

# Maadu River in the South

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**T**he Maadu River and its associated ecosystems is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the Southern Province. Many people like to experience a boat ride on the Maadu River. The mangrove ecosystem along it and the archipelago attract more and more local and foreign tourists.

In the past, this River had many islands, but today only a small number of islands exist. However, there are unique stories and events about each of these islands, and legends are there that at one time even the Sacred Tooth Relic was hidden on one of the islands along this river to protect it from enemies.

Most of the other rivers in Sri Lanka start from the central hills and flow downwards, but the Maadu River differs from other rivers since it originates from the lower part of the country in the Southern Province. It starts from the 'Pol Athukanda' area in Uragaha in the Galle District and can be seen joining the ocean after a short journey of about four kilometres.

Although the other rivers in the country flow downstream, feeding on many other areas and eventually joining the ocean, the Maadu River flows through a limited area and eventually joins the ocean from the Balapitiya area, marking its destination.

It was named a Ramsar Wetland in 2003 because of the biodiversity value of the Maadu River and its ecosystem. It is the third Ramsar wetland named in Sri Lanka and apart from that there are several Ramsar wetlands such as Bundala in Sri Lanka. In addition, the Maadu River-area was declared a sanctuary in 2006.



**THE PRESENT DAY TEMPLE WAS BUILT BY THE LATE SIR KALUHATH SAMSON DE ABREW WIJAYA GUNARATNE RAJAPAKSA WHO LIVED IN THE MAHA KAPPINA WALAWWA IN BALAPITIYA AT THAT TIME AT A COST OF AROUND RS. 10,000 WITH THE CONSENT OF HIS WIFE**

Anyone who has heard about the Maadu River will always be reminded of the associated mangrove ecosystem. The total mangrove distribution in Sri Lanka is about 10,000 hectares, of which about 23 are rare mangroves in the Maadu River.

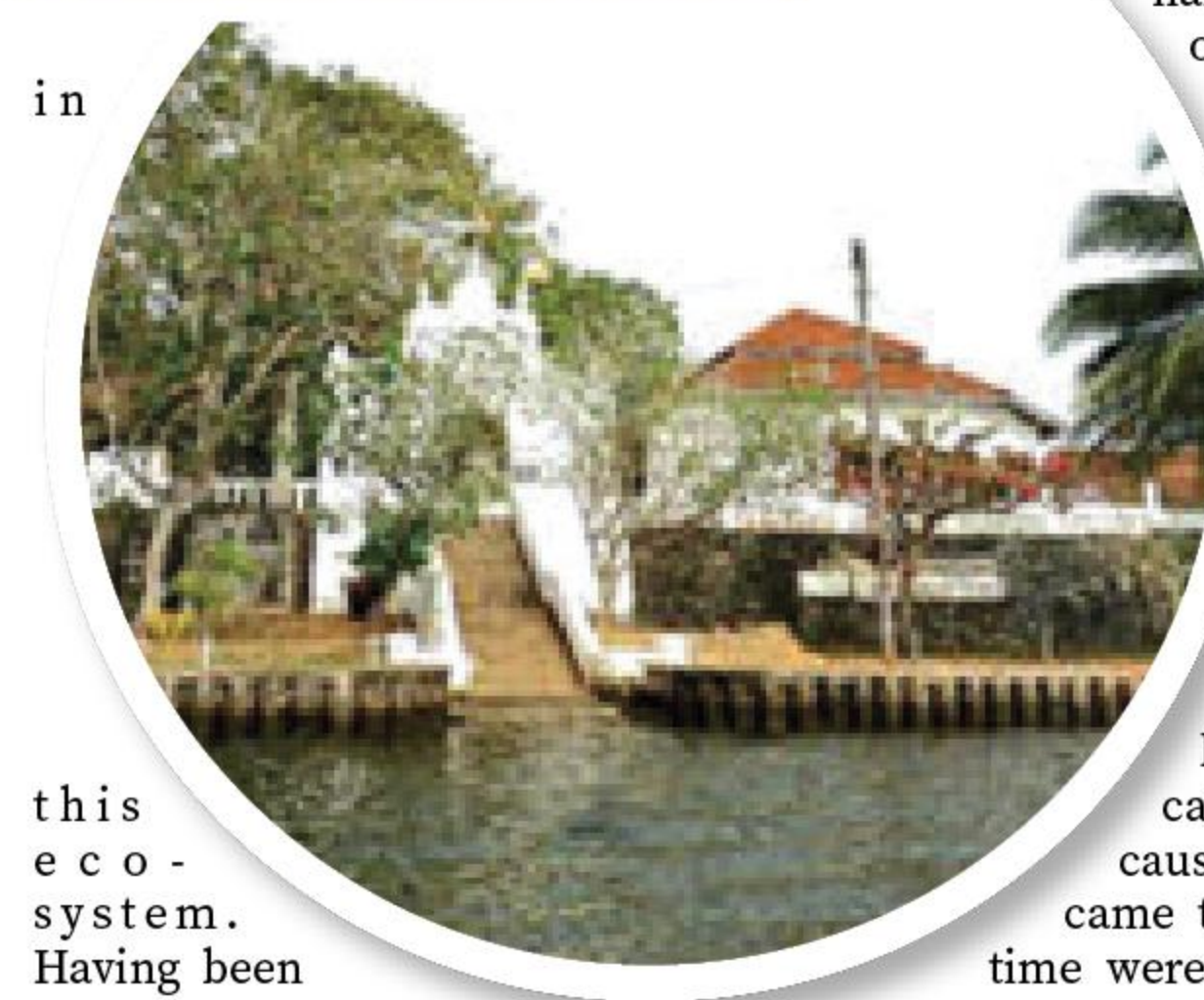
Another special feature is the presence of a mangrove plant in this area which is not found in other mangrove systems but is endemic to the Maadu River ecosystem. It is called "Rathmilla" and the plant has not been found anywhere else. The fact that there are only about 50 such plants in the vicinity of the Maadu River shows how rare it is.

## Biodiversity

About 300 species of plants belonging to 96 genera have been recorded in this ecosystem, of which about 19 species are endemic to the country. However, about eight species of plants have already been identified as endangered. In addition, invasive plants such as *Gandapana*, *Weli Anoda*, *Mahogany*, *Japanjabara*, *Hydrilla* and *Salvinia* can also be found in association with this ecosystem.

In addition to plant species, a number of species of animals can be found

in



this ecosystem.

Having been named a Ramsar Wetland, it has also been found that about thirteen species of migratory birds flock to the area during the winter. It is also home to a large number of fish that survive under the three conditions of saltwater, freshwater and brackish water. Out of them, several fish species are threatened with

extinction. At present, crocodiles are seen growing on numbers along the Maadu River and pythons and squirrels are also abundant. More than twenty mammals have been recorded in the area and 14 species of snails can also be found there.

'Kothduwa' is one of the important islands in the Maadu River. The Kothduwa Rajamaha Vihara on the island is a historical place of worship with a long history and the present day temple was built around 1881 AD.

## The Kothduwa

According to sources, Devapathiraja, the ruler of the South during the reign of King Parakramabahu II, planted a Bo Tree in the Rajamaha Vihara. The sacred tooth relic is also believed to have been hidden in this island at one time, in order to protect it from the Western nations.

The present day temple was built by the late Sir Kaluhath Samson de Abrew Wijaya Gunaratne Rajapaksa who lived in the Maha Kappina Walawwa in Balapitiya at that time at a cost of around Rs. 10,000 with the consent of his wife.

## Seema Malakaya

In 1872, when the late Ven. Ganasmuttapaka Jagara Thera of Burma visited Ceylon to pay homage to the shrines, he was received by Maha Mudaliyar Rajapaksa of the Maha Kappina Walawwa. Rajapaksa sought the help of Ven. Jagara Thera to reconcile the Amarapura Sect which was divided into three sections at that time and accordingly the Ven. Thera was advised to build a 'Seema Malakaya' (The place where the Upasampada ceremony is held).

Accordingly a *Seema Malakaya* was built by Rajapaksa by the Maadu River and as a tribute to Thera, it was named "*Schweizin Seema Malakaya*". Its first Upasampada ceremony was held in 1872 under the patronage of Ven. Jagara Thera. At present the annual Upasampada ceremony of the Amarapura Sri Saddhamawansa Nikaya is held there.

## Islands

According to sources, there have been more than 50 islands along the Maadu River in the past, and ecologists attribute the location of such a large number of islands to past seismic activity. Unfortunately, only a small number of islands remain today.

'Kurundu Dupatha' or Cinnamon Island is one of the most famous islands in the Madhu River. Cinnamon drying, as the name implies, as well as other related activities are done on this island.

There is an island that is not visited by many during the Maadu River tour and it is called 'Nai Duwa'.

It looks like a forest and according to the ancients who lived along the Maadu River, it was called 'Nai Duwa' because the snakes that came to the villages at that time were caught and left into this island.

Another island in the middle of the Maadu River is called the 'Satha Paha Duwa' and it can be identified as the smallest island in the middle of the river. There is even a small shrine here and the villagers say that people used to perform various rituals in the shrine in the past.