buddha and Venerable Upali, the Thai missionary who came to Sri Lanka to institute the Siam Chapter and to re-establish the Upasampadha (rite of ordination) are the only two images other than that of the Buddha.

A sapling from the Sacred Bodhi Tree in Anuradhapura was planted by the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand nearly ten years ago. The boundary wall surrounding the Bodhi Tree has the familiar Sri Lankan images of dwarfs and guard stones and moonstones at the four entrances. Here again, the sacred tree is encircled by golden images of the Buddha placed in casings.

The bell tower in the temple stands away from the imposing structure of the *uposathakara*, amidst greenery. It is also a cynosure with the artistry of Thai murals etched on the slender structure that ascends like a steeple with a spire and a belfry.

Beyond this is a repository of rare herbs and fruits of many varieties.

The Thai-Sri Lanka Buddhist Cultural Centre has not only spurred a revival of religious ties between Siam and Sri Lanka, it has also initiated the donation of bronze images of the Buddha to ensure durability. In order to revive the practice of monks seeking alms on foot, the Centre has distributed 7,000 ‘alms-bowls’ from Thailand throughout Sri Lanka. During the past three years, the Centre has been ordaining Sri Lankan novice monks in Thailand. For the first time, the lay can live and learn the disciplined life of a monk in Thailand through a two-week temporary ordination programme successfully led by the Centre, which will be organised again in November of 2015.

191, Mabima, Heiyanthuduwa

(+94 11) 248 8196

thaitemplesrilanka.com

