

TO BUTTALA IN A DAY AND BACK!

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With the Southern Expressway (E01) being completed, Hambantota via the Mattala exit can be reached in less than two and a half hours. Thus you can travel up to Buttala and experience the wildlife and witness the many cultivations in the area, and return to Colombo in a day.

We started our journey early in the morning entering the expressway from Kaduwela. As we progressed, the morning mist and early sunrays created a picturesque sight. The

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surrounding landscape changed continuously with the stretch from Matara to Hambantota being distinctively unique from the rest. Views of massive overhead bridges from a distant were awe-inspiring. With the completion of the final stages of the Southern Expressway, the Mattala Airport and Hambantota Harbour are linked with the city of Colombo, the commercial capital of the country.

We did not feel time passing and we soon reached the Mattala exit in less than two and a half hours. We were surprised and excited since traveling time had been reduced by more than half. We first headed towards the Buttala-Sella Kataragama Road. Scrub jungle prevalent in the Southern region bordered the road. A speck on the road, grew in size as we got closer, indeed, it was a giant of the jungle waiting by the side for some fruits or sugarcane from passersby. A short distance later we met another, in the middle of the road. These elephants merely stretch their trunks towards the vehicles and mean no harm. Along we journeyed energized by our encounters with elephants though we were not in a national park. Further away we were met by a couple of deer, and in another instance a mongoose ran across the road. Near a water hole, a group of painted storks was foraging for food in the water in a synchronized manner. We drove along and came across two more massive elephants on two separate occasions. Each time stretching their trunks and receding allowing the vehicles to pass.

Eager to explore the area, we headed along a small gravel path and came across acres of sugarcane, tall green stalks swaying in the wind. In the distance we could see a wadu kurulla (Baya Weaver) nest beautifully woven like nature's art. We journeyed towards Dambe in Sella Kataragama driving further inland and was impressed by the vegetable cultivations. Along the way we came across the Akkara Vissey Wewa, a reservoir where the water is used for agriculture and also people can bathe in an allocated area.

Two varieties of aubergines, wam batu and waga batu were bearing fruit in a home garden in Dambe. Sri Lankans love their aubergine curries, which are prepared in various ways. The farmer was preparing the land for further cultivation with water ways also in place. In the adjoining land, katu anoda (soursop) trees had fruits of various sizes. These fruits when ripe are ideal to be consumed raw as a fruit or to be made as a delicious drink. The Angun Ara, which is a small river was a short distance away. We walked along the sandy roads, it was apparent that when the river was full the road too would be underwater. However, on the day we traveled the river was a small stream, as rains had not reached as yet. The water of the river was clear and cooling.

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We thereafter headed towards Tissamaharama, where trees abundant with delum (pomegranate) and kilo pera (guava) caught our eyes. The delum were not yet a rosy pink but green as it was still the cultivating season. From little to larger fruits, and flowers too could be seen. Kilo pera is ideal with salt and pepper sprinkled on chunky pieces and the red kernels of the delum fruit are consumed as it is.

Journeying back towards the expressway, we were mesmerized by the impressive structure of the sluice gates of the Lunugamvehera reservoir and the surrounding waters. Acres of banana cultivation could also be seen from the bridge. In all areas the new season of cultivation had just started thus the trees were starting to bear fruit.

From Mattala, we entered the expressway and we were in Colombo in less than two and a half hours. We had seemingly done the impossible, we had traveled to Buttala and returned in a day.



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