



The picturesque view of the ocean at dusk from the Keerimalai pond

It was late afternoon as we journeyed towards Kankesanthurai (KKS). The sun was shining brightly exuding the heat of the northern peninsula. There was much to explore as we sought the numerous sites along the way.

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Winding through the roads of Jaffna, passing a massive statue of Lord Hanuman, in Chunnakam and thereafter the Maviddapuram Kandaswamy Kovil in Tellippalai we were on an adventure. Our first stop was the Kandarodai Temple also known as Kaduragoda Viharaya, which was located within a residential area in Chunnakam. Stupas of various sizes were visible amongst the palmyrah trees. Quiet and peaceful, it is believed that this is the resting place of 60 Arahants and their sacred remains have been placed within each stupa. While few complete stupas can be seen today, the foundations and layout of the remainder are visible as well.

The Buddha is believed to have rested at this site during his travels to Nagadeepa. Also according to legends, Sangamitta Theri had passed Kandarodai on her journey from Dambakolapatuna to Anuradhapura. While archaeological discoveries have unearthed many artefacts from this site, what remains to see at Kandarodai are the rock stupas that stand as a testament of time amidst the tranquil environs.



We dipped our feet in the glistening waters while observing the shipwreck a far

As we approached KKS, the mesmerizing blue ocean glistened in the afternoon sun. The iconic lighthouse stood tall and white, a beacon guiding those out at sea. The solid railway tracks ran parallel to the road and the last stop on the Northern tracks was Kankesanthurai. Farther we drove and soon reached a shipwreck just beyond the coast. The blue of the sky and the ocean merged perfectly creating a picturesque setting. Seashells adorned the beach, thus reflecting nature's beauty.

The spiritual energy of the Naguleswaram Kovil in Keerimalai, is one of pure divinity, as it is one of the five Iswarams dedicated to Lord Shiva in the island. The history of this Kovil dates back millennia to the arrival of a sage with mystical powers. The sage known as Nagula Muni was believed to have had a face that resembled a mongoose. He had meditated in a nearby cave, worshipping the Shiva Lingam and had bathed in the natural springs of Keerimalai, which had transformed his mongoose face to a human. Another story narrates a tale of a Chola princess in the eighth century who had face of a horse. She too had bathed in the mystical springs of the Keerimalai pond and her face had changed to the human form.



The interior with a clay-tile roof leading to the sanctum sanctorum is decorated with vibrant murals

Following the invasion of Jaffna by the Portuguese, the Hindu Kovils in the Jaffna peninsula including the Naguleswaram Kovil had been destroyed. However, the Kovil was rebuilt and what can be seen today is a colourful and vibrant Kovil, that is a divine place of worship. The compound is expansive with murals and statues. The Shiva Lingam within the sanctum sanctorum bears great spiritual power. The Kovil has a simple clay tile roof. Except for a small area at the back of the inner sanctum, the courtyards or passageways are roofed as well and have beautiful arches. There is a traditional feel and simplicity that exudes spirituality. Statues of other deities can be seen within the Kovil and these are of vibrant colours. The newly completed Raja Gopuram is 117 feet with nine storeys. The sculptures on the Gopuram depict various stories relating to God Shiva.

The Naguleswaram Kovil is special since it has the three principles together in one place, Thalam (Kovil and its precincts), Moorthy (deity) and Theertham (source of water). Beautiful remnants of the old Kovil still remain, and passing the banyan tree a short distance away, the mystical and natural Keerimalai water pond can be seen. The pond is large and mesmerizing with steps leading to the water from a natural spring. The water is believed to have healing and mystical powers and many who visit the Kovil, make sure that they have a bath in the pond. Just beyond is the great ocean spreading far and wide. The sun was setting

over the Northern sky, it was around 6.45 in the evening and there remained a faint light. We decided to take our chances and visit Dambakolapatuna in Madagal.



Nearly everyone visiting the kovil takes a dip in the Keerimalai waters, believed to possess healing and mystical powers

It was soon dark, but we did not give up. In a short while we had reached the site, which is known to be the landing place of Sangamitta Theri carrying the sapling of the Bodhi Tree. The temple stood serene in the night, with enough lights enabling us to see around.

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The white stupa and a large Bo tree enclosed, signified the event of thousands of years ago. It is said that King Devanampiyatissa received the Great Theri with the sacred Bo sapling at this port. A sculpture of this moment can be seen within the temple premises as well. In the darkness of night, the cooling waters of the ocean lapped at our feet. We could only imagine the grandiosity and significance of the arrival of Sangamitta Theri, who also brought with her 18 craftsmen of various skills. Just outside the environs of the Temple in the lagoon, a statue of Sangamitta Theri has been placed to symbolize this important moment of the island.



Symbolising Sangamitta Theri's arrival to the island with the sacred Bo sapling

With the night breeze cooling our senses we bid adieu, silent in our own thoughts, reflecting on our journey to KKS and the significance of the many sites we had seen.

