

The Teardrop of the Indian Ocean: Sri Lanka

By Ms. Preethi Warriar

warrier.preethi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Sun, sands, sea, mountain, culture, heritage, wildlife; if there is one abode that's an amalgamation of all wonders of nature, it's this little island nation, Sri Lanka. Ramayana comes to life here, in the majestic hills of Nuwara Eliya. Lord Buddha is omnipresent with his massive statues guarding every nook and junction of the island nation. The mighty Indian Ocean lashes the sun-kissed beaches of Colombo. The kindness towards animals becomes evident with a visit to Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage and Kosgoda Turtle Hatchery.

Keywords

Ramayana, Tooth relic, Elephant orphanage



Introduction

During our eight day-long visit to the paradise island Sri Lanka, not only did I have the good fortune to witness the rich cultural heritage that our neighboring country had to offer, but also the greenery, ocean, and wildlife. Our trip commenced from the city of Kandy, followed by day trips to Sigiriya and Dambulla. From Kandy, we traveled along the picturesque mountains, to Nuwara Eliya, and later to the serene beaches of Bentota and the vibrant city Colombo.

Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage

Our journey from Colombo airport to Kandy began with a stop-over at Pinnawala elephant orphanage. The Elephant Orphanage was established by the Sri Lankan Department of Wildlife Conservation in 1975 for feeding and providing care and sanctuary to orphaned baby elephants that were found in the wild. It was indeed a sight to watch the elephants being fed, calves drinking bottled milk and the pachyderms being marched to the Oya river for their bath. It was heartening to witness this action of kindness towards animals, an entire reserve dedicated to orphaned elephants, being nurtured with such care and love.

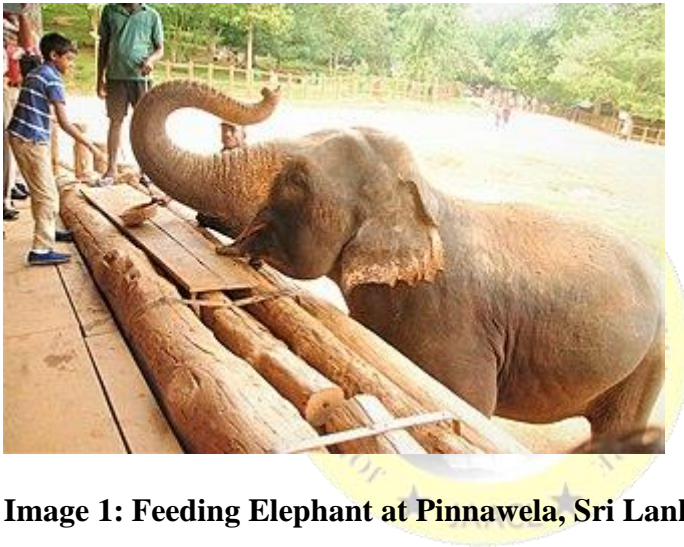


Image 1: Feeding Elephant at Pinnawela, Sri Lanka

Tooth Relic Temple, Kandy

On the banks of the Bogambara lake in the enchanting city of Kandy, stands the magnificent Tooth Relic Temple. Sri Dalada Maligawa or the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic is a Buddhist temple in the city of Kandy, Sri Lanka. It is located in the royal palace complex of the former Kingdom of Kandy. The tooth relic temple enshrines relics of what is believed to be the actual teeth of Lord Buddha in a well-secured golden casket. After Lord Buddha was cremated, his four canine teeth were taken from the ashes. These teeth are regarded as the holiest relics of Buddhism. It's the fourth tooth, the tooth relic of the

Kalinga, that is today enshrined at the Sri Dalada Maligawa. When a neighboring kingdom waged war with King Guhasiva of Kalinga to get hold of the Tooth relic, for its safety, the tooth relic was taken out of India and sent to Sri Lanka with his daughter Princess Hemamali. It was placed on a gold lotus flower and enshrined inside a nested jeweled casket fronted by two large elephant tusks.



Image 2: Sacred Tooth Temple

Sigiriya Rock

A comfortable two-hour drive from Kandy takes you to another historical marvel of Sri Lanka, The Sigiriya Rock Fortress. The queue that day was long, but I was surprised to find absolutely no line jumping. People waited patiently for their turn along the winding stairway. The faraway statue of Lord Buddha, adds to the beauty. Not to mention the size of the rock, the Lion Paws, and the cool garden courtyard. Sigiriya is an Ancient Rock Fortress and Palace built by King Kashyapa during the reign of 473 – 495 which is standing majestically 660 feet straight up. The word Sigiriya or the Sinhagiri means the Lion's Rock where you have to climb up 1200 steps before you reach the Lion Rock Fortress on top of Sigiriya. The entire trip takes about three hours, from the base to the top

of the rock. With ancient paintings and frescos maintained so well, the Sigiriya rock fortress is no doubt, a UNESCO Heritage site and perhaps the eighth wonder of the world.

Dambulla Cave Temple

Our next stop was the Rangiri Dambulla Cave Temple, or the Golden Temple, with a huge golden statue of Lord Budha, towering over the road and the skies. Statue. The Rangiri Dambulla Cave Temple is a living Buddhist site that is focused on a series of five cave shrines. Inhabited by forest-dwelling Buddhist monks since the 3rd century BCE, these natural caves have been transformed continuously throughout the historical period into one of the largest and most outstanding Buddhist complexes in the Southern and South-Eastern Asian region, showcasing innovative approaches to interior layout and decoration.

The climb to the temple is simple and the rich interiors showcase Lord Budha in various postures and ancient paintings and murals.

Nuwara Eliya

We set off the next day to the scenic hill station of Nuwara Eliya from Kandy, there's soothing greenery surrounding us all around. The mist lifts off the tea gardens as we see women with baskets, joyfully plucking tea leaves. A land of waterfalls, a trip to Nuwara Eliya is incomplete without a visit to Devon falls or the Lovers Leap Falls.

But what sets Nuwara Eliya apart is, it is believed that King Ravana held Sita Devi captive here. Aadhishakti Seetha Amman temple stands testimony to this. A waterfall behind the temple is supposed to be where Seeta Devi drank water from, and the rocks bear some marks which resemble footprints, Lord Hanuman seems to have landed at this point. Our driver tells us, that the mountains here have black soil, indicating that, Lord Hanuman did

actually set fire to the Ashoka Vatika, with his tail. Nuwara Eliya is the land of Ramayana indeed, so many stories just come alive.

Boating on the vast Gregory Lake, the colonial post office, the beautiful and well-maintained botanical gardens, light rains, cold weather, make Nuwara Eliya one of the most sought after destinations in the world.

Bentota Beach

A long six-hour downhill drive brings us from the mountains to the sea, Bentota beach. Bentota has always been renowned as the water sports capital of Sri Lanka with the hoteliers in the area actively promoting water sports from an adrenaline-filled speed boat and jet ski riding, windsurfing, boogie boarding, water skiing, kite surfing, to a leisurely ride on a banana boat. The mighty Indian Ocean sparkles in its sea-green best and the view of the sunset sets the most restless mind to peace.

Kosgoda Turtle Hatchery

Enroute Bentota to Colombo, we stopped at the Kosgoda Turtle Hatchery. The Turtle Care Centre at Kosgoda beach is one of 18 turtle hatcheries along the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The center is located in the South Western coastal village of Kosgoda and was established in 1981. It is also very popular as all five species of turtles that visit Sri Lanka nest in Kosgoda. This is not so with many of the other hatcheries around the island whose beaches host only some of the species.

The center functions mainly as a hatchery and makes huge efforts to increase the rate of hatching and survival of baby turtles in their very initial stages. However, the Care center

also works on sick or injured adults; treating them and releasing them back into the ocean. They also run volunteer programs and awareness programs for local and international visitors.

It was indeed fun, observing the various variety of turtles and picking up the little ones, and actually holding them in our hands. The location is serene as well, bang on the Kosgoda beach.

Colombo

Colombo is the executive and judicial capital of Sri Lanka. Situated on the west coast of the island, just south of the Kelani River, Colombo is a principal port of the Indian Ocean. It has one of the largest artificial harbors in the world and handles the majority of Sri Lanka's foreign trade.

Colombo's important buildings include the Secretariat, the Town Hall, the Clock Tower, Independence Memorial Hall, St. Lucia's Cathedral, and the Galle Sea Face. Other distinctive buildings in the city are the Wolvendahl Church, the University of Colombo, several Buddhist and Hindu temples, and the residences of the head of state and of the prime minister.



Image 3: Colombo

Colombo has numerous parks and playing fields. Among them are the Galle Face Green by the sea, the Vihara Maha Devi Park, and the Ridgeway Golf Links. Sea bathing and surfing can be enjoyed at Mount Lavinia Beach, which is south of the city.

The shimmering lights, busy malls, cool green gardens, disciplined traffic, the sea and the lakes make Colombo a modern, fashionable bustling city. A mix of culture and style.

Hospitality

I think an article about Sri Lanka wouldn't be complete without talking about the warmth of her people. Every individual is so very polite, trying to help you in whatever little manner possible. The queues at some sites were serpentine, but there was no pushing, shoving or

line jumping, in fact, the security personnel at the Tooth Relic Temple went out of the way to help me locate my family when I couldn't find them for a while.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka is a rich combination of all marvels that nature has to offer. My only regret is, couldn't extend my stay by a week more perhaps, to visit the famous Trincomalee beach, Yalla National park, and the ancient capital city of Anuradhapura. I realize I definitely need to revisit the island nation to cover this part of the journey.

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