

Splendour of the Royal Botanical Gardens Peradeniya

BY GAYAN NARANDENIYA AND SHALUKA MANCHANAYAKE

If there is anyone who has not joined a tour to the Royal Botanical Gardens, Peradeniya with school friends, it is very rare. The Royal Botanical Gardens, currently the most popular Botanical garden in Sri Lanka, covers an area of 147 acres (59 hectares) and is visited by about 1.2 million (mn) visitors each year.

This article is about the largest Botanical garden in Sri Lanka and considered to be one of the most beautiful in Asia, which has been highly praised by local and foreign botanists as well as tourists.

Mahaweli River

Situated at an altitude of 500 metres (m) above sea level, the Royal Botanical Gardens in the Kandy Hills, borders the Mahaweli River, the longest open water body in Sri Lanka from three sides. It is located 110 kilometres (km) from Colombo city and 6 km west of Kandy city limits in the Peradeniya town.

Commonly known as the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens, the story behind its name is also remarkable. By combining the two words 'Pera' and 'Deniya'. The name Peradeniya is the best evidence that guava, which is not a native fruit of Sri Lanka, was cultivated in the country long before the British came to Sri Lanka.

The Royal Botanical Gardens date back to the reign of King Vikramabahu III in 1371 AD. King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe who later held the throne of Kandy from 1747 to 1780 AD named it as a Royal Garden and King Rajadhi Rajasinghe who built a temporary



palace in it also lived there from 1780 to 1798 AD.

Although he improved the temple and the dagoba built by King Wimaladharmasuriya I, they were later destroyed by the British. King Rajasinghe II also led the battle of Ganoruwa against the Portuguese from the north bank of the Mahaweli River.

Relocated

The Garden was relocated to Kaltura in 1813 AD and again relocated to Peradeniya in 1821 under the direction of Alexander Moon. He was a passionate botanist in Sri Lanka until 1824. He even published a book, The Catalogue of Ceylon Plants, which contains the local names and scientific names of 1,127 Sri Lankan plants

FOOD CAN BE TAKEN FROM OUTSIDE THE BOTANICAL GARDENS AND THE RESTAURANTS INSIDE THE GARDENS ARE OPEN DAILY FROM 10 A.M. TO 5 P.M. FOR THE CONVENIENCE OF VISITORS, A MAP OF THE PARK CAN BE SEEN AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE PARK, SHOWING THE ENTIRE PARK AS A COLLECTION OF 30 SECTIONS

that are native to the country. Sri Lanka's first tea tree was planted at the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens in the same year.

In 1844, after the death of Alexander Moon, George Gardner became the guardian of the Botanical Gardens. Before coming to Sri Lanka, he visited Brazil and introduced the rubber and cinchona plants found there to Sri Lanka. George Gardner, who

dedicated his life to the development of the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens, died in 1849 and a monument has been erected in his honour, which can still be seen.

Dr. Twitz, who subsequently became the guardian, maintained and propagated the Royal Botanical Gardens globally for more than three decades. He was also instrumental in establishing the Hakgala Botanical



Gardens in 1861 and the Gampaha Botanical Gardens in 1876.

Various directors

The Royal Botanical Gardens, which had been developed under various directors, was handed over to the Department of Agriculture in 1912. At present it is managed under the supervision of the Director General of the Department of National Botanical Gardens.

Tickets must be purchased to enter the Royal Botanical Gardens, which is open to the public from 7.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. throughout the year.

Food can be taken from outside the Botanical Gardens and the restaurants inside the gardens are open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For the

convenience of visitors, a map of the park can be seen at the entrance to the park, showing the entire park as a collection of 30 sections. Also, a hard copy can be obtained from the ticket counter at the time of ticket purchase.

Foreign dignitaries

Located in the centre of the Royal Botanical Gardens, the 4 acre Elite Circle is designed for local and foreign dignitaries who are visiting the Garden to plant a memento plant. There, a Bo tree planted by King Edward VII in 1857, a Na tree planted by the Tsar of Russia in 1891, an Asoka tree planted by the Austrian Emperor in 1893, as well as another tree planted by King George and Queen Mary in 1901, can be found there.