The Religious Fervour of August

Posted on

Sri Lanka abounds with religious devotion, rich tradition, and elaborate festivity all year round; yet it is in the month of August that the country celebrates three of the most important religious and cultural festivals – the Feast of Our Lady of Madhu in Mannar, the Dalada Perahera in Kandy and the Mahotsavam of the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil in Jaffna. Experience the customs and spirituality of these festivals and feel the soul and cultural heartbeat of this paradise island.

Words Keshini de Silva

Feast of Our Lady of Madhu Church



The sacred statue of Our Lady of Madhu taken on procession
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In Mannar is a miraculous statue of Our Lady, which draws many worshippers from around the world. The Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu was established amidst a cover

of forestry by Catholics who worshiped in secret during the Dutch period. During the British era the church began to grow.

Thousands make the Madhu pilgrimage for the main feast in August. Worshippers camp on the grounds from weeks ahead for the Grand Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady to Heaven. The religious festivities will commence with the hoisting of the flagpole, held on August 6. From then onwards novenas for Mother Mary will be held daily. The white and blue marble shrine will be decorated in Marian colours and flags for the feast. Vespers service will be held on the eve of August 14. To celebrate the grand feast, the High Mass will be held on August 15; this is generally under the auspices of the Archbishop of Colombo and the Bishop of Mannar. Following the religious services, the statue will be taken around the sacred grounds of the church in procession, surrounded by worshippers signing praise and worship to God and Our Lady.

Hoisting of the flag
August 6, 2018
Assumption of Mother Mary
August 15, 2018
Daily Masses are held in both Tamil (6am) and Sinhala (6.45am) on weekdays. During the weekends, Mass will be held at 11.15am in both Tamil and Sinhala.

Kandy Esala Perahera



The majestic tusker bearing the sacred Tooth Relic makes its way through the streets
©Sri Dalada Maligawa

Customarily known as the Dalada Perahera, this festival of rich pageantry and heritage art is a tradition that has been a part of Sri Lanka dating back to the Anuradhapura Era. After the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha or Dalada Vahansa arrived on the island, the procession was initiated by royal patronage under King Kirthi Sri Meghavarna. Today, it continues to take place annually within the citadel of Kandy, the final bastion of the Sri Lankan monarchy. It is believed that many of the artistes and performers who take part in the procession are descendants of the entourage that accompanied the Sacred Relic to Sri Lanka eons ago.

Weeks before the Nikini Full Moon Poya day in August, the city sparkles with shimmering lights. Thousands flock to the hill capital to watch the cultural pageant; this is a representation of the island’s artistic heritage and rich custom.

The religious festivities commence with the Kap Situweema, where the ceremonious ‘Kap’ is planted at the Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama and Pattini Devala, after which their processions commence. Five days later, the Kumbal Perahera occurs; this is a modest procession with tuskers, drummers, and the four devala processions. The Randoli Perahera that parade the streets of Kandy for the following five days are

magnificent with regally caparisoned tuskers, dancers and instrumentalists. Maha Randoli Perahera is the procession of the final night; this takes to the streets of Kandy in a triumphant bang with Whip Crackers leading the way. The traditional KandyanVes dancers are a key attraction that enthralls onlookers. The majestic tusker in elaborate caparisons carrying the Golden Casket encasing the Sacred Tooth Relic is the cynosure for devotees reflecting on the Dhamma; and the chants of ‘Sadhu Sadhu’ will be heard. The Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama and Pattini Devala processions follow towards the end. The Water Cutting Ceremony takes place during the early morning hours of August 26. After which, the Perahera concludes with the Day Perahera.

Kap Situweeme Mangalyaya – Aug 12, 2018
First Kumbal Perahera – Aug 16, 2018
Second Kumbal Perahera – Aug 17, 2018
Third Kumbal Perahera – Aug 18, 2018
Fourth Kumbal Perahera – Aug 19, 2018
Fifth Kumbal Perahera – Aug 20, 2018
First Randoli Perahera – Aug 21, 2018
Second Randoli Perahera – Aug 22, 2018
Third Randoli Perahera – Aug 23, 2018
Fourth Randoli Perahera – Aug 24, 2018
Final (Maha) Randoli Perahera – Aug 25, 2018
Water Cutting Ceremony – Aug 26, 2018
Day Perahera – Aug 26, 2018
Above details provided by the Sri Dalada Maligawa, Kandy.

Mahotsavam of Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil



Massive crowds attending the Ther (Chariot Festival)
©Varnan Sivanesan

The Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil, a magnificent structure with elaborate gopurams and interiors of detailed artistry, dates back to the Nallur Kingdom. The Mahotsavam, believed to have been held since the times of King Cinkai Arya, is an adoration of Lord Kandaswamy.

Mahotsavam begins with the Flag Hoisting Festival, followed by sacred rituals in worship of Lord Murugan. The festival days commence with Mancham, where Lord Murugan and his consorts are taken in procession. Devotees will also perform Kavadi. Vessels and chariots are used to carry images of the deity amidst chants of “Haro Hara”. On the Chariot Festival day, Lord Murugan (Sri Shanmuga) is placed on a silver throne and carried by worshippers in a trance of worship. With Theertham, the Mahotsavam begins its conclusion. Devotees from across the globe travel to Jaffna for the 28-day festival, which engulfs the North in the echo of sacred chants.

Kodiyetram – Aug 16, 2018
Mancham – Aug 25, 2018
Arunakirinathar Festival – Sept 1, 2018
Karthikai Festival – Sept 2, 2018
Sooriyotsavam – Sept 3, 2018
Santhanagopalar Festival – Sept 4, 2018

Kaliasavaganam – Sept 4, 2018
Kajavallimahavalliutsavam – Sept 5, 2018
Velvimanam – Sept 5, 2018
Thendayuthapani utsavam – Sept 6, 2018
Orumuga festival – Sept 6, 2018
Sapparam – Sept 7, 2018
Chariot festival (Ther) – Sept 8, 2018
Theertham – Sept 9, 2018
Lowering holy flag – Sept 9, 2018
Poongavanam – Sept 10, 2018
Vairavarshanthi – Sept 11, 2018