Ussangoda: Into The Realm Of The Surreal

Posted on



The unusual rock formations bordering the beach

The red and green landscapes rise and dip as in a dreamy meadow. Azure skies soar from horizon to horizon. I stand amidst the vastness, with a lingering feeling of my trifling existence. It is one of those places that inspires intrigue but its secrets and origins remain a mystery. And I am left to wonder about grand lore and eventualities of nature…

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

Hidden from view Ussangoda exists as a coastal plateau in the deep south near Ambalantota. Cruising through the townships and trappings of livelihoods,

visitors would simply pass by with no inkling of its existence. What strikes me at once is the very red soil and the absence of trees or the usual lushness of greenery. Instead thinly laid grass drape the bright redness, and ribbons of red paths traverse and loom with the undulating open plains.

The short grass seems distinctive to Ussangoda and the only interruptions are pockets of shrubs and large boulders that appear to have fallen arbitrarily in place. The shrubs comprise largely of cacti and meandering along the expanse I glimpse birdlife that includes bee eaters, peacock and yellow wattled lapwings. On the ground are borrows for the more nocturnal inhabitants such as kangaroo rats.

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There are many stories and theories that surround Ussangoda offered as explanations for its many unique attributes. For instance the deep red soil not found elsewhere in the region has led to the belief that a meteorite may have struck this area. The redness is said to be as a result of the high content of iron aside from other minerals. Further signs that may or may not support this theory are the uneven cliffs that comprise of unusual rock formations along the vertical drop to the beach strip, and the blackened rocks that appear scorched from heat. Aside from the unsubstantiated theories are the legends and lore that shroud Ussangoda deeper in mystery.

These legends resonate like an undying echo amongst locals. One of the more popular stories derived from mythology, is that the ancient King Ravana used this plateau as a landing site for his peacock chariot, “dandumonara”. This legend finds further grounds with the incident of Hanuman, the monkey god who arrived to the Island. To seek revenge from Ravana for capturing the princess Sita from India, Hanuman set fire to Ravana’s ‘airport’ or what is believed to be Ussangoda today. These fanciful legends only add more lure to Ussangoda. Apart from its natural beauty and mythological charm Ussangoda is also certified as an archaeological site.

Strolling along the breathtaking expanse, the coastal limit emerges abruptly and I gaze across the tumultuous sea that laps against an inviting beach strip. A fishing village sleeps easily in its refuge and the breakwater, a trail of fishing boats and housings are the signs of an active fishing harbour here.

The blue depths carry an endless view and even a glimpse of the lighthouse in the farthest distance. Directly below are also curious rock formations and I am quick to venture down a safe descent to have a closer look. The powdery beach strip arches end to end, and the cascading rock formations that appeared roughly hewn from above, loom large as life with its unusual tiers and colourations. I touch its crusty surfaces that look as though they might crumble to bits, yet here it has stood for as long as anyone has known of its existence. I can only be left to puzzle over this phenomenon with what little information or findings that exist on the mysteries of Ussangoda. It remains frozen in time and space as if to offer its silent story.

It leaves an otherworldly impression on those who wander into its red, green and blue realm

Whether it is the ground zero of a meteorite impact or the origins of fantastical legends, it leaves an otherworldly impression on those who wander into its red, green and blue realm.

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