

Wellawatte Beachside Stroll



Silhouette of people making memories

Wellawatte, ‘Wella’ meaning ‘sea sand’ and ‘Watte’ meaning ‘garden’, has a getaway back door from its bustling city work and living, into a wonderland of oceanic charm. We sometimes travel long distances to find peace of mind from our mundane lives; yet, right here lies a quick fix – a bit of sand and sea that sets you free.

Words Sonali Kadurugamuwa Photographs Prabath Chathuranga and Indika De Silva

We had always known it was there, on the other side, close to where we spend most of our time... our work places. If we listen as well as we should, we can hear it and at times see its grayish blue gaze beam through meager gaps of thick concrete jungle that wall the city’s edge. Wellawatte is mostly a working city, every nook and cranny overflows with diverse activity, offices over here, restaurants and fast food stalls over there, bargain shopping, cinemas, houses and apartments in between. But that’s not all...

Dodging traffic and even zigzagging our way through hoards of other pedestrians

we eagerly headed towards Marine Drive — a main road running parallel to the Galle Road, just beyond the hurdle of buildings, alongside the railway tracks of the Bambalapitya and Wellawatte stations. The tracks sat atop a short bund and from Marine Drive the level of the sea, just beyond it, seemed to meet at the same height, with no intermission. It was only after we walked the incline crossing over the railway tracks, that we saw the long strip of beach fringing the ocean. After work, before the evening dusk turned dark, we had made our way into a haven, where the breeze never ceased, but only got stronger and we literally let our hair down, let the spray of ocean and soft beach sand leisurely cure a stressful day.

Mount Lavinia beach hung vaguely in the distance at one end of the shoreline, the Colombo Harbour at the other. The twin towers of the World Trade Centre, although farther inland seemed closer to the ocean than met the eye, with what appeared to be a brush stroke of sea spray edging towards it. The sea before us danced; with swelling highs and lows... we were transfixed in its grace until it splashed our clothes with a salty yet sweet awakening, making us giddy with amusement.

Children, some cautious of the thick foam approaching their curious feet, ran away in mix of happy yet frightened hysteria, others were sent rolling up to shore along with the playful tide. Families, new loves, people walking their dogs and even anglers, were all participants of their own recreational activities by the seaside. A few daring souls swam farther into the ocean to inspect what seemed like a wreck, in the distance. However, we felt quite comfortable being at one with sea on its shore... although beautiful, the Indian Ocean can be unpredictable, all the same.

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The beach sands were white and transitioned into a dull gold when ocean waves came onto shore.

The footprints on them multiplied as more crowds kept pouring in and suddenly we were among many others who were here to make use of this tidal bliss and the sands that soothed the senses. We heard the numerous toots of train whistles at their busy stations, collecting and taking home, who may have been those regular commuters who are known to come from as far south as Matara to work in

Colombo. The trains went chugging along their way full to the brim with passengers that squeezed through whatever crevices they could find between their fellow travellers to watch the coming of the sunset. We, on the other hand, had a front row seat — on the sand!

Sundown closed in and although we hadn't realised it earlier, each and every one of us was using this time as an escape not only to wash our heads off of our programmed lives, but we were also here to add to or even change our everyday lifestyles. Watching the sunset by the city of Wellawatte, we became conscious of the fact that this place, just a few minutes from the city, was not to be taken for granted. Its preservation needs to be fostered, if we are to keep coming back.

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