

Rumassala Kanda

Legend atop a hillock

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While returning to Weligama from the colonial masterpiece of Galle Fort on the Southern coastal belt recently via the Galle-Matara main road, a hillock, away from the main road, caught our attention. We could spot a small, but elegant Dagaba on the top.

Tracing the spot through GPS and enquiry from the roadside vendor we were told it was the Rumassala Kanda – a huge rocky outcrop that derives its name from mythological warrior King Hanuman in the Ramayana.

We decided to explore the place even as the friendly venter advised us that the path leading to the base of the hillock is partially motorable and the downward climb is strenuous. What's more, the sun was beating down mercilessly.

Without heeding his friendly advice, we geared ourselves to traverse the narrow carpeted road off the highway. We passed groves of vegetation, and soon reached the base of the hillock, which is surrounded by thorny bushes and trees.

Panoramic view

Finally, we reached the green forested hill sloping down to a sandy beach, a rocky headland pounded by the waves of the Indian Ocean. We were greeted by the panoramic view across a bay dotted with fishing boats bobbing in the ocean swell. This is the only place along the South coast that provides all this scenery plus a timeless legend that spans two countries – the enchanting and historical Rumassala Kanda.

In the colonial period, Rumassa-



The Dagaba known as Japanese Sama Chaitya (peace pagoda)

la was known as Buenos Vista (Good view). Regardless of origin, it is indeed an accurate description of the place, for the top of Rumassala Kanda offered what was arguably the best coastal view along the Southern coast of Sri Lanka.

The calm waters of Galle bay provided safe anchorage for numerous foreign vessels sailing in the Indian Ocean, transporting vast quantities of spices and precious stones. It is said that during this period, sailors of the vessels used the Southern end of Rumassala Kanda known as Watering Point to take fresh water before setting off on their long voyages. The ruins of the old jetty can still be seen today.

The small graveyard on the hill

contains the final resting places of many British civil servants and sailors. Reading these inscriptions provides an interesting insight into the past of Galle and the people who lived there. The lush vegetation and the ocean around Rumassala Kanda are rich in biodiversity. The forest is home to many endemic species of birds, reptiles and mammals as well as rare medicinal plants.

Although the coral reef has been badly affected over the past years by human and natural causes, it still provides interesting snorkeling to explore the underwater world. The surrounding areas of Rumassala Kanda including the forest and coral reefs are now protected as a sanctuary due to its valu-

able biodiversity.

Legends and folklore

Rumassala Kanda is steeped in many legends, folklore and interesting narrations. According to the Ramayana, the ancient Sanskrit epic, Hanuman, the Indian monkey warrior god was sent back to India to fetch some medicinal herbs from Himalaya to heal Lakshman who was wounded in his battle with demon King Ravana to save the abducted Princess Sita. While bringing the herbal plants, he accidentally dropped it at Rumassala Kanda. The villagers attributed this as a source of many rare medical plants found in the area and some vouch that the only

other place that some plants from Rumassala are found in the Himalayas in Nepal.

To express their devotion and veneration to the God Hanuman, a statue about 15 ft. in height depicting of God Hanuman has been constructed under the roofed structure in the entrance to the Peace Pagoda in the Rumassala Kanda. Here, we spotted devotees knotting vows (coins knotted with strap of cloth) on a stick, lighting oil lamps and offering Pujaas to the God Hanuman.

Now it was intimidating, as we were at a loss as to how and where to begin our climb. Walking around, we came to junction which branched off three directions. One road led upward and another downward.

We proceed downward and found a large Buddhist Dagaba popularly known as the Sama Chaitya (Japanes Peace Pagoda) which is the landmark of the Rumassala Kanda, built with the assistance of Japanes bhikkhus. At the entrance to the temple, one can see a statue of God Hanuman.

We took a break sitting on the upper terrace of the peace pagoda, taking in the beauty of panoramic view under a cloudless blue sky. It was breezy spot to sit and enjoy the view. The sea below us looked beautiful with wave less emerald calm waters all around the Galle Bay flanked by the dense forest of Rumassala Kanda.

Four Buddha statues

There is a staircase to the Dagaba and we walked around it. There are four Buddha statues in the cavities around it and they indicate the Birth, Enlightenment and the *Parinibbana* (passing away) of the Buddha. Walking around the upper terrace of the peace pagoda, we could catch the magnificent views across the Galle Bay, with Galle town and the Dutch Fort visible on the far side.

The adjoining shrine room of the



The statue of God Hanuman in the peace pagoda

Peace Pagoda houses varieties of gold plated Buddha statues of different sizes. A Japanese bhikkhu resides in the temple. All the visitors who step into this shrine room are offered a bunch of sweet candy. Most visitors to Rumassala Kanda never forget to visit this enchanting peace pagoda.

Travelling further upward from the peace pagoda is another Buddhist temple call Sri Vivwaramaya of Rumassala which also contains interesting statues. One is the statue of God Hanuman while others are statues of the Buddha in different postures.

On the way to this temple through a narrow winding road up the hill, we also stepped into the Rumassala Natural Field Centre which provides information about the biodiversity of Rumassala Kanda and surrounding areas for schoolchildren and other visitors.

From near the Peace Pagoda, a pebbled dusty track leads through coastal scrub down to the sandy beach. Here the sea is calmer providing better swimming and snorkeling conditions all year around.

Rumassala Kanda is a haven for genuine nature lovers to enjoy her natural resources. Tragically, Rumassala Kanda is gravely polluted. Although the Department of Wildlife Conservation has erected a notice board advising the visitors not to pollute the place, no one seems to pay attention to it.

In spite of unkind intervention by man, the historic Rumassala Kanda still retains its character as a place of beauty.



The sea below the Rumassala Kanda



The Rumassala Kanda