The Pekoe Trail: Taking Trekking in Sri Lanka to New Heights

Posted on



From atop, one can see the distant mountains brush against the mist. There are swathes of greenery on cascading mountains. The perpetual waters flow in tranquility. Time stands still as one walks through the grasslands and towering trees. There is something wistful and ethereal about the landscape. The Pekoe Trail is Sri Lanka’s breathtaking journey through a rich ecosystem of many temperatures

through the central highlands, leading to an unimaginable journey of exhilaration, a tonic to the body and soul.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

The Pekoe Trail is a 300-kilometer- long walking trail set in 22 stages that passes through the central highlands of Sri Lanka. It’s the experience of a lifetime as one traverses through nature’s serendipitous abundance, the languid rivers, and the exuberant water- falls. But what is most rewarding is en- countering the communities along the trail, their traditions, food, and way of life. It is an invitation to discover Sri Lanka by foot. There is nature and adventure, history and culture, tea plantations and villages. The trail takes you through a diverse landscape that gives a glimpse into the heart of Sri Lanka.

The brainchild of adventurer Miguel Cunat, the Pekoe Trail can be taken in stages, with the first stage beginning in Kandy and the rest of the stages winding through Hatton, Horton Plains, Haputale, Ella, Uda Pussellawa, leading to Nuwara Eliya.

The Pekoe Trail, opened by President Ranil Wickremesinghe, responds to the travel industry’s evolving expectations. The great outdoors is taking hold of the hiker buff, those seeking the thrills and shrills of an active holiday, and those searching for nature’s tranquility for inspiration and rejuvenation.

The beauty of the trail is that it winds through an inherited colonial legacy. Miguel said the tea industry had already created the route, negating the need to clear forests for new paths. So, the experience is undoubtedly going to be engaging. Walking through tea plantations, detouring to reach women busy plucking tea leaves, learning the intricacies of the leaves that make the great Ceylon Tea, interacting with them, and listening to their experiences walking daily in some part of the trail. Or veering off the track with a guide who would know some secret place tucked away, a waterfall or a waterhole. It’s a trail of many blessings, spontaneous downpours, rare wildlife sightings, beautiful fauna and flora, and creating memories with people.

The Pekoe Trail is a labor of love, of meticulously curated routes from the many paths traversing multiple terrains. It was also challenging to map out the most

sensible and practical route that would be safe and accessible. It took ten years to map out the trail. An avid hiker himself, Miguel walked the walk to create the Pekoe Trail so that it could be experienced by not just the gung-ho gangs but also by families, friends, and honeymooners, for anyone from seven to seventy-seven, a path of least resistance through the mountain passes, the valleys, and the rivers, making it a worthwhile experience for everyone.

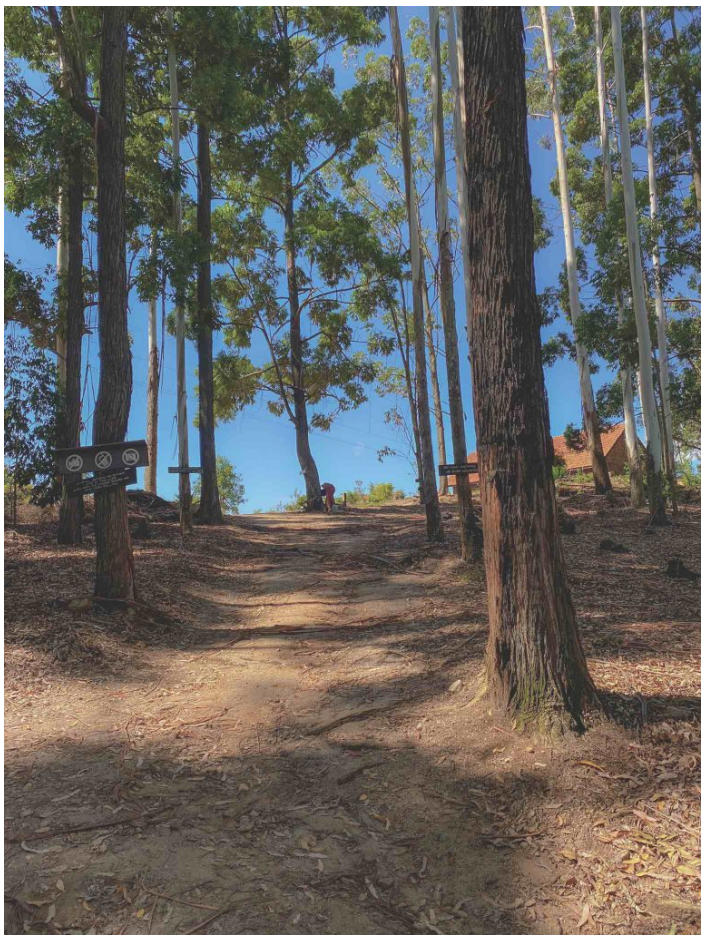
The trail, until 2019, was in patches, a bit of here and there, finally taking shape into a unified whole after many iterations and changes. What Miguel started came to fruition as many others joined him in his quest. They included friends, government agencies, and plantation companies. The European Union and USAID entered the project as donors to assist in creating a brand that began as an embryo that, over many years, has grown into a well-recognized, identifiable, well-positioned, and curated national asset for Sri Lanka. While he dived into the exercise with commitment, Miguel credits the tea plantation companies as the true architects of the route, whose contribution was immense. Part of the Pekoe Trail that winds through extensive tea plantations has been in existence for many years and maintained by its owners. The tea companies had supported the concept from inception, embracing the trail as a novel approach to marketing Ceylon Tea to the world, creating new stories around the iconic brand among visitors, and taking it to a global audience.



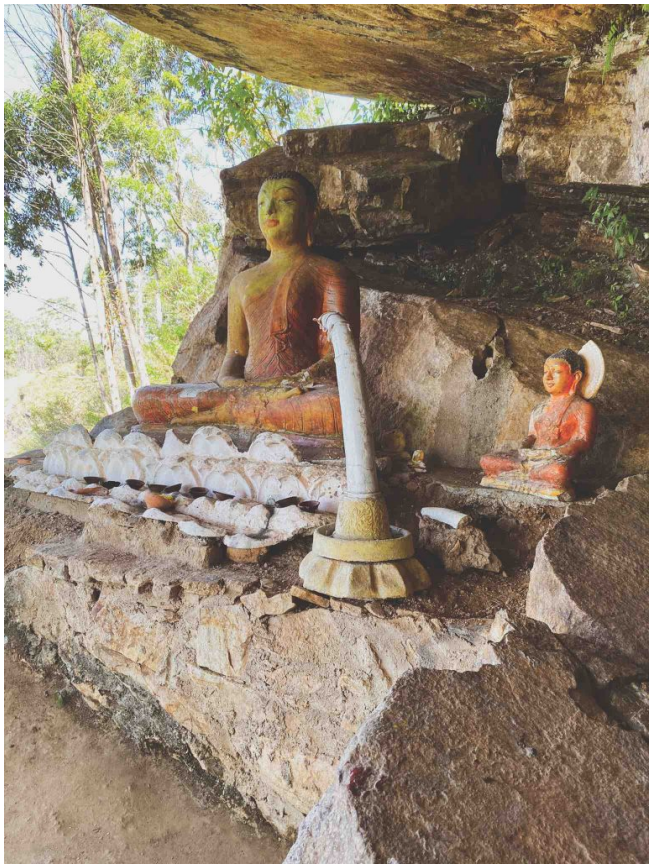
President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Miguel Cunat, the brainchild of Pekoe Trail.



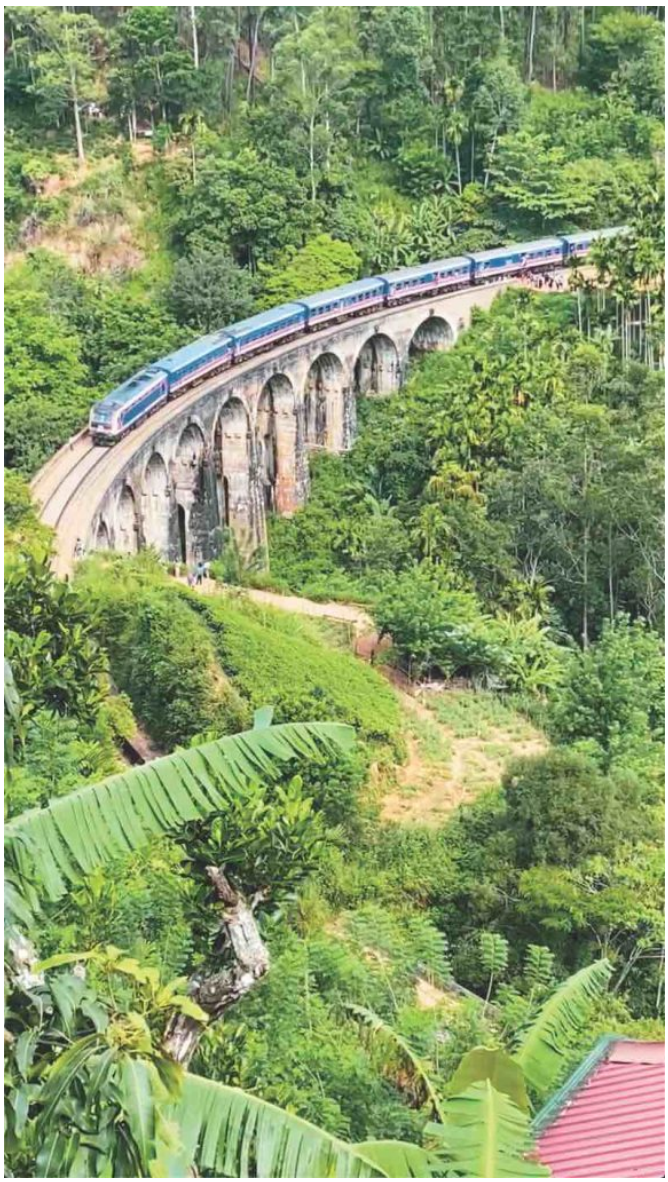
Encounter an abundance of tea plantations and wander into the island’s iconic Ceylon Tea.



The trail passes through many terrain.



Experience the island’s heritage along the trail. An ancient cave temple.


A breathtaking view of the iconic Nine Arch bridge in Ella.

The Pekoe Trail winds through multiple territories, hence the greater responsibility to treat every place respectfully. The Pekoe Trail is set to create new economic opportunities for small and medium entrepreneurs, the tea industry, and tourism. Still, all stakeholders must buy into the ethos of the trail through a cohesive consciousness towards treating the trail with respect and conducting themselves responsibly. Hence, in the Pekoe Trail, everyone participates in the governance of a

destination. The Pekoe Trail’s website provides a complete guide to the route, with every minute detail on every aspect of the trail, which is an eye-opener to amateurs and experts with the dos and don’ts and a list of guides and hotels along the route.

Miguel Cunat has lived in Sri Lanka for twenty-two years, working in tourism development and operations. He also consults with the Government of Sri Lanka and private companies on tourism initiatives and policies. In 2021, Conde Nast Traveler named him the Travel Specialist for Sri Lanka. Miguel, who is captivated by Sri Lanka’s nature and its people appeals to everyone who intends to go on the Pekoe Trail to take responsibility for its care by committing to zero pollution, of taking responsibility for waste management and maintaining the pristineness of the trail, so that the Pekoe Trail will continue to render the best travel experience in the world, making it a proud heritage of the island.

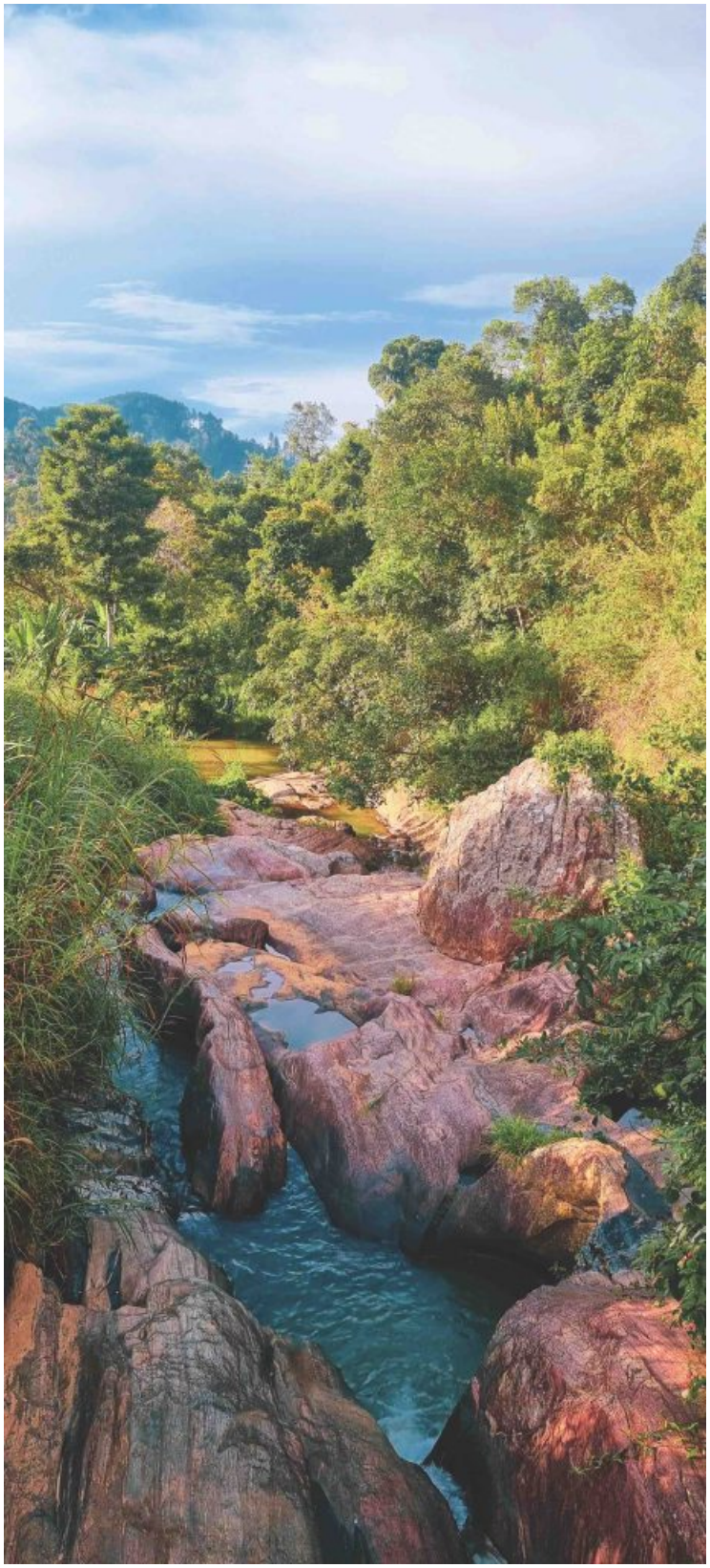
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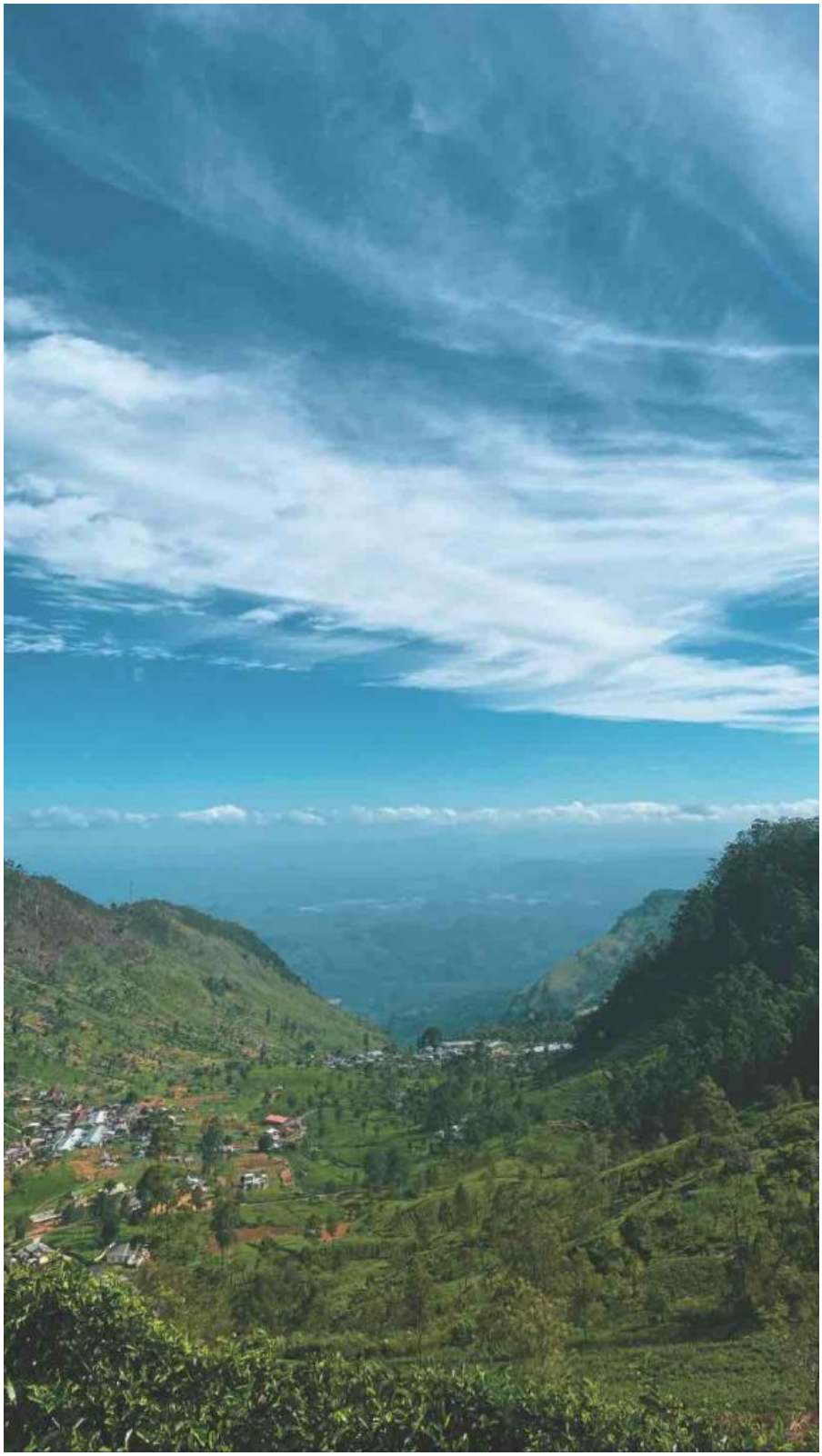
Be mesmerized by nature’s wonders. The mountains caressed by mist.



The trail through tea plantations.



Unimaginable tranquility.



Dramatic and awe-inspiring landscapes.