

Pigeon Island in the East

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Pigeon Island, about one kilometre from the Nilaveli Beach, a scenic beach to the north of Trincomalee, is a very popular destination for local and foreign tourists. Pigeon Island is one of the two Marine National Parks in Sri Lanka and has been designated as a National Park due to its ecological value. As it is a very popular tourist destination, a boat service is also in operation to the Island.

According to legend, Pigeon Island derives its name from the hundreds of blue rock pigeons that inhabit the island. Pigeons nesting among the high rocks of the island bring a beautiful view and Ornithologists have said that Pigeon Island is one of the few places in Sri Lanka where rock pigeons can be found.

This species of pigeon is found in several subspecies and the subspecies found in Sri Lanka can also be found in India. Given the fact that Pigeon Island is separated from the sea, the chances of those pigeons breeding are less and the Island is also known as a haven for migratory birds.

National Park

Pigeon Island National Park is one of the two marine national parks in Sri Lanka. The national park is one km off the coast of Nilaveli, in the Eastern Province, encompassing an area of 471.43 hectares. The island consists of two islands; large Pigeon Island and small Pigeon Island. The large Pigeon Island's highest point is 44.8 metres above mean sea level.

The national park is within the dry zone of Sri Lanka and the mean annual temperature is around 27.0 °C (80.6 °F). The annual rainfall ranges between 1,000–1,700 millimetres while most of the rain is received during the North-Eastern Monsoon season from October to March. Given its invaluable ecological value, Pigeon Island was designated as a sanctuary in 1963 and was re-designated as a national park in 2003.

The purpose of making Pigeon Island a national park was to protect the pigeon-laying habitats and the coral reefs. Despite being a sanctuary, the corals were broken off by various people and were later sold to tourists on the Nilaveli Beach.

However, following the declaration of the island as a national park, such activities have ended.

Fishing within one kilometre radius of Pigeon Island is prohibited since the biggest threat to the island is illegal fishing with dynamite.

The Navy and Forest Department officials are deployed to nab those who are engaged in illegal fishing around the island.

A BOAT SERVICE TAKES TOURISTS FROM NILAVELI BEACH TO PIGEON ISLAND. HOWEVER, DUE TO THE PREVAILING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE COUNTRY, THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS VISITING PIGEON ISLAND, LIKE ALL OTHER TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN THE COUNTRY, HAS BEEN GREATLY REDUCED.



Coral reefs

A 200-metre long and 100-metre wide beautiful coral reef can be found in the shallow sea areas around the larger island and it records about 100 very rare coral species not found anywhere else in Sri Lanka. It is considered as an ecosystem with high biodiversity.

This coral reef is home to over 100 species of corals and 300 species of parasitic fish.

The coral system in the sea areas around the Pigeon Island is also important and the reef was not damaged by the heat waves in the 1998 floods.

Colourful fish of all sizes swim through the colourful coral reefs in the



area are creating breathtaking views for thousands of tourists visiting this island. Among the fish species here are endangered species such as butterfly fish, jellyfish and sea urchins.

Pigeon Island is a popular tourist destination for both local and foreign tourists during the period from July to Sep-

tember every year.

The tourists are provided with the opportunity to dive into the sea and observe the corals by swimming alongside the colourful fish.

A boat service takes tourists from Nilaveli Beach to Pigeon Island. However, due to the prevailing Covid-19 pan-

demic in the country, the number of tourists visiting Pigeon Island, like all other tourist destinations in the country, has been greatly reduced.

As a result, many people who used to make a living by providing boat services have lost their livelihoods.

Although the tourism industry has brought several benefits to the country such as generating foreign exchange and creating employment for the people, the environmental damage caused by the large number of tourists visiting Pigeon Island is not insignificant.

Therefore, if the authorities are not able to restrict the arrival of tourists, it is important to formulate a systematic and long-term plan to protect this valu-

