

# The ancient port of Godawaya

**M**y destination is GotaPabbatha Rajamaha Vihara, better known as the Godawaya temple, on a rocky boulder with a panoramic view overlooking the Indian Ocean.

It is an ancient site on the coast, to the south of the Walawe Ganga estuary in the Hambantota district.

## An ancient port

The ancient sea port of Godawaya lies about four kilometres from Ambalantota on the Galle Road, turning right at the Dehigahalanda school towards the seaside. It has a quiet little bay, which is a thriving fishing centre at present.

## Stone ruins

Several rocky boulders are scattered around, facing the boisterous bay on its west, while on the landside there are numerous stone ruins, including rock caves, stone pillars, a *dagaba* and the torso of a Buddha statue.

Some stone ruins, including a carved stone statue of the Buddha, in the Godawaya temple, have been restored by the Department of Archaeology.

## A rock inscription

The rock inscription at the temple

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site states that the dues collected from the port were to be donated to the Godawaya temple.

The records also state that King Gamini Abaya donated the customs duties of the port of Godawaya to the nearby *Vihara* at this site. Initially, the Godawaya temple was attributed to King Gota Abhaya of Ruhuna, in the third century BC. History records that Godawaya came to be called Gota Pabbatha *Rajamaha Vihara* as a result of this association.

## The Silk Route

According to ancient chronicles, Godawaya had been on the Silk Route, where ships had anchored to take precious stones, spices and ivory, in exchange for clothing and porcelain.

The most picturesque site that adorns Godawaya is the estuary of

the Walawe Ganga. Its mouth was sealed for all time by a mountainous sand dune of yesteryear. The strip of seashore flanked by the flowing Walawe Ganga is a fascinating spot, with its scenic deep blue sea, resembling a picturesque islet.

The sea is very turbulent around the rocky boulders and it is not advisable for visitors to enter the sea at the Godawaya bay.

## A Brahmi inscription

The *Brahmi* inscription on the rock at the temple premises, states that the old port of Godawaya is also called Godapavita. In ancient times, the Walawe basin was considered a prosperous rice producing area in Magama and the Walawe Ganga was said to have been navigable for transportation. It is said that, in ancient times, the paddy harvest was transported by boats along the Walawe Ganga, which also had a ferry service, transporting paddy and spices to be shipped abroad from the ancient port of Godawaya.

## A Dutch bhikkhu

During World War II, a Dutch bhikkhu resided at the Gota Pabbatha Rajamaha Vihara. He had lived in a small *kuti* (abode) built with cement blocks on the rock boulder facing the

The glistening dagaba gives a majestic looks to the ancient site



The part of the ruined Buddha statue conserved in the temple premises

Indian Ocean on the shore at Godawaya, which gave a fascinating view of the sea.

The ruined abode where the bhikkhu dwelt can still be seen at the rocky boulder of Gota Pabbatha *Rajamaha Vihara* premises.

In 1993, a group of archaeologists from the Department of Archaeology, in collaboration with the University of Bonn in Germany, carried out an extensive excavation at the Gota Pabbatha *Rajamaha Vihara*, and found several ancient coins, which indicated that Godawaya was an ancient port along the Silk Route.

A visit to this remarkable place built by ancient kings whose monumental achievements are treasured centuries on, is a must, where one can enjoy the tranquility that prevails surrounded by an endless seascape.



The large outcrop boulder overlooking the old port and *kuti* built by the Dutch bhikkhu



Standing stone pillars buried in the temple premises