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If someone has studied the Southern province, they may have heard of Bonavista College, Galle, which is located on a beautiful mountain range in the Unawatuna area. The history of that mountain and the surrounding area goes back to the story of Rama-Ravana.

Even today, this mountain range has a beautiful ecosystem that attracts local and foreign tourists, and various researchers have said that it is the highest point of gravity in the world. In addition, there are a number of plants in this area, including herbs that cannot be found anywhere else in the country.

Known as Rumassala, this magnificent mountain range has such an attractive ecosystem that Arthur C. Clarke, a scientist who lived in Sri Lanka and made a great contribution to the field of astronautics, had also been living and studying in a house at the foot of Rumassala for many years.

Rumassala is a land rich in natural beauty and folklore tells a very interesting story about its origin. The Rama-Ravana story is the main basis for that. Rumassala is so closely associated with the story of Rama-Ravana that even its name is based on the story of King Ravana's abduction of Princess Sita from India.

According to legends, King Rawana abducted her and imprisoned her in a cave on Rumassala hill. Then, King Rama, who came to this country in search of Princess Sita, fought with King Rawana and rescued her by lifting and throwing a huge granite that had blocked the entrance to the cave where she was imprisoned. According to folklore, the word 'Ramassugala' with the meaning of 'the granite carried by Rama' became 'Rumassagala' in due course and later it came into use as 'Rumassala'.

Also, according to Valmiki's Ramayana, a great epic in Indian literature, Prince Rama's brother Lakshman was injured by Ravana during the Rama-Ravana war when he came to Ceylon. Then some species of herbs were needed from Himalayas to cure him and the task to bring them was handed over to Hanumantha. Accordingly, Hanumantha, who was on his way to the Himalayas thinking of other things, could not remember what herb to bring, so he carried a hillock (Rumassala) with herbs from the Himalayas.

The fact that many of the herbs found only in the Himalayan forest are still found in the Rumassala range today leads us to believe this folklore.

Location and history

After about four kilometres along the main road from Galle to Matara, one will find the access road to this



Mountain of history

mountain range on the south side. The Rumassala Range belongs to the Unawatuna East, Unawatuna Central, Unawatuna West and Yaddhimulla Grama Niladhari Divisions of the Habaraduwa Divisional Secretariat in the Galle District.

It is located at an altitude of about 110 metres above sea level. On one side is the port of Galle and on the other is the Unawatuna Beach. Today, much of the land is inhabited, and many hotels and resorts are located here. In addition, some areas in the Rumassala Mountains are owned by the Government and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

Bonavista College

Today, the Rumassala mountain range is home to four Buddhist temples and a Catholic church. Also, the Bonavista College, where Martin Wickramasinghe, who has been hailed as the 'Greatest Author of Sri Lanka', Prof. Senarath Paranavithana, a former Commissioner of Archaeology, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, and Abdul Gayoom, former President of the Maldives have studied, is also located there.

A well was built at the foot of Rumassala near the beach to supply water to ships arriving at the Galle Harbour, which is now known as the watering point.

A hospital was also maintained here to treat the victims of various ailments, including epidemics on ships

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that arrived in the port of Galle during the British era, and is home to a cemetery established by the British in 1874.

Remains of a torture house also remain at the tip of Mount Rumassala towards Galle, and the stone-walled torture house is about ten feet high, about twelve feet wide, and about two feet thick. Sources said that Sinhalese who had worked against the British were captured, imprisoned in the Galle Fort, put in chariots and brought to this house from time to time.



A site of a "gun house" where the soldiers were then trained in weapons is also located here and it is now covered with sea sand. Located on the land called Kukulewatta, it is eight feet in length, width and height respectively.

A 50-foot-tall tower built by the British in 1875 can be seen in what is known as the *Kulunu Kanda* in the Rumassala Mountains. It is said that it was designed to commemorate the surveyors who built the railway line from Galle to Matara. Some say that

this was also used as a measuring tower.

Topography, flora and fauna

Rumassala is made up of rocks belonging to the highland range. It consists of a large rock deposits and on the southern slopes of the mountain, one can see a stream called *Beheth Dola* which flows between two slopes of the mountain.

There is also a belief among the locals that many ailments can be cured by bathing in it, which however, is drying up due to human activities such as quarrying today. There is also a paddy field of about seven acres in the middle of the mountain.

Plants belonging to several ecological zones can be seen here. Certain plants such as *Akkapana*, Cactus,

Daluk, *Nawahandi* and *Palu* found growing in the dry and arid zone of the area, are found in the area called '*Kulunu Kanda*'. In the area where the Unawatuna Government Hospital is located, plants such as *Heldomba*, *Dankenda*, and *Godapara* that are grown in the rainforests can be seen. Along the West coast, there are plants such as *Mawewel*, *Kitul* and *Godapara* as well as dry zone thorny shrubs, as well as mangrove and coastal plants

A herbal garden

Rumassala has been known as a herbal garden since ancient times and a study in 1991 found about 150 medicinal plants in Rumassala. Of these, 141 were endemic to Rumassala. *Konthalang* (*xylocarpusrumphii* / *Meliaceae*), one of the rarest mangrove species in Sri Lanka, can also be found in Unawatuna, on one side of Rumassala. It is said that there is a very rare medicine called *Kalunika* here.

There are about 84 species of butterflies and 72 species of birds inhabiting Rumassala. Among them are Sea Eagles and Sea Urchins. In addition to birds, mammals such as squirrels, deer as well as snakes such as pythons and cobras can be found in Rumassala.

Bonavista Coral Reef

The Bonavista Coral Reef at the foot of Rumassala mountains is considered to be the coral reef with the highest biodiversity in Sri Lanka.

'Bonavista' is a Portuguese word meaning beautiful view. The coral reef is also known by the name 'Bonavista' since the Rumassala mountains is commonly referred to by foreigners as 'Mount Bonavista'.

About 491 species of fish were found here, which is the highest number of fish species found in a coral reef in the country.

According to the 1993 National Quality Report of the ICUN, 36 of the 72 endangered fish species in the world live in the Bonavista coral reef.

A total of sixty four species of fish found in this coral reef have not been recorded anywhere else in the country. It is also home to some 300 species of invertebrates, such as prawns, crabs, and sea worms.

House where Arthur C. Clarke lived

According to well-known scholar Dr. Arthur C. Clarke, Rumassala was a meteorite that crashed into earth billions of years ago. Dr. Clarke who came to this country, lived in a house near Unawatuna Beach for a long time from 1970 to 1983. He enjoyed the beauty of Unawatuna Beach and wrote articles about it, making this place world famous. Unawatuna Beach is one of the 13 most beautiful and scenic beaches in the world, he said.