



TRAVELOGUE

In the land of the lion with the sword

The island of Sinhala, or Sri Lanka as we know it today, is a country beautiful beyond expectations. The warmth of its people, the neat and clean roads, the delicious food - everything is impressive. Most surprising were the smiling faces of immigration officers at the airport. I bet no one has seen that anywhere else in the world!

COLOMBO: BEGINNING WITH THE CAPITAL

The moment we stepped out of the Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo, we knew it was a good choice as a destination. The guide said our hotel was by the sea, and it would take a while to get there, across traffic congestion, and so we should eat something on the way.

We decided to opt for something traditionally Sri Lankan. So we went into a restaurant. Among the various food items on display, we spotted something that looked like our 'Chittoi Pitha', with a poached egg on top, seeing which Nowshin exclaimed in excitement, "These are hoppers! I saw it featured on a show by Peter Kuruvita's 'My Sri Lanka' on Travel and Living! And this looks like Malu Paan (a type of triangular bread). We must have this!"

Some people seem to dislike Sri Lankan cuisine for its use of coconut and coconut oil, but we became instant fans of the delicious stuff after the very first experience.

By late evening, through traffic and across the city to almost its very boundaries, we finally made it to Hotel Berjaya at

Lavinia, right by the seashore.

We were most surprised to see rail tracks by the water. The wild waves of the sea on one side, and the whistling trains sliding right by it every so often. How very surprising!

Right by the sea and the tracks are a whole alley of restaurants, where we had dinner. We finished dinner in the flickering

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The next morning we set out to see Colombo. The British made this city the capital of Sinhala after taking over power in 1815, but the port city was well known to ancient mariners and businessmen for its harbour, even more than 2000 years ago. It

gained recognition as a port after the Portuguese came here in the year 1505. The city abounds in the architectural creations of the Dutch, the Portuguese, and the British. In Colombo, you will find among others the Saint Anthony's Church, All Saints Church, Wolvendaal Church, Seema Malaka Temple, many Buddhist temples, the old parliament house, Premadasa Stadium,

and the Old Town Hall. If you have time, you can also visit the museum, and the the Kailawasanathan Swami Mandir, the oldest and largest Hindu Temple here.

Colombo is such a clean city that it appears to be a city in the western hemisphere of the world. Even the sea beach is unusually clean. Multitude of people move about the Galle face sea beach, eating crab and shrimp fry, chips, and all other fried

street food goodies, yet there is no litter at all!

The Sri Lankan cricket star Sangakara is quite a popular figure, and hence people in the group demanded we check out his restaurant "Ministry of Crab." It's situated in an open mall at the centre of the city's main business district. I was quite jealous to see such open sitting space in the centre of Colombo's main business centre - the counterpart of our Motijheel.

I should mention, if you want to get any shopping done in Sri Lanka, do it in Colombo. There are quite a few large shops like ODEL and Cotton Collection. The items you can get from Sri Lanka are tea, herbal cosmetics, precious and semi-precious stones, cotton clothes, and spices. Fill your bag to your heart's content with various herbal cosmetic items from Nature's Secrets. There is also a Twin Tower, used as a commercial building. And that is how we used up two days sight-seeing in Colombo.

KANDY: WHERE BUDDHA RESIDES ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP

After two days of taking in the sights of Colombo, we headed to the mountain city of Kandy. Designated a part of World Heritage, Kandy is among the most sacred places for followers of Buddhism. The Sinhala king had been able to just keep this part of the island free of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British colonisers, although it was finally annexed by the British in 1815.

SEE PAGE 20

