



SACRED ISLAND

A Buddhist Pilgrim's Guide to Sri Lanka

Ven. S. Dhammika

SACRED ISLAND

This travel and pilgrimage guidebook is meant primarily for Buddhists or those interested in Buddhism who wish to explore Sri Lanka's rich cultural and spiritual heritage. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of the Island, the author weaves together archaeological findings, art history and the stories and legends of the Buddhist tradition to bring to life thirty three places of religious significance. He also offers practical advice on how to travel in Sri Lanka and what the visitor can do to learn more about Buddhism and meditation. Besides lively descriptions, this book also contains detailed maps, illustrations as well as colour pictures of the sacred sites, making it interesting reading too for those who can't visit the sites themselves.

Venerable Dhammika is an Australian Buddhist monk who is the author of several popular books on Buddhism. His other books published by the BPS include *Gemstones of the Good Dhamma*, *The Edicts of King Asoka*, *The Buddha and His Disciples* and *Middle Land Middle Way*, an excellent guidebook to the Buddhist sacred sites in India.

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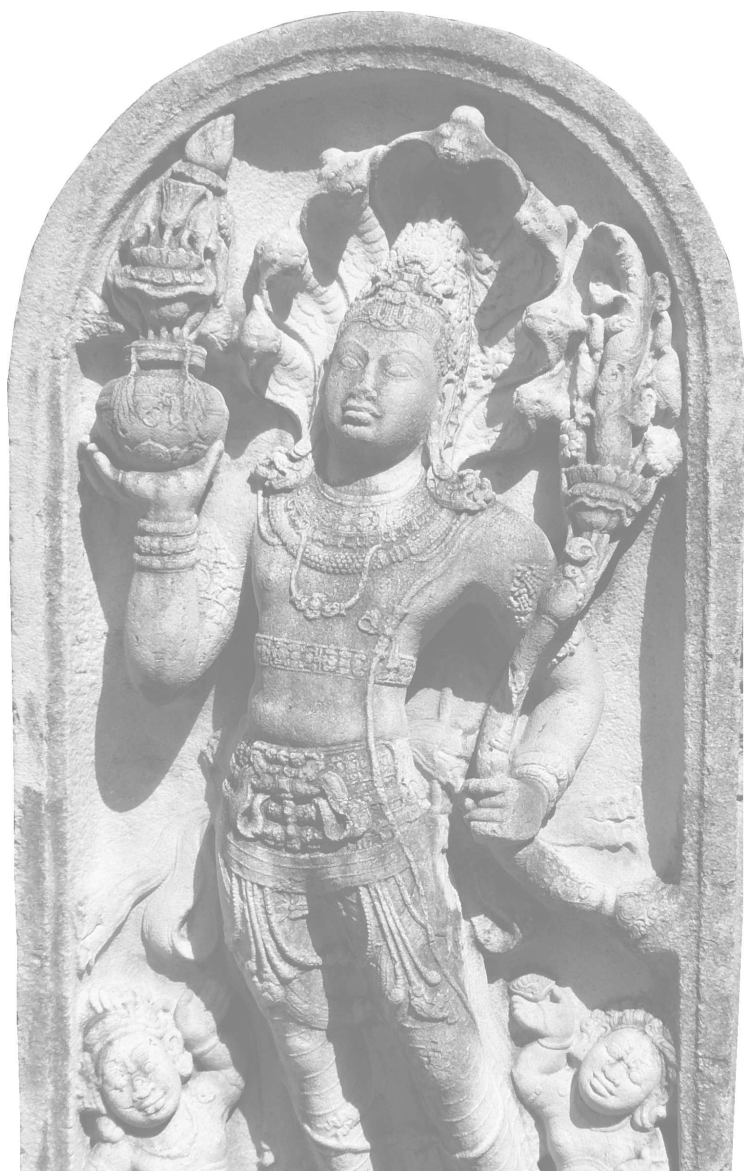
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A BUDDHIST PILGRIM'S GUIDE TO SRI LANKA

Bhante S. Dhammika

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY
KANDY • SRI LANKA

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PREFACE

This book is meant primarily for Buddhists, or those interested in Buddhism, who are visiting Sri Lanka, and thus differs somewhat from conventional guidebooks. It covers only places of religious importance; it covers them in more detail and from a very different perspective. The aim is to highlight not just the historical and artistic interest of each place, but also its spiritual significance and associations. The golden age of Theravādin spirituality in Sri Lanka ended around the 13th century and only places dating from before that time are highlighted here because they often feature in the sacred literature and legends of Theravada. Of the many temples and monasteries in Sri Lanka dating from after this time the only one mentioned here is the Temple of the Tooth, because of its precious relic that goes back to at least to the 4th century CE.

This book owes much to people whose names I have forgotten or never even knew—hermits who welcomed me into their caves, abbots who let me rest for a few days in their monasteries and simple peasants who gave me food when I walked for alms in their villages. I would have never seen the Sacred Island so widely or so thoroughly if it had not been for the kindness and hospitality of these people and I take this opportunity to thank them. I would like to thank Tissa Devendra whose knowledge of Sri Lankan history and archaeology has often inspired me to set out on yet another journey to explore something I missed last time or had not heard about before.

I must also thank Raja De Silva, former Director General of the Archaeological Survey, for sharing with me some of his thoughts about the true significance of Sigiriya. Mr. B. E. Wijesuriya, the general secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society and Miss S. Wijenayaka, the Society's librarian, uncomplainingly helped me find material when I needed it. Finally, I must express my gratitude to Sunil, who accompanied me on many of my earlier journeys, and particularly Viraj, whose patience, practicality and companionship have made many of my travels so much more enjoyable.

S. Dhammika



INTRODUCTION

Think of yourself as a pilgrim
And your teachers as guides.
Think of their instructions as the road
And the practice as the land of your destination.

Gandavyūha Sūtra

Sri Lanka is a small pear-shaped island situated just off the southeastern tip of the Indian sub-continent. It is not a big island being only 436 kilometers from north to south and 225 kilometers from east to west at its widest point. Talaimannar, the western most extent of the Island, is a finger of land that juts out into the Gulf of Mannar and is a mere 32 kilometers from India. The western and southern coastal plains of Sri Lanka are lush and tropical and this is where the country's fabled spices come from. Regular rains mean that crops, fruits and flowers grow in abundance. The north and east are hot and dry and cultivation is only possible with the help of an extensive system of irrigation. The south-central region is made up of high jungle-covered mountains often shrouded in mist. It is from here that the Island's many crystal-clear rivers begin their journey to the sea.

Sri Lanka has been known by a bewildering variety of names throughout its history. Its earliest name, Tambapanni, first appears in one of King Asoka's inscriptions and is the origin of the name the Greeks knew the Island by Taprobane. The name means "Copper-colored Hands." According to ancient legend, when the first immigrants arrived in the Island, they threw themselves on the shore and the rust-colored earth stained their hands. The Sinhalese have long called their home "Lanka Island" (Lankādīpa) or just "Lanka." In the Sanskrit literature of India, it was usually known as the "Island of Gems" (Ratnadīpa), "Island of Lions" (Sinhala-dīpa), or simply as "Sinhala," from which the English name Ceylon is derived. In 1973, the country changed its name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka, meaning "Lustrous Lanka."

The Sinhalese people trace their origins back to the semi-historical Prince Vijaya and his followers, who migrated to the Island from northern or perhaps western India in about the 5th

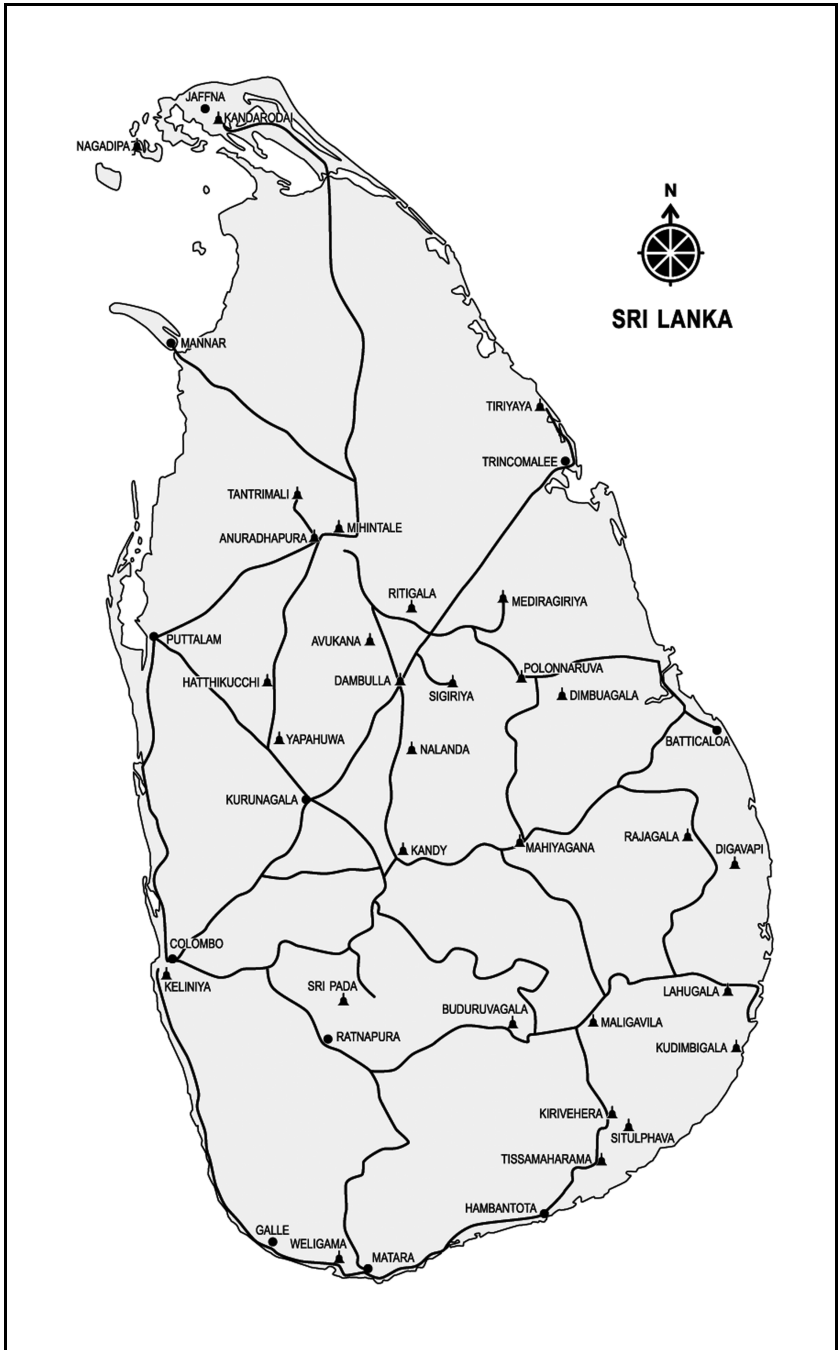
century BCE. Since then other peoples, Tamils and Nāyakkars from South India, the ancestors of Arab traders, as well as Portuguese, Dutch and British settlers have made Sri Lanka their home too. Today the Sinhalese people make up about seventy-four percent of the population and of these most are Buddhists.

From Roman times Sri Lanka has been famous for its elephants, pearls, conch shells, sweet fragrant spices and in particular its gems. Ships from as far away as China in the east and the Red Sea and Persian Gulf in the west used to converge on Sri Lanka to get these and other exotic products. However, Sri Lanka has also long been known for something more flavorsome than any spice and more beautiful and precious than any gem—the teaching of the Buddha.

Buddhism was introduced to the Island in about 248 BCE and has been the religion of the majority of its people ever since. In fact, Sri Lanka was the first country outside India to embrace Buddhism and it has now prevailed there longer than in any other place on earth. For centuries, Buddhists have looked upon Sri Lanka as a sacred realm almost on a par with India itself, and even more so since Buddhism’s disappearance from its homeland.

There were several reasons for the country being held in such enormous esteem. The Island was believed to be sanctified by several visits by the Buddha himself. The legend of the Buddha’s visits was not, it should be noted, confined to the Theravada tradition alone. The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, the seminal text of the Ch’an and Zen schools of Buddhism, was believed to have been taught by the Buddha while he was in Sri Lanka residing on Sri Pāda “which shone like a jewel lotus, immaculate and shining in splendor.” The *Cakrasamvara Tantra* mentions the Buddha flying to Lanka and leaving the impression of his foot on a mountain, which Tibetans today mistakenly identify with as Mount Kailash in the western Himalayas. Another reason is that the Island’s many temples enshrined some of the most revered relics in the world, the really important ones being the Buddha’s tooth, some strands of his hair and his begging bowl. Of course, numerous similar relics were to be found throughout the Buddhist world, but for some reason those in Sri Lanka were held to be more authentic and thus more sacred.

INTRODUCTION



Perhaps another reason that gave Sri Lanka a wide appeal to Buddhists from other lands was that all three vehicles of Buddhism—*Srāvakayāna*, *Mahāyāna* and later even *Vajrayāna*—flourished there. Occasionally, kings proscribed one or another of these sects, but more usually a spirit of wide tolerance prevailed. People were free to practice the Dhamma and interpret it according their own understanding. And of course, this tolerance extended not only to different sects of Buddhism, but to other faiths as well. Writing in 911, the Muslim geographer Abu Zeid al Hasan said, “In the Island there are a great multitude of Jews as well as other sects ... the king permitting the free exercise of every religion.” All this has meant that Sri Lanka has been a major destination for pilgrims since almost the beginnings of Buddhism.

PILGRIMAGE IN BUDDHISM

Pilgrimage has a long tradition in Buddhism stretching back to the time of the Buddha himself. In the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha says that at least once in their lives his disciples should try to visit the places where he was born, awakened, where he preached for the first time and where he attained final Nirvana.

In Buddhism, a pilgrimage, or indeed any act, derives its value from its ability to awaken positive mental states. If journeying to a place sanctified by the Buddha or a great Dhamma master is motivated by faith, and while being undertaken reinforces patience, devotion or a commitment to practice the Dhamma, then it can be an adjunct to one’s practice. However, Buddhist teachers have always added to their advocacy of pilgrimage the important reminder that it is virtue that really counts. In his *Jātakamālā*, Āryasūra says:

More beautiful than any garland, sweeter than any taste,
truthfulness generates great good, and is less arduous than
practicing austerities or pilgrimages to far off shrines.

In about the 2nd century CE, the merchant Visākha of Pāṭaliputta in northern India heard the country being praised in these terms: “The Island of Lankā is, they say, adorned with a diadem of stupas and gleams with the yellow robe. There a man can

sit where he likes or lie where he likes. The climate is mild, the dwellings are good, the people are good, the Dhamma sermons are very good and all that is good is available there." This was enough to encourage Visākha to make the long journey to Sri Lanka and become a monk. And he was not the only one. Records show that people have been coming to Sri Lanka for nearly two thousand years to learn the Dhamma, to worship at its many sacred shrines or just because it seemed like a congenial place to live the religious life.

During Sudhana's quest for truth, as recounted in the *Gandavyūha Sūtra*, he met a monk named Supratishthita who was on his way to Lankā to study. In the *Samantapāsādikā* there is a story of four monks who came to the Island all the way from what is now northern Pakistan. The pilgrim Fa-hsien stopped off in Sri Lanka on his way back to China to visit the sacred places and to collect copies of the scriptures not then available in his own country. In 1169, the royal preceptor of Burma arrived in Sri Lanka with a large retinue of monks. They were welcomed by the king and visited all the sacred places on the Island. One of these monks named Chappata stayed back when the others returned and spent ten years perfecting his knowledge of Dhamma and monastic discipline. When he finally returned to Burma, he established a reformed sect of monks that went on to have an important role in the country's religious history.

For centuries, intrepid Sri Lankans made their way to sacred places in India, but the difficulties and the expense involved in such journeys meant that only tiny numbers were ever able to do so. The majority were happy to visit sacred places within their own country and these places grew in number and sanctity as more of the devotees flocked to them. By the 1st century CE a pilgrim's circuit consisting of sixteen sacred places (*solos mahāsthāna*) had developed, most of them associated with the Buddha's legendary visits to the Island.

Of these sixteen places, seven are in Anuradhapura and the rest are spread widely throughout the whole country. Those in Anuradhapura are the Sri Mahābodhi, Mirisaveti Stupa, Ruvanveli Stupa, Thūpārāma, Abhayagiri Stupa, Jetavanārāma Stupa and Lankārāma Stupa. Of the rest, Nāgadīpa is on an island near the northern tip of the country while Tissamahārāma is in the far south. Dīghavāpi is on the eastern seaboard near Ampāra and

Kelaniya is on the west coast near Colombo. Sri Pāda is on top of the country's second highest mountain. Divāguhā is somewhere near the foot of the same mountain. Mutiyangane is on the very southeastern edge of the central highlands; while Mahiyangana and Kirivehera are down on the plains.

For the ancient Sinhalese there were not only many sacred places in their land, but the very land itself was sacred. For them Lankā was a vast sacred gem-encrusted *mandala* with Sri Pāda as its axis from where numerous rivers spiraled outwards with their life-giving waters. The *Saddhammopāyana* puts it like this: "This Buddha land is illuminated by the luster of the sun of supreme wisdom and cooled by the moon of compassion. It is everywhere enclosed by the lofty peaks of the Buddha's Dhamma and with hills of the gold and jewels of true understanding. The lions of self-confidence living comfortably and fearlessly in the forest of the Sangha decorate it. It is refreshed with the rain of Dhamma teaching, strewn with the blossoms of the Factors of Enlightenment and has the straight highways of the Eightfold Path. The ocean of virtue surrounds it with waves of good conduct. Noble heroes inhabit this Buddha land which is eminent above all others."

In ancient times, visiting all the sixteen places must have required a major commitment for the average pilgrim. The most devoted tried to visit all of them, if not in a single journey, then at least a few at a time at different periods throughout their lives. However, as populations shifted, capitals changed and roads got better or worse the popularity of one place would grow while another's would fade. For example, Mutiyangana, Dīghavāpi and Lankārāma no longer attract the crowds they used to while more people probably go to Kirivehera now than ever before in its history. It is also true that over the centuries numerous other places apart from the traditional sixteen came to be considered sacred and began to attract pilgrims.

After the 13th century, when the ancient heartland of Sri Lankan civilization was abandoned to the jungle, it became difficult to visit some of the sacred places although they never faded from memory and a trickle of pilgrims continued. Some, like Dīghavāpi, were only rediscovered in the 19th century and one place, Divāguhā, has still not been found.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the usual way to travel

in Sri Lanka was either on foot or by bullock cart. The wealthy could afford to be carried in palanquins, at least on the better stretches of road. There was a reasonable network of roads and well-trod footpaths. Kings saw it as their duty to keep roads passable and to provide for travelers and pilgrims. We read that in the early 13th century Queen Lilāvati established alms halls at the gates of Anuradhapura to give free food to the many pilgrims visiting the city.

Along the more popular pilgrim routes, rest houses were built at regular intervals that offered shelter to the weary. Several such rest houses dating from the late medieval period can still be seen, one of the finest is in the village of Manalagama.¹ King Vijayabāhu I built rest houses every five *gavu* along each of the three pilgrim's routes to Sri Pāda and King Nissankamalla had milestones put up along major arteries so that weary pilgrims and others would know how far they still had to go to reach their destinations.²

During certain periods, the number of pilgrims coming from other lands was so great that foreign monarchs sometimes made provisions for their subjects within Sri Lanka. In 1456, King Narapati of Burma built a monastery to accommodate monks from his country coming to worship the Tooth.

Nonetheless, pilgrimage was always a long, tedious and sometimes dangerous endeavor. It is said that even in the 19th century those going to Sri Pāda would write their wills and put their affairs in order before setting out. Except in times of civil strife, banditry was generally not a problem in Sri Lanka because of the relative prosperity, but wild animals—leopards, bears and particularly elephants—could attack pilgrims in areas where roads passed through jungle. There was also the danger of getting lost or running out of food and water.

When the Moroccan traveler Ibn Batuta was in Shiraz in Persia, he was shown the grave of Shaikh Abu Abdullah Khafif, supposedly the first Muslim to go to Sri Pāda in the year 929 CE. He wrote, "Previously the infidels (Buddhists) prevented Muslims from visiting it, vexed them, and neither dined with them or had any dealings with them." However, the Shaikh, who had lived in

-
1. Just beyond the 85 km. post on the main Colombo–Kandy road.
 2. A *gavu* is about 3 kilometers.

Chilaw for some years and had gained a reputation amongst the Sinhalese for holiness, was finally allowed to join a group of pilgrims going to the mountain. At one point in the journey, the party found itself in a jungle wilderness and without any food. To save themselves they killed a baby elephant and ate it, though the Shaikh advised against this and refused to partake of the meat. That night, as the party slept, a herd of elephants appeared, sniffed each person and crushed to death all those on whom they smelt the flesh of their kin. The chief elephant then put the Shaikh on his back and took him to the nearest village. Ibn Batuta concludes this tale by saying; "From that time the infidels began to honor the Muslims and up to this day they revere the Shaikh and call him the Great Shaikh."

For safety's sake, traveling in groups was preferred; families or groups of friends from the same village usually went together, often led by a monk. Sometimes all the monks from one monastery would go together. According to one record, the great teacher Dhammadinna of Tissamahārāma went on pilgrimage accompanied by five hundred of his disciples. A painting of a traveler on the walls of the Degaldoruva Temple near Kandy gives some idea of how a pilgrim might be outfitted. The painting shows a man with a sack of provisions over his shoulder, a water bottle in one hand, a staff in the other and an umbrella leaning on his shoulder. The *Papañcasūdanī* mentions that a monk on pilgrimage would have a knapsack containing a needle and thread, nail clippers, tinder and flint for lighting fires, oil for massaging the feet and a little book listing the Buddha's virtues that he could read as he walked.

Guidebooks existed, several of which still survive, and collections of songs like the *Vandanākārayinge Kavi* that pilgrims could sing as they traveled. Concerning the advantages of pilgrimage for monks Walpola Rāhula writes: "Travelling through the country, seeing new things and meeting new people, was a healthy change from the monotonous life of the monastery. Travelling with a learned teacher was always profitable, for the bhikkhu could discuss important points all along the way... A pilgrimage also helped monks get rid of their attachment to their own monasteries."

For the ordinary person a pilgrimage had a major effect on his or her life. To actually see the places they had read about or had

heard being mentioned in sermons brought the teachings alive. A man or woman who returned to their village after a six or nine months' absence with a radiant face and stories to tell about their adventures would be regarded with considerable respect. Those who returned saw their pilgrimage as the culmination of their lives and often used to say, "Now I am ready to go whenever Death is ready to take me."

Pilgrimage is as popular today as it was in the past. It is true that modern transportation and better roads have changed some aspects of the experience, but the old spirit of devotion and benediction, of enjoying companionship and enduring hardship, still prevails. The Sinhalese term for pilgrimage is "journey of worship" (*vandana gamana*) or alternatively "journey of merit" (*pin gamana*).

The devotees of a particular monastery or a particular teacher, an extended family or perhaps people from one neighborhood will discuss the possibility of going on pilgrimage, decide on a date and begin to work out the details. One of the local monks or perhaps a nun will be invited to accompany the group (*nade*) or, if they are particularly respected, to lead it. This leader is given considerable respect and is referred to as the *nade gura*. The costs of the whole journey will be calculated and shared equally between all the participants. A bus or truck will be hired, loaded up with large cooking pots, bundles of fire wood and sacks of rice and vegetables and after the inevitable delays will set off to enthusiastic shouts of "Sādhu, Sādhu, Sādhu!" This oft-heard exclamation means something like "It is good!"

The old tradition of hospitality is still very much alive: pilgrims can turn up at almost any monastery on their way and be given a place to sleep. In Buddhism, pilgrimage is neither an obligation nor a penance and so the pilgrim is not required to be dour and serious. The mood of Sri Lankan pilgrims often alternates between curiosity and piety, high spirits and devotion. There are traditional songs that pilgrims sing and poems they recite as they progress towards their goal and some of those sung on the Sri Pāda pilgrimage contain a good deal of humor.

After the devotions, time is always made for buying souvenirs or products not available at home. Pictures of Samanta and little books of devotional poems are popular at Sri Pāda and at Anuradhapura a certain type of native sugar not available in

southern Sri Lanka always sells well. At Nāgadīpa, fishermen sometimes sell conches and other seashells, but the responsible pilgrim should never buy such things as this only encourages killing. Most pilgrims today wear neat ordinary clothes, but those keeping the eight or ten Precepts during the journey and some of the older people will wear the traditional white garb.

Why would the modern Western Buddhist or someone just interested in Eastern spirituality consider going on pilgrimage to Sri Lanka as opposed to, say, India? Although geographically close to each other, India and Sri Lanka could not be more different. People who have spent time in the former and then come to the latter expecting it to be similar are always surprised, usually pleasantly so. India is dry, brown and dusty, while Sri Lanka is generally lush and green. The level of public hygiene is many times higher in Sri Lanka than in India, the crowds are smaller, there is less pushing and shoving and people are more ready to smile. Nevertheless, it is also true that Sri Lanka has none of the exuberant and diverse expressions of spirituality that one finds in India.

Only one school of Buddhism prevails throughout the entire country, Theravada, and there is a general uniformity of belief and practice. Theravada tends to emphasis practice of the Dhamma rather than devotion to the guru, which means that there are few high profile teachers in Sri Lanka. The *Vinaya*, the rules for monks and nuns, is a further discouragement to the public emergence of such personalities. One of the rules says that a monk or nun who attains an exalted state cannot tell laypeople about it.

It is also true that meditation is perhaps not as widespread in Sri Lanka as it should be, even within the Sangha. As in other religious traditions, the average monk and the average monastery or temple is just that—average. To meet interesting monks or nuns with a lot of meditation experience one usually has to spend time in the forest monasteries (*ārañña*) located in the more remote corners of the Island. Unfortunately, most of the monks in these places are not conversant in English.

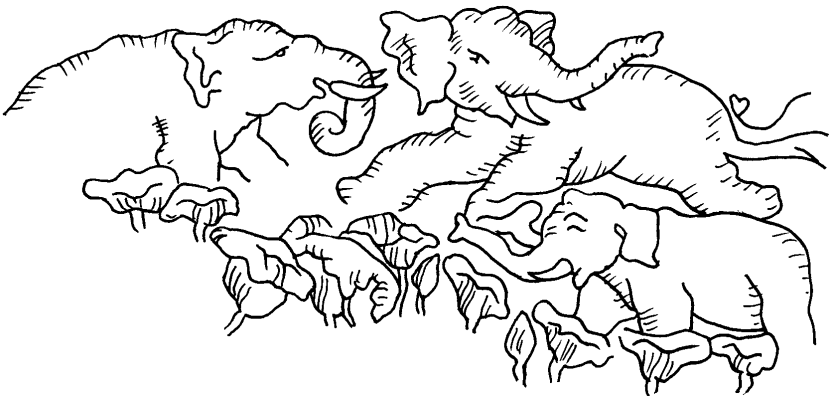
What the Western Buddhist will find in abundance in Sri Lanka are places associated with the great sages of the past and the events mentioned in the sacred literature and legends of the Theravādin tradition. At many of these places the pilgrim will feel a very palpable spiritual energy; an energy often enhanced by the great

natural beauty of the surroundings. Those practicing Mahayana and Vajrayana will also find places where those schools once flourished and where they left behind inspiring traces of their presence.

The Western Buddhist might also be able to share the experience of pilgrimage with Sri Lankan devotees. Sometimes one's encounters with Buddhists from a different culture can be both moving and humbling. Once when I was at Sri Pāda, an old man with a white wispy beard approached me and asked where I was from. I told him and then he inquired if this was my first pilgrimage to the holy mountain. "No," I said with just a touch of pride in my voice, "This is my third time. How many times have you come?" I asked him. "Forty three," he said quite unselfconsciously. He told me that once his daughter became critically ill and he had made a vow that if she recovered he would go to Sri Pāda every year for the rest of his life to pay homage to the Buddha's footprint. He was still fulfilling his vow and his faith was as strong as ever.

Another, perhaps less obvious, pleasure of going on pilgrimage is Sri Lanka is all the wildlife one can see. Many of the places mentioned in this book are located in forested areas or near water where wildlife comes to drink. The Sinhalese are generally very kind to animals, which means that even wild creatures are not too frightened of people; this is particularly true in and around places of religious significance.

Several pilgrimage places are bordering on or even located inside national parks and wildlife reserves and so the pilgrim is sure to see some wildlife. Early in the morning and again towards



Calving of Elephants from Goldfish Park, Anuradhapura

dusk, deer, wild pigs, buffaloes and many different types of birds come to drink from the several reservoirs in the area of Situlpahuwa in Yāla National Park. There are crocodiles in these reservoirs too. Elephants are common at Situlpahuwa as well as at Ritigala, Rājagala and Lāhugala and although they sometimes come out during the day, they are usually more active at night. The cry of the peacocks often rings out around Situlpahuwa, Kirivehera, Tantirimale and Dimbulāgala and you are sure to see the bird itself foraging in the late afternoon.

Even in well-populated places like Anuradhapura, Dambulla and Polonnaruwa, the noisy and mischievous macaques and the graceful black-faced langurs are common. These monkeys play amongst the ruins, eat the flowers offered at the shrines and squabble over food thrown to them by pilgrims. While walking through ruins or exploring caves, a pair of mongooses might dash across the pilgrim's path and he or she will often see squirrels in the trees or hear their shrill chirping.

Once, when I was staying for a few days in a cave at Hatthikucchi, I got up before dawn to meditate amongst the ruins. After about an hour, I heard a rustling noise near me, opened my eyes to see what it was, and found myself surrounded by a troop of langurs. They quietly watched me for a while and then moved off to continue their breakfast foraging. It was a wonderful experience to be so close to these beautiful creatures and to see that they had so little fear of humans.

SOURCES OF HISTORY

Sri Lanka has a longer and more complete history than any other country in Asia except China. This history is derived from five main sources; the Pali chronicles, the Pali commentaries and subcommentaries, collections of folk tales, travel accounts by pilgrims and travelers, and from inscriptions.

The most important and comprehensive of these sources are the Pali chronicles. The *Dīpavamsa* or "Chronicle of the Island" is the oldest and most reliable of all these works and was written in the 4th century CE. It tells the history of Buddhism from the time of the Buddha, its introduction into Sri Lanka and its progress up to the

time of its writing. Scholars believe that nuns of the Hatthālhaka Nunnery in Anuradhapura composed the *Dīpavamsa*. The *Mahāvamsa* or “Great Chronicle” was written in the 5th century by the monk Mahānāma and covers much the same ground as the *Dīpavamsa*, but from a somewhat different angle and in much more detail. The *Cūlavamsa* or “Lesser Chronicle” by Dhammakitti takes up from where the *Mahāvamsa* leaves off and brings the Island’s history up to the 13th century.

All three chronicles were written by clerics of the Mahāvihāra and thus, of course, tell their story very much from that perspective. Although the history these chronicles tell is uneven, giving much space to some kings or events and doing little more than mentioning the names of others, research over the last hundred years has consistently verified many of the details that they record. There are several other lesser chronicles as well, the *Mahābodhivamsa*, the “Chronicle of the Bodhi Tree,” the *Thūpavamsa*, the “Chronicle of the Stupa,” the *Dhātuvamsa*, the “Chronicle of the Tooth Relic,” etc.

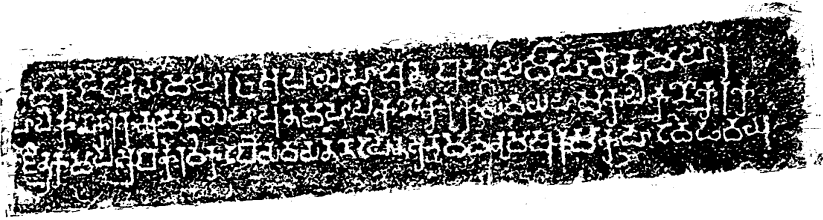
After these chronicles, the Pali commentaries are the most important source of Sri Lankan history. In the centuries after Buddhism came to Sri Lanka, scholars and teachers began writing commentaries on the Tipitaka, the canon containing the words of the Buddha. By the 5th century CE, the Sinhalese found that these commentaries were composed in was becoming so archaic that it was increasingly difficult to read and thus it was decided to render them all into Pali, the sacred language of Theravada. Buddhaghosa, the most erudite scholar of his time, was invited from India to perform this task. Some decades later, another Indian monk, Dhammapāla, wrote commentaries on the parts of the Tipitaka that Buddhaghosa had been unable to finish. As well as explanations of doctrine and comments on language, these commentaries included stories about famous monks and saints, information about the daily life of the time and about the deeds of various kings and princes.

Another good source of Sri Lankan history is the collections of folk stories that the country produced over the centuries. The *Rasavāhinī*, the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, the *Rājāvaliya*, the *Pūjāvaliya* and many similar works contain local histories, popular legends and retellings of incidents from the chronicles.

In ancient times, many pilgrims and scholars came to Sri Lanka and some of them wrote accounts of their sojourns on the Island.

Other pilgrims, like the Chinese monk Hsüan-tsang, never actually visited Sri Lanka, but collected much interesting information about it from Sri Lankan monks he met in India. Although most of these accounts are scant, they do provide some interesting information.

Burmese monks were interested in the history of Buddhism and thus wrote a lot about Sri Lanka. Works like the *Sotabbamālini*, the *Sāsanavamsadīpikā*, the *Yazawinkyaw*, and the *Hamannan Yazawin* all contain information about Sri Lanka. The famous Kalyāni Inscription at Pegu also contains important information about the history of the Sri Lankan Sangha not found in other sources.



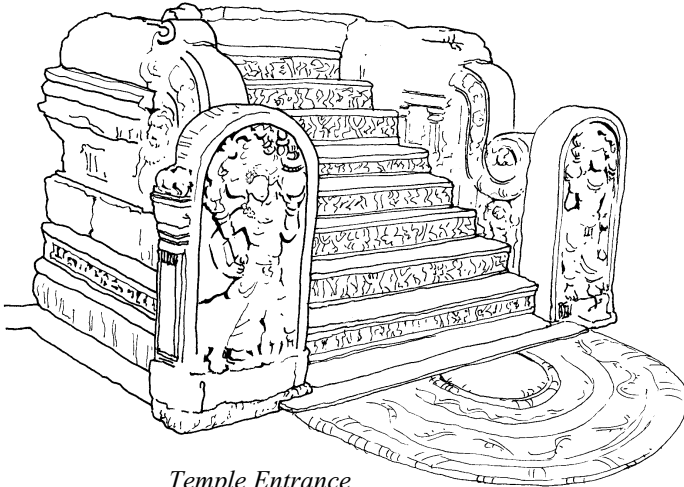
Inscription from Anuradhapura, 5th century CE

The most recent source of history is archaeological evidence. Since its founding in 1890, Sri Lanka's Archaeological Survey has discovered and excavated hundreds of ancient temples, monasteries, shrines and other monuments. At many of these sites, inscriptions have been found recording the names of the places, gifts given to various institutions, how much they cost, the names and titles of the donors, what year in the reign of which kings the gifts were made, and so on. When all this information is put together, it becomes a very valuable supplement to the information given in other sources. The work of piecing together Sri Lanka's past is by no means finished and new information is coming to light all the time.

SACRED ARCHITECTURE

Walking around the ancient sites, the pilgrim will often see stone pillars in square or rectangular arrangements. Most of these pillars are plain, but some have decorated capitals with bands of birds, animals or dwarfs on them. Wooden monasteries once sat on the top of these pillars to keep them cool and to protect them from damp and insects. Stairs, also made of wood, went from the ground up through the middle of the floor into the monastery.

Apart from the pillars, usually the only parts of these monasteries that still survive are their elaborately decorated entrances that give at least some idea of how splendid the rest of the structures must have been. The typical monastery or temple entrance is made up of four parts: a moonstone, guardstones, stairs and balustrades. Moonstones (*addhacandapāsāna*, literally “half-moonstone”) are a sort of semi-circular first step or stone door-mat and are among the most interesting and beautiful objects still to be seen at ancient monastic sites.



Temple Entrance

The earliest moonstones were plain, but became more elaborate as time went on, reaching their most elaborate form in the 8th and 9th centuries. The classical moonstone is decorated with intricately carved bands of birds and animals, swirling vines and flowering creepers. Much has been written about exactly what these

decorations mean, usually that they symbolize the progress of the individual towards enlightenment. Some of these explanations are highly inventive, but they do not take into account the fact that there are numerous variations in the arrangements of moonstone decorations. However, the feature common to most moonstones is the depiction of processions of animals—usually horses, lions, elephants and bulls. In the scriptures, the Buddha is sometimes compared with these animals. They also represent the four directions in Indian cosmology. Many moonstones will often have a line of geese (*hamsa*) on them too. In early Buddhist poetry and art the goose was associated with detachment and non-clinging, probably because of its migratory habits.

On either side of the moonstone are guardstones, which are meant to give a warning to those who pass them and to impart a blessing. Some guardstones are plain, but most have either water pots or human figures carved on them. The water pot (*pūrnaghata*) is even today an auspicious object to the Sinhalese; it is used to offer refreshment both to those setting out on a journey or returning from one. To indicate that the pots are full of water, they are depicted with either water lilies or lotuses in them. On the more common guardstones, the water pots are held aloft by dragon kings (*nāgarāja*). These beings are crowned and bejeweled, with seven cobra-like hoods behind their heads and a small dwarf besides their left foot, his hands lifted in jubilation.

On some guardstones, like those at Issaramuni, the Abhayagiri stupa and Lāhugala, the dwarfs (*vāmana* or *bhairava* or *gana*) have become dominant. The dwarfs are named Padmanidhi and Sankhanidhi and are the attendants of Kuvera, the guardian of the north and the god of prosperity. Their job is to welcome visitors to the monastery, but also warn them not to meddle in its affairs or steal anything from it. Padmanidhi, with his lotus hat, is usually on the left guardstone and Sankhanidhi, with his conch shell hat, is on the right. Some of these whimsical figures hold the handles of whips while others hold strings of gold coins. Dwarfs also often appear on the vertical face of the stairs in their other role of good-naturedly holding back or holding up some heavy object.

The balustrades on either side of the stairs usually have *makaras* on them—the *makara* being a huge seamonster, all head and mouth, capable of swallowing or alternatively of spewing out almost

anything. From their mouths comes a mass of foliage ending in a spiral that forms the balustrade. In medieval temples *makaras* often form an arch over the Buddha image.

The most noticeable monument the visitor will see in Sri Lanka is the stupa. The word stupa comes from the Sanskrit verbal root *stūp* (Pali *thūp*) meaning "to heap." The Sinhalese word for a stupa is *saeya* or *dāgaeba*, which is derived from the Pali words *dhātu* meaning a relic and *garbha* meaning a receptacle or womb.

In India during the Buddha's time, the ashes of particularly revered people were interned under mounds of earth, which were then honored in their memory. The Buddha's corporeal remains were treated in this manner, but because he was the son of a king an umbrella, the symbol of royalty, was also placed on the top of the mound. In time, these mounds evolved into domes and the umbrellas developed into the spires or pinnacles of the stupas we know today.

Stupas usually enshrine the real or supposed relics of the Buddha, although some enshrine those of his direct disciples or saints of later ages, and sometimes even objects used by such people. The stupa is also seen as a symbol of the Buddha himself. Indeed, until the first CE century the stupa took the place of the Buddha image. Even after images came into vogue, stupas were, and still are, considered a symbol of the Buddha's presence.

According to legend, two of Sri Lanka's thousands of stupas date from the time of the Buddha's visit to the Island. The one at Mahiyangana was built by Samanta to enshrine some hairs the Buddha had given him. The stupa at Tiriyāya was built by Tapassu and Bhallika who received some hairs from the Buddha as he sat under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. According to both history and archaeology, the country's first such monument was the Thūpārāma at Anuradhapura, which was built soon after the arrival of Buddhism.

There are many differently shaped stupas concerning which a verse from an ancient Sanskrit treaty on stupa architecture says:

Like a lotus flower
Or an *āmalaka* fruit,
A heap of rice, a rounded pot,
A bubble or a bell.

The most common stupas in Sri Lanka have always been either bell or bubble-shaped. The Thūpārāma was originally shaped like a rice heap, but was changed to the bell type when it was renovated during the 19th century. Rice heap stupas that can still be seen are those at Kelaniya and Ottappuva. No one is quite sure what the *āmalaka* and lotus-shaped stupas looked like, but perhaps the Indikatu Seya at Mihintale with the delicate lotus petal molding around the base of its dome represents this second type.

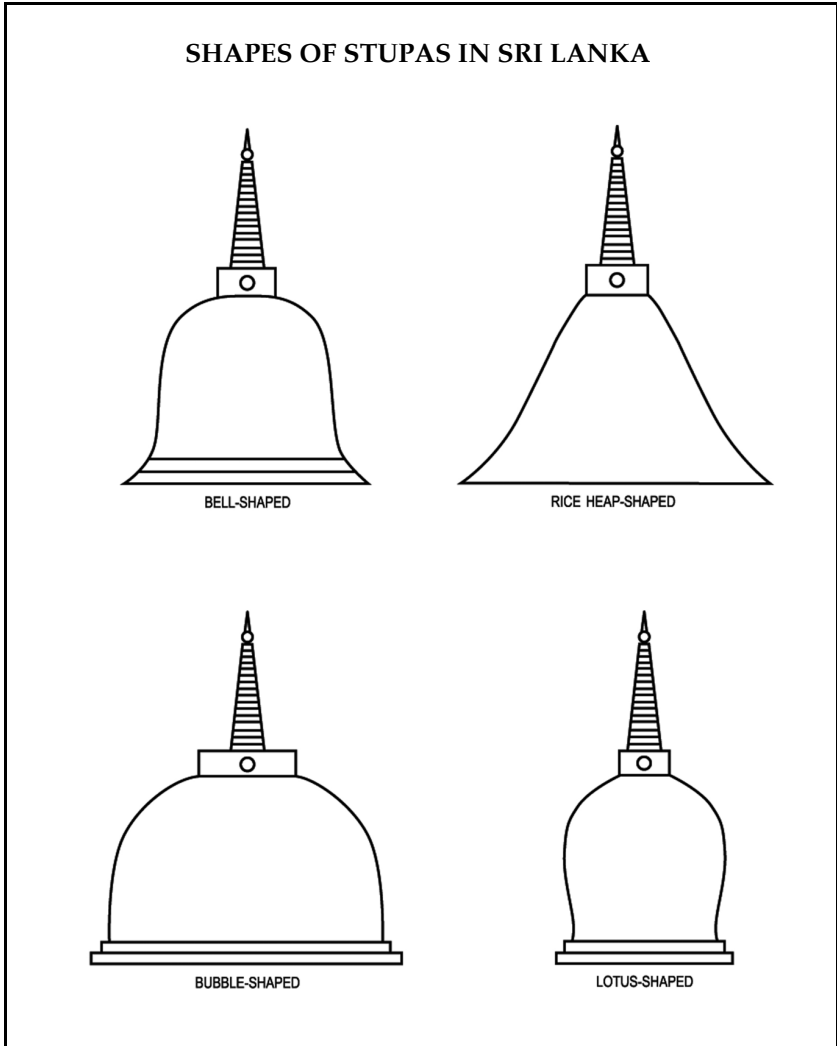
The first huge stupa in Sri Lanka was the Ruwanweliseya built in the 1st century BCE. From then on, the Sri Lankans built stupas of truly gigantic dimensions for the next four hundred years, culminating in the Mahāsenā's Jetavana Stupa—the biggest in the world in both its dimensions and its mass. The Damila Stupa built in Polonnaruwa in the 12th century would have been even bigger than this, but it was never finished.

Two of Sri Lanka's unique contributions to the development of stupa architecture are the *vāhalkada* and the *Vatadāge* or stupa temple. *Vāhalkadas* are stone or brick screens situated at the four cardinal points around stupas to act as a focal point for people's devotion and a place where they could place their offerings. These screens are often elaborately decorated with deities and animals associated in Indian cosmology with the different directions. The north is the domain of Vessavana or Kuvera, the king of the spirits (*yakkhas*), and is associated with the lion and the earth element. The south is the domain of Virūlhaka, the king of the Kumbhandas, and is associated with the bull and the fire element. Dhatarattha, the king of the angels (*gandhabbas*), has his domain in the east and is associated with the elephant and the air element. The west is the domain of Virūpakkha the king of the dragons (*nāgas*) and is associated with the horse and the water element. These various deities and mythological beings are all mentioned in the Janavasabha Sutta and the Ātānātiya Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya.

By the 7th century, some stupas were considered so sacred that it was thought appropriate to shelter them from the elements. A circular wall would enclose the stupa and then a large dome resting on stone pillars and supported by wooden rafters would be built over it. In Pali such structures are called stupa houses (*cetiya ghara*), and in Sinhalese *vatadāge*. In ancient times, the interiors of these temples would be covered with paintings and sometimes the stupa

INTRODUCTION

itself would be coated with gold leaf. Fairly well preserved stupa temples minus their wooden elements are to be seen at Polonnaruwa, Medirigiriya and Tiriyāya.



HINTS FOR PILGRIMS

The wise man proceeds from one shrine to another, giving no thought to rivers, mountains, rain or the burning sun. He ignores any abuse he encounters and humbly accepts any alms he receives. He greets any fellow-pilgrims he passes, gladly shares his food with them and gives them advice on the road ahead. Thus, he learns patience and contentment, generosity and kindness. Such a pilgrim is blessed by the Buddha.

Abhayandadanāmaparājita Sūtra

What follows are some hints about traveling in Sri Lanka that will help make your pilgrimage more fruitful.

WHAT TO BRING

Sri Lanka is generally hot and humid, except in the mountains, which are pleasantly cool all year round. Several pairs of light clothes are all you will need during most of your stay. If you intend to spend time in a meditation centre or perhaps stay in a hermitage, at least two pairs of white clothes, T-shirts and trousers or sarongs, will be necessary.

Sri Lanka is dotted with man-made reservoirs called *wewa*, many of them near the ancient places. It can be very pleasant to have a bath during the heat of the day or after a long day's walking, so don't forget to bring a bathing dress with you. A good pair of walking shoes or strong sandals will also be essential because places like the sacred cities require a lot of walking. However, be careful! Sri Lankan temples usually don't have a shoe-minder and good footwear left at temple entrances has a tendency to disappear.

Bring either a wide brimmed hat or an umbrella to protect you from the heat and perhaps some sunscreen. Another way to protect yourself from the heat is to drink plenty of fluids. If you have your own water bottle with a shoulder strap, you can drink whenever you need to, and will not have to keep buying bottled water and thus contribute to plastic bottle pollution.

A travel guide might be useful on your pilgrimage also. The ubiquitous *Lonely Planet Guidebook to Sri Lanka* will give you up-to-date information on visas, accommodation, prices, etc. Lonely

Planet's *Sri Lanka Phrasebook* might be useful too, although English is widely spoken throughout the country.

Some reading material can enrich your pilgrimage and fill up evenings or time spent waiting for transport. I recommend *Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals in Sri Lanka* by A. G. S. Kariyawasam and *Buddhism in Sri Lanka—a Short History* by H. L. Perera. A book that will certainly help you understand some of the things you will be seeing is Walpola Rahula's *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*.

These and other books on Buddhism and Sri Lanka are available in Colombo from the Buddhist Cultural Centre (125 Anderson Rd, Nedimala, Dehiwala. Tel. 011-2734256. Website: http://www.buddhistcc.com/books_main.htm.) The Centre has another branch at the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (380 Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7) The Nārada Centre bookshop (380/9 Sarana Road, Colombo 7) situated 200 meters from the last shop, also has a wide range of Buddhist publications. The widest range of books on Theravada Buddhism to be found anywhere is at the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy (54 Sangharaja Mawatha, Kandy. Tel. 081-2237283. Email: bps@bps.lk. Website: <http://www.bps.lk>.), situated at the Kandy lake 10 minutes walking from the Temple of the Tooth.

A map of Sri Lanka will be helpful and the *Road Map of Sri Lanka* published by the Survey Department is as good as any. You can get it from the Survey's sales outlet at 62 Chatham St, Fort, Colombo. Other maps and books can be purchased in most of Colombo's several bookshops. The two most comprehensive of these are Vijitha Yapa Bookshop, Unity Plaza, Galle Rd, Bambalapitiya, and Lake House Bookshop, Liberty Plaza, R. A. de Mel Mawatha, Kollupitiya.

WHEN TO GO

There are only two seasons in Sri Lanka, the wet and the dry. There are roughly three climate zones: the southwestern lowlands, the central hill country and the lowlands of the rest of the country. The temperature is most comfortable in the lowlands between June and December. The hill country is pleasant all year around. Between October and January, it rains a lot all over the Island. Monsoonal rains wet the southwestern lowlands and the hillcountry again between April and July.

Where possible, avoid the more popular sites like Anuradhapura and particularly Sigiriya on weekends, when crowds can be very large.

CULTURAL TRIANGLE

Throughout the 1990s, the Sri Lankan Government, together with UNESCO, carried out extensive excavations at many of the country's archeological sites, restored previously excavated sites and built or upgraded several museums. To help finance this work, tickets are now required for entering the main archeological sites. For non-Sinhalese, the round ticket to visit all sites costs US \$ 40 or Rs. 4000. It is valid for sixty days and one must start to use it within fourteen days of purchase. Tickets for individual sites cost US \$ 20 or Rs. 2000 for foreigners, and Rs. 10 or 20 for Sinhalese. If you wish to spend two days at Anuradhapura, mention this at the time your ticket is stamped and they will write your passport number on it, giving you a second day. Note that although your ticket is supposed to cover entrance into Dambulla and all the sites at Anuradhapura, in fact it does not. You will have to pay extra to visit Dambulla and at least one place at Anuradhapura. The Cultural Triangle Head Office in Colombo is at 212 /1 Baudhdhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7. Tel. 011-2500732. The ticket sales counter is at 11 Independence Avenue, Colombo 7 (Tel: 011-2679921). The Cultural Triangle web site is <http://www.lanka.net/ccf>. In Kandy, the office is near the tourist office, between the Queens Hotel and the Temple of the Tooth.

ITINERARIES

Most of the sacred places covered in this book can be visited in five separate journeys. The pilgrim will have to enter Sri Lanka through Colombo, so the Kelaniya Temple can be visited either as you arrive or leave the country. Because Kandy is a much cooler and more pleasant city than Colombo, I suggest that you use it as your base to visit the other places. Sri Lanka has good bus services. Private buses, including air-conditioned ones, ply between all major towns and cities. Where they do not, local Ceylon Transport Board buses are usually available. Another option is to hire a car and driver. Most of

the places in these itineraries can be conveniently visited by bus or with a combination of bus, hired car and three-wheeler.

THE NORTHERN PILGRIMAGE

1. Kandy to Kurunegala (42 km) and from there to Arankele via Ibbāgamuwa and back to Kurunegala, a round trip of about 60 km.
2. Kurunegala to Māho (46 km) and from there to Yāpahuwa, another 5 km.
3. Yāpahuwa to Galgamuwa (22 km) and from there to Sasseruwa and return to Galgamuwa, a round trip of about 45 km.
4. Galgamuwa to the Hatthikucchi turnoff (8 km) and from there to Hatthikucchi itself and back to the main road about 8 km altogether.
5. Hatthikucchi turnoff to Anuradhapura, a journey of about 35 km.
6. Anuradhapura to Tantirimale and return, a round trip of about 50 km.
7. Anuradhapura to Mihintale and return, a round trip of 22 km.
8. Anuradhapura to the Ritigala turnoff (43 km) which is few kilometers past Ganewalpola. No buses go from the turn off to the ruins, a distance of 9 km.
9. Ritigala turnoff to Minneriya (20 km) and from there to Medirigiriya via Hingurakgoda, a further distance of 19 km and then return to Minneriya.
10. Minneriya to Polonnaruwa, 20 km.
11. Polonnaruwa to Dimbulāgala and back, a round trip of 30 km.
12. Polonnaruwa to Kekirāwa via Habarana to Avukana, 85 km.
13. Kekirāwa to Kandy stopping at Dambulla, Nālanda and Aluvihāra, a total distance of 100 km.

THE TIRIYĀYA PILGRIMAGE

1. This journey can be done as an extension of the Northern Pilgrimage. Habarana to Trincomalee, 86 km, and from there to Tiriya, 26 km.

THE SRI PĀDA PILGRIMAGE

1. I suggest taking one of two routes to Sri Pāda: going from Kandy and returning the same way, or going from Kandy, taking the Ratnapura path down the mountain to Ratnapura and then going from there back to either Kandy or Colombo. Both routes will take two days.

THE SOUTHEASTERN PILGRIMAGE

1. Kandy to Mahiyangana, 68 km.
2. Mahiyangana to Rājagala via Maha Oya, 87 km.
3. Rājagala to Ampāra (25 km) and from there to Dīghavāpi, 20 km.
4. Dīghavāpi to Lāhugala via Siyambalānduwa, 86 km.
5. Lāhugala to Potuvil (5 km) and from there to Kudumbigala, another 18 km.
6. Potuvil to Monarāgala (71 km) from where the pilgrim can return to either Colombo or Kandy or join the Southern Pilgrimage.

THE SOUTHERN PILGRIMAGE

1. Kandy to Budurewagala via Wellawaya, 175 km.
2. Wellawaya to Maligawila via Buttala (51 km) and return to Buttala, a further 19 km.
3. Buttala to Kataragama, 37 km.
4. Kataragama to Sītulpahuwa, 13 km.
5. Sītulpahuwa to Tissamahārāma, 20 km.
6. Tissamahārāma to Weligama, 120 km.
7. Weligama to Colombo, 144 km.

WAYFARING IN SRI LANKA

Buddhist monks have always been great travelers. As with most people, they usually travel for a specific purpose although there is a long tradition of wayfaring (*cārika*) in Buddhism too. The idea of wayfaring is not necessarily to go anywhere in particular, but just to go. A wayfaring monk can only take with him what he is able to carry and so he has to learn make do with the bare minimum.

Encountering different people and new situations around every bend in the road also teaches him acceptance, patience and to have few expectations. Some of the other spiritual advantages of wayfaring are well summed up by Sakra in his advice to Rohita:

There is no happiness for him who does not wander. Thus have we heard. Living in the company of others even the best of men can become a wrong doer. Therefore, wander.

The feet of the wanderer are like flowers, his mind grows fruitful and all his defilements are destroyed by the fatigues of traveling. Therefore, wander.

The fortune of he who is sleeping, sleeps; it sits when he sits; it rises when he rises; and it progresses when he moves forward. Therefore, wander.

The practices of wayfaring and even of going on alms round (*pindapāta*) have almost died out in Sri Lanka, but people still know what they are and have great respect for monks who do either. For the Western monk, Sri Lanka is a wonderful place to go wayfaring. The country is beautiful, there are plenty of monasteries and ancient caves to stay in and people are friendly and hospitable—particularly towards monks. It also offers an excellent way to get to know the country and the people, to learn the language and see the places mentioned in this book. It can be a transforming experience as well. When you stand with your bowl at the door of a simple dwelling and the people give you the best food they have, you are inspired to try to be more worthy of their humble offerings. Experiencing the innate kindness and generosity of the Sinhalese people, especially of the rural folk, can also be conducive to gratitude and joy.

If you are wayfaring in the central highlands, it is best to keep to the roads or footpaths as going cross-country often involves a lot of climbing or having to negotiate rivers, some of them quite wide or fast flowing. Everywhere else, going cross-country from one point to another is much easier. On the west and south coast, one can alternately walk along the railway line, the coast road or the beach. There are also plenty of monasteries to stay in and alms-food is easily available.

It is necessary to decide where you are going to sleep well before dark. Monasteries are usually welcoming, although not always. Sleeping in the open or in a cave is easy, although Sinhalese

always find it a bit shocking for monks to do this. If they see that you are going to sleep rough, they will urge you to go to the nearest monastery or perhaps invite you to their homes and thus you will have accommodation that you did not know was available. If the place they suggest is unsuitable, let them know that you intend to stay where you are and they will often disappear and return with a candle, a mosquito coil and maybe a flask of hot tea. Inevitably, the next morning people will turn up with food.

In the drier areas of the country check yourself periodically for ticks if you are walking through shrub country or long grass. If you get one, do not pull it off as the head will break off under the skin and cause infection. Rather, hold a cigarette lighter near the tick and it will detach itself and fall off without being harmed. Leeches can be a real problem in the rainforests and other wet areas. One can protect oneself against these very persistent creatures by smearing soap or rubbing lime juice on the legs and feet.

If you intend to enter a forested area, always ask local people about the next village or settlement and make sure you have sufficient amount of water in the drier areas. If you are wayfaring in the south beyond Hambantota, some of the estuaries and lagoons have crocodiles in them; so again talk with local people before thinking of having a bath or wading across. Be also careful of wild elephants and bears when venturing into jungle areas in the south, east and north of the country.

Although the chances of contracting malaria while in Sri Lanka are small, this disease is prevalent in the north and in several remote districts in the east and it would be wise to take preventive measures such as taking malaria tablets and using mosquito nets if you are thinking of travelling through these areas.

To go wayfaring in Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks will need two robes and under-robes and a bathing cloth. You may also take a towel, but I have always used the second under-robe for this purpose. After bathing, the bathing cloth and second under robe can be quickly dried by laying them in the sun. A bowl with a holding sling and a shoulder bag, which can be used to carry everything in will also be necessary. Alternatively, if you have one of the larger Thai or Burmese bowls you can use that instead. A cloth satchel, which should contain a small bottle of citronella to ward off mosquitoes, a needle and thread, several pins or a pair of

tweezers for removing thorns from the feet, a cigarette lighter, some string, a few band-aids and a small bottle of iodine or some other disinfectant. Basic toiletries can be kept in a plastic satchel. A water bottle and a double layered cloth water strainer. Recent research has shown that such strainers are capable of removing all harmful bacteria from water. An umbrella: a folding umbrella can be easier to carry. If one intends to travel through rainforest areas such as the Simgharāja forest and Peak Wilderness Sanctuary, it might be useful to bring a raincoat because an umbrella offers no protection from heavy downpours. Sandals: if one is going to walk a lot, a pair of sturdy sandals will be necessary. Maps: topographical maps are available from the Surveyor General's Office, Kirula Rd, Narahenpita, Colombo 5. I recommend the 1:50,000 sheets. These maps can be cut into strips and folded zigzag, or cut into squares and made into a book for easy carrying.

MEDITATION CENTERS

There are many meditation monasteries and centers in Sri Lanka¹, but only a small number of them are geared to provide for foreigners and few of the teachers in them know English. There are, however, several places that do cater for foreigners. Some of these make a charge for food and accommodation, others don't. Either way it is very bad kamma to use a meditation centre, monastery or hermitage as cheap or free accommodation.

Some of the more well-known meditation centers are:

DHAMMAKŪTA VIPASSANA MEDITATION CENTRE

This centre offers ten-day courses using the technique taught by the Indian teacher S.N. Goenka. If you are interested in Goenka's particular approach to meditation, it is good to read William Hart's *The Art of Living—Vipassana as Taught by S.N. Goenka* before doing a course. Courses are held at Dhammakūta every month, but it is

1. For detailed information on meditation monasteries in Sri Lanka, see *Buddhist Forest Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Sri Lanka: A Guide for Foreign Buddhist Monastics and Lay Practitioners*, at <http://www.bps.lk/olib/mi/mi008.pdf>.

necessary to book well beforehand as they are often booked out completely. Course information and applications forms are available on the centre's website at www.kuta.dhamma.org. To get to Dhammakūta take the Mahākanda bus from Kandy and get off at the last stop. From there signs show the way up the mountain to the centre.

The address of the centre is: Mowbray, Galaha Road, Hindagala, Perādēniya. Tel.: 081-238-5774 or 081-383-7800. Email: info@kuta.dhamma.org.

Other Goenka centres are Dhammasobha near Avissawella, an Dhamma Anurudha near Anuradhapura.

KANDUBODA MEDITATION CENTRE

The Siyame Meditation Centre at Kanduboda near Delgoda out of Colombo has been welcoming Westerners for many years. The centre has accommodation for seventy-five people and a separate section for Westerners. Women have their own separate section also. The regime is a strict one and will be of most benefit for those already experienced in meditation. The Mahāsi Sayādaw technique is taught here, stressing mindfulness from moment to moment. To learn more about this approach to meditation read Mahāsi Sayādaw's book *The Progress of Insight* and Nyanaponika's *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, which are available from the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy. The centre's address is Kanduboda, Delgoda. For more information, ring 011-2570306 or siyanevipassana@yahoo.com. Website: www.insight-meditation.org. To get to Kanduboda, take the Pugoda Bus No 224 from the Pettah Bus Stand in Colombo.

NILAMBE MEDITATION CENTRE

This meditation centre is perched on the top of a mountain with a magnificent view over the surrounding countryside. During the 1980s and 90s it became very popular with Westerners because of Godwin Samararatna, an exceptionally kind and insightful teacher. Nilambe offers regular meditation courses that need to be booked well beforehand. The centre also has a good library. To get there, take the Deltota/Galaha bus No 633 from Kandy. Get out at Nilambe Office Junction (about 17km). From there, it is a steep 40

minute walk through tea plantations to reach the centre, or one can take a three-wheeler up. For more information see the centre's website at nilambe.net.

PĀRAMITĀ INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST CENTRE

This meditation centre offers regular courses and facilities for individual retreats. It has a book shop, a large library and finely appointed accommodations set amongst beautiful gardens. The centre is right on the Kandy–Colombo highway at Kadugannāva, about 20 kms from Kandy, and can be reached easily by bus. Coming from Colombo, ask the driver to let you off just after the famous tunnel rock at the hairpin bend before Kadugannāva. The centre is at No. 07 Balungala, Kadugannāva, Tel, 0774481980 (office). Website: <http://www.paramitaibc.org>.

SUMANTIPALA MEDITATION CENTRE

This meditation centre is just around the corner from Kanduboda Meditation Centre at Hibatgala Rd, Kanduboda, Delgoda. The abbot, Venerable Premasiri, is a gentle patient monk with much experience teaching Westerners. There is accomodation for 70 people and the abbot gives instruction on an individual basis. It is best to write beforehand to ask permission to stay or visit here. For more information, ring: 011–2402805.

LIBRARIES

There are several libraries in Colombo and Kandy for the visitor who would like to find out more about Buddhism or the history and culture of Sri Lanka.

THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

The best such library is at the Royal Asiatic Society, which was founded in 1848 and has one of the largest collections of books, documents and maps pertaining to Sri Lanka anywhere in the world. Only members can borrow books, but non-members can get permission to read on the premises. The Society is in the Mahāweli

Centre at 96 Ānanda Coomaraswamy Mawatha, Colombo 7. It is open from 9.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Sunday to Thursday and closed on public holidays.

THE COLOMBO PUBLIC LIBRARY

The library's Special Collection on the third floor has a large number of books on Buddhism and rare books on Sri Lanka. The library is on Marcus Fernando Mawatha, Colombo 7 and is open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. and is closed on Wednesday and public holidays.

THE D. S. SENANAYAKA LIBRARY

If you are spending time in Kandy, the town's public library is an excellent place to do some reading. The reference section on the second floor had a good collection of books on Buddhism and Sri Lankan history. The library is in the centre of the town between the prison and the market.

THE BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY (BPS)

You are welcome to use the Society's reference library with books and magazines on Buddhism, including German, French and other non-English works. The collection includes most of the Pali Tipitaka in both Pali and English. The BPS is situated beside the Kandy Lake, 300 meters beyond the Temple of the Tooth. For more information, ring 081-2237283 or visit <http://www.bps.lk>.

MUSEUMS

The first museum in Sri Lanka—and probably the first museum in the world—was built in Anuradhapura to preserve and display the bow and mast of the ship that had brought the Bodhi tree to the Island. The first modern museum, the National Museum, was built towards the end of the 19th century and now the country has a good number of such institutions (see <http://www.srilankatourism.org>). The more important ones are:

NATIONAL MUSEUM COLOMBO

This museum was founded in 1877 and houses the finest and most comprehensive collection of Sri Lankan Buddhist and Hindu art in the world. There are galleries displaying ivory carving, masks, inscriptions and Kandyan period jewelry, including the throne of Sri Lanka's last king. A special gallery contains numerous bronze and gilt images including the exquisite golden Avalokitesvara from Veheragala, the highlight of the collection. The National Museum is at 53 Marcus Fernando Mawatha, Colombo 7, and is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and closed on Friday and public holidays.

NATIONAL MUSEUM KANDY

The museum houses a modest collection of Kandyan period wood and ivory carving, palm leaf books, paintings and domestic artifacts. The museum is on Anagārika Dharmapāla Mawatha directly behind the Temple of the Tooth and is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and closed on Fridays and Saturdays.

ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM ANURADHAPURA

This is the largest and most comprehensive museum at Anuradhapura and should not be missed. The most interesting exhibits are the paintings from the Mahiyangana Stupa, but there are also some beautiful gilt bronze Buddha images and some very fine stone sculptures. In the gardens at the back of the museum is a good collection of urinal stones, images and thrones. Of particular interest are the inscriptions. The Archeological Museum is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is closed on Tuesdays and public holidays.

THE FA-HSIEN MUSEUM

This museum is named after the famous Chinese pilgrim who visited Anuradhapura in the 5th century and is located on the southern edge of the ruins of the Abhayagiri. It contains a small, but interesting collection of artifacts discovered during the recent excavations at the Abhayagiri. The Fa-hsien Museum is open every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

THE JETAVANA MUSEUM

This new museum is on the southern edge of the ruins of the Jetavana and displays a choice collection of stone and metal sculpture, inscriptions, pottery and jewelry recently discovered in the nearby ruins. The Jetavana Museum is open every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

POLONNARUWA MUSEUM

The exhibits in this fine new museum are well lit and clearly labeled. I suggest the pilgrim visit this museum before seeing the ruins as the models will give a good idea of how some of the monuments looked when they were complete. The Polonnaruwa Museum is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and closed on Tuesdays.

FESTIVALS AND HOLIDAYS

Sri Lanka has about thirty public holidays every year, more than any other country. The Sri Lanka Tourist Board publishes a monthly *Calendar of Events* that will inform you of coming holidays; see <http://www.srilankatourism.org/index.php>.

The main holidays and festivals are:

DURUTHU PERAHERA

Held on the full moon of January at the Kelaniya Temple, this is a smaller, but nonetheless colorful and vibrant, version of the Kandy Perahera. The temple and the stupa are illuminated with thousands of lights and huge crowds attend.

VESAK

According to the Theravādin tradition, the Buddha was born, enlightened and attained final Nirvana on the full moon of the third Indian month Vesak (Pali: *Vesākha*). It seems that Vesak has been celebrated from the time Buddhism was introduced to the Island; however, the first mention of it is from the reign of Dutthagāmani in the 1st century BCE. This festival is celebrated in Sri Lanka with enormous enthusiasm. For a week or so before,

children and youths are busy making geometrically shaped lanterns out of semi-transparent paper usually of soft pastel colors and often with long graceful tails. Nearly every house in the country will have at least one of these lanterns, some quite modest, others large, elaborate and of great beauty. Many people will spend Vesak evening going around looking at the lanterns and particularly beautiful ones will attract large appreciative crowds. Ambalangoda on the coast south of Colombo is famous for the size and creativity of its lanterns. An exhibition of lanterns is also held at Vihāra Mahādevī Park just next to the Colombo Town Hall.

On almost every street residents will set up a stall to offer food and drink to passers-by. In some cases, residents and businesses have collected money all year for the purpose. Neighborhood committees or wealthy people also build large billboards called *thoranas* or *pandels*. These large and brightly colored structures illustrate events from the life of the Buddha or various Jātaka stories and are illuminated with hundreds of colored lights. Some have moving panels, allowing particular stories to unfold gradually. In the cities, *pandels* are usually put up at main intersections and do attract huge crowds. In Sri Lanka, Vesak has not yet been spoiled by commercial considerations and the generosity, goodwill and piety that one encounter everywhere can be very moving. Both Vesak and the day following are public holidays.

POSON

This festival commemorates the arrival of Mahinda in Sri Lanka and is held on the full moon after Vesak. The first mention of this festival is from the reign of King Sirimeghavanna in the 4th century CE. He is said to have had the whole of Anuradhapura beautifully decorated and then a golden statue of Mahinda taken in procession from the city to Mihintale. Posen is celebrated with special events and sermons throughout the country. Monasteries are filled with people observing the eight or ten Precepts. Thousands of pilgrims converge on the stupas at Mihintale and spend the whole night on the mountain meditating, chanting or doing *pujas*. Mihintale's stupas are illuminated with thousands of lights. Everyone has their own little oil lamp and the whole places becomes literally a mountain of light.

THE ESALA PERAHERA

This spectacular festival, which continues for ten nights, is held in Kandy on the full moon of July or August depending on the year. The modern Perahera dates from the times of Kandyan kings but the festival of taking the Tooth in public procession goes back more than 1500 years. Fa-hsien has left us a vivid description of the ancient forerunner of the present Perahera as it was done during the 5th century in Anuradhapura. In preparation of the festival, the city was cleaned and beautified and paintings of all the five hundred and fifty two Jātaka stories were put up along all the roads. The Tooth was taken out of its temple and carried in a colorful procession northwards along the main road to a special shrine in the Abhayagiri Monastery where huge crowds gathered to worship it.

In the modern Perahera, dwarfs clear the crowds from the streets by cracking huge whips. They are followed by wave upon wave of beautifully decorated elephants, contingents of drummers vigorously beating a variety of drums, groups of dancers and acrobats all dressed in costumes from the Kandyan period. The climax of the procession is the brilliantly illuminated tusker bearing the gilded casket that contains the Tooth Relic. The honor of carrying the Relic casket is given to the largest and most regal elephant in the country. As the elephant proceeds, a pure white cloth is laid before him so that his feet never touch the ground. An exquisitely embroidered canopy is held above the casket. In reality, the Tooth Relic never leaves the Temple, a replica is carried in the Perahera, although people treat it as if it were the original, standing up and worshipping it as it passes. Hundreds of men carrying flaming torches for illumination flank the entire procession, which lasts as much as three hours. Each night, more performers and elephants are added so that on the last night the procession becomes one of the most spectacular pageants to be seen anywhere. It can be a good idea, if the pilgrim has the opportunity, to join the crowds watching the Perahera one night, and then the next night go to Rājapihilla Mawatha up the hill on the other side of the lake and watch it from there. The light from the burning torches and the illuminated Temple reflected in the lake is quite a sight.

MAHIYANGANA PERAHERA

Although not as spectacular as that of Kandy, the Mahiyangana Perahera is still a colorful affair well worth seeing. One of several unique features of this Perahera is the Khombakali dance where women balance pots on their heads. On the last night, the Veddas, the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka who live around Mahiyangana, join the procession. The Mahiyangana Perahera goes on for six nights and ends on the full moon after the Kandy Perahera. Accommodation in Mahiyangana is very limited, so if you decide to come, it would be wise to arrive earlier or book a hotel well beforehand. Otherwise, be prepared to join the pilgrims sleeping out in the park around the stupa.

THE SRI PĀDA PILGRIMAGE

One of the major events in Sri Lanka's religious calendar is the annual pilgrimage to Adam's Peak more correctly known as Sri Pāda. The pilgrim's season starts on the full moon of December, when an eight hundred-year-old white sandalwood statue of Samanta is carried up the mountain and enshrined there. The season officially finishes on the full moon of April (*Vesak*), when the statue is carried back down the mountain. It can be well worthwhile being in the country during this time in order to join the nearly quarter of a million others making the ascent. More details will be given in the section on Sri Pāda.

OTHER HOLIDAYS

All full moon days (*poya*) are public holidays, as are National Day (4 February), Christmas, Good Friday, New Years Day, May Day, Sinhala and Tamil New Year and the proceeding day (13th and 14th April), and the Hindu festival of Dipavali, which is celebrated in either late October or early November.

GUIDES

Watchers and gardeners at some archaeological sites sometimes attach themselves to visitors and try to act as guides. This is quite harmless, but do remember that such people are unskilled workers

and the information they give you is usually a mixture of fact, fiction and nonsense. I have heard such guides say that the Sigiriya paintings are of "Chinese ladies", that Buddhaghosa lived in one of the caves at Aluvihāra and that the Jetavana Stupa is as big as the pyramids of Giza. Some of this patter even makes its way into the guidebooks. The guides provided by tour companies are often little better informed. A self-appointed guide can also be an irritation if one wants to contemplate the monuments in silence and see them at one's own pace.

There are two ways to deal with this problem. If you politely, but firmly, tell the guide to go away, he usually will. Perhaps a more skillful strategy is to tell him that if he leaves you alone, you will give him something when you have finished. This way you get your peace and he gets something to supplement his inevitably meager wages.

FOOD

Sri Lanka has its own unique cuisine although those not used to it often find it oily and overly salted. Another problem some visitors have with the food is that it can be very hot, sometimes hot enough to take the mucus membrane off your mouth as it goes in and the lining off your bowels as it comes out the next morning.

Most meditation centers do not make provisions for foreigners as far as the chili in food is concerned, or if they do, it does not seem to make much difference. There are ways you can minimize this problem is to drink coconut water with your meal and the other is to mix a bit of curd in it. Both can really take the fire out of a hot dish.

Vegetarianism is common in Sri Lanka and many places offer meat-free dishes. Most people staying in meditation centers observe the eight or ten Precepts, one of which is to abstain from eating after noon. Consequently, meditation centers do not usually provide supper, although tea or other hot drinks are always provided. Outside the cities, soft drinks are available but a better alternative to soft drinks or bottled water is coconut water (*tembili*), which is both very refreshing and safe even when not chilled.

MEDICAL CARE

Medical care in Sri Lanka is generally not of the same standard as it is in the West, but most doctors are skilled enough to deal with most medical problems. The best hospitals in Sri Lanka are the Asiri, Apollo and Navaloka private hospitals in Colombo where the medical care and facilities are of a very high standard, but, of course, the fees are higher too. Government hospitals offer adequate medical facilities for low prices, although one often has to wait a while to get attention.

ETIQUETTE

In Sri Lanka, the Buddhist values of gentleness, politeness and restraint are highly regarded and the etiquette of the culture is built around these values. While Sri Lankans are not as particular about etiquette as some Southeast Asians and are far too polite to say anything when it is transgressed, like people everywhere they appreciate it when visitors honor their customs.

Here are a few hints on how to behave. When entering a temple or monastery, it is polite to remove your shoes, take off your hat and lower your umbrella. Even some long-ruined temples are considered sacred and should be treated as if they were still in use. Clothing that leaves the legs and shoulders exposed are not appropriate in temples. When preparing flowers to offer at a shrine, it is considered bad manners to smell them. A flame used to light incense or an offering lamp should be extinguished with a flick of the hand rather than blown out. In other Buddhist cultures people walk around stupas or temples in a clockwise directions, but in Sri Lanka this is not considered to be of great importance. When meeting a layperson, it is usual to put one's hands together in the *añjali* gesture and say "*Āyubowan*," meaning "Long life."

When meeting a monk, people usually just bow, although it is not necessary to do a full prostration as the Sinhalese do; putting your hands together in the *añjali* gesture and giving a slight bow would be good. When given something or helped in some way, you can say "*Bohoma Stuti*" meaning "Many thanks." A woman should never touch a monk and it is considered decorous for them not to stand too close to one either. As in most Asian cultures, it is

considered polite to eat, give things and receive them with the right hand as the left hand is used for washing after going to the toilet.

Outside main tourist areas, Sinhalese are very curious about foreigners and you will often be asked which country you come from and similar questions. Some visitors may find this continual asking of the same questions a bit trying after a while, but be patient and remember that your questioner has probably never had your opportunities to broaden his or her horizons. Reverse roles by asking your questioner about *his* or *her* life. This can make the conversation more interesting and can be a good way to get to know the people and the country better.

Sinhalese are by nature a very open people and the tradition of hospitality to strangers runs deep. Unfortunately, as often happens with mass tourism, familiarity with visitors has begun to breed contempt. You are bound to encounter people who under the guise of friendliness or a shared faith will try to take advantage of you. At main tourist places such as Kandy, various rip-off scams have become very common, so be careful. Sadly, some monks in the temples where tourists go are not averse to this sort of thing either. If a monk asks you to buy him something, asks you for a donation or suggests you do something that it likely to cost you money, politely, but firmly decline. According to the *Vinaya*, monks are not supposed to ask for anything without being invited and are not even supposed to touch money.



SACRED CITIES

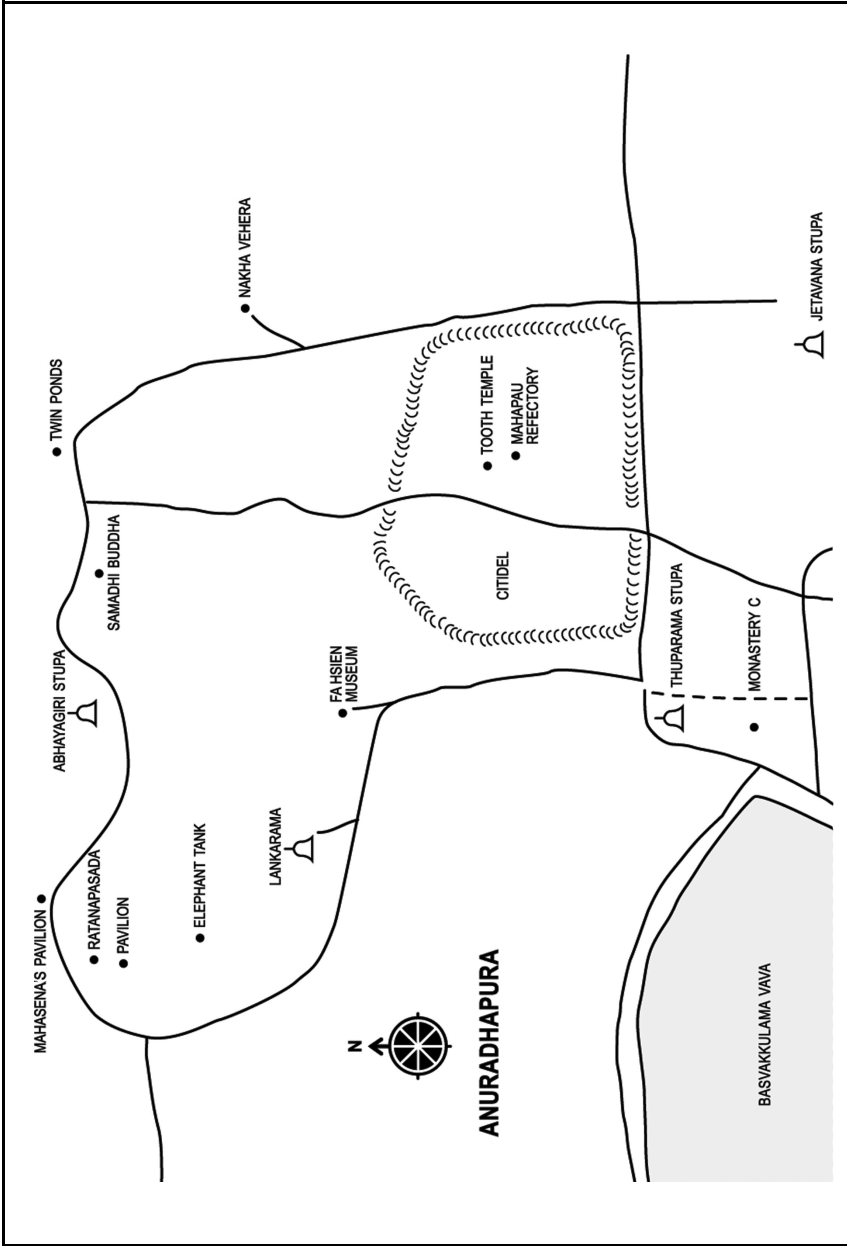
ANURADHAPURA

Anuradhapura was founded by Pandukābhaya, the fifth king of Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE, and remained the capital of the country for one thousand four hundred years. There are several stories about how the city got its name, but it was probably named after Anurāḍha, one of the ministers of Pandukābhaya. The centre of the city was the citadel where the royal palace and the homes of the aristocracy and the wealthy were situated. There were four gates in the citadel, the main one to the east where its massive foundations can still be seen. In the 1st century CE, King Kūtakannatissa raised the walls to a height of 3 meters high and constructed a moat around them. Fa-hsien, who stayed in Anuradhapura for three years, said that, “the main streets and side streets were level and well kept.”

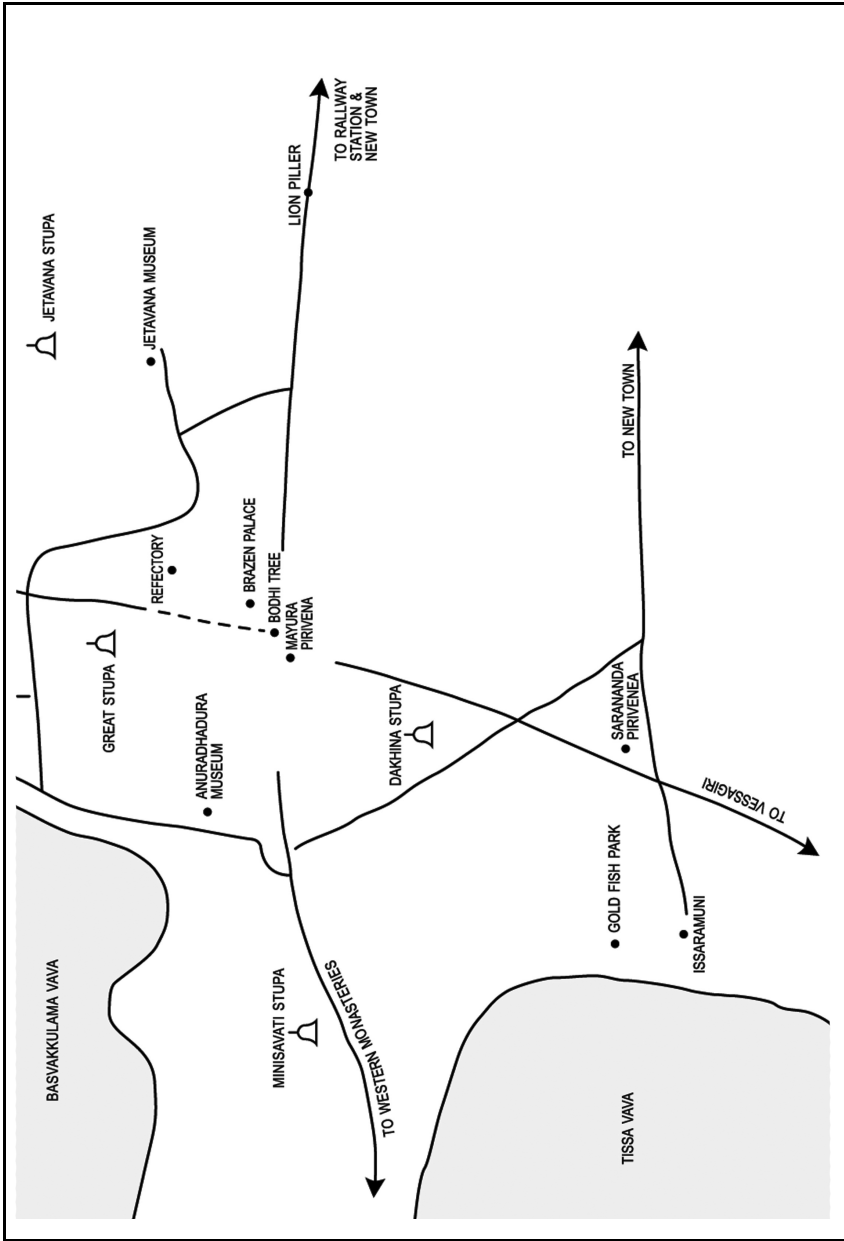
There are four large reservoirs around the city, the biggest being the Nuwarawewa. These reservoirs were meant to provide the city with its water, but may have also had a defensive role as well. These major engineering undertakings have retained their usefulness right up to the present; the Tissawewa provides the modern town with its drinking water.

Like Lhasa, Kyoto, Xian and several other ancient Buddhist capitals, Anuradhapura was a city surrounded by and to some degree dwarfed by three huge monasteries and several other smaller ones. The first of these was the Mahāvihāra or the “Great Monastery” founded by Mahinda in the 2nd century BCE. What later came to be called Theravada Buddhism originally evolved in the Mahāvihāra. The monastery started as a few small buildings, but eventually grew into a vast complex of thirteen separate monasteries covering about 40 hectares on the southeast side of Anuradhapura. For several centuries, the Mahāvihāra was the biggest and most powerful monastery in Sri Lanka and all other monasteries in the Island were affiliated to it. With power came political influence and there were times when the Mahāvihāra even played a role in king making.

SACRED ISLAND



SACRED CITIES



The second great monastery at Anuradhapura was the Abhayagirivihāra, the Mount of Courage, which covered about 121 hectares. The Abhayagiri was situated to the north of the citadel and thus was known as the Uttaravihāra, the Northern Monastery, while its monks were referred to as the Dhammarucikas, "Those Who Delight in Dhamma."

With an inclination for openness and liberalism, the Abhayagiri was regularly at odds with the more conservative Theravādins of the Mahāvihāra. The chronicles of Sri Lanka and other works of the Mahāvihāra generally paint a negative picture of the Abhayagirivāsins, but evidence from other sources suggests the opposite. When the Chinese monk Hsüan-tsang was in India, he heard this about them: "The Abhayagirivāsins studied both vehicles and widely diffused the Tipitaka. The monks attended to the moral rules and were distinguished by their power of abstraction and their true wisdom. Their correct conduct was an example for subsequent ages, their manners grave and imposing."

The meditation manuals used by each of the two monasteries suggest that they also took a somewhat different approach to spiritual practice. The Theravādin's *Visuddhimagga* presents meditation from a more academic perspective, while the Abhayagirin's *Vimuttimagga* is a more practical manual.

The Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien reported that there were three thousand monks at the Mahāvihāra, but five thousand at the Abhayagiri. The Abhayagirivāsins were the custodians of the country's most sacred relics, the Tooth and the Bowl and they had a Bodhi tree, which was supposedly an offshoot of the original at Bodhi Gaya. The Abhayagirivāsins also controlled Mihintale, the oldest and most hallowed religious centers in the country and it appears that the monastery at Sigiriya was a branch of the Abhayagiri as well.

While the Mahāvihāra used Pali, which had died out in India before the end of the first millennium, the Abhayagirivihāra also used Sanskrit, which gave them wide international contacts. As the great Mahayana sutras appeared in India, they quickly found their way to the Abhayagirivihāra where some of their ideas were adopted with enthusiasm. Records show that Abhayagirivihāra had branches in Java in Indonesia and probably in India as well.

Directly south of the citadel, and east of the Mahāvihāra, was the third of Anuradhapura's great monasteries, the Jetavana. This monastery, named after the famous monastery in Sāvattihī, India, where the Buddha used to stay, was built by King Mahasena in the 3rd century C.E. In about the year 249 CE a new teaching from India called the Vetullavāda (Mahāyāna) was attracting attention at the Abhayagiri. Some three hundred of its monks disagreed so strongly with certain aspects of this new teaching that they broke away and formed themselves into a new sect called the Sāgalikas after their leader, the renowned scholar Sāgala. King Mahāsena appropriated some land owned by the Mahāvihāra and built these monks the Jetavana monastery. Ideologically it seems that the monks of the Jetavana occupied a position somewhere between the conservatism of the Mahāvihārins and the radicalism of the Abhayagirivāsins.

Almost all the ruins the pilgrim sees at Anuradhapura today are of these three great monasteries. Secular buildings like palaces, shops and houses were all made out of brick, mud, wood or thatch and therefore have all completely disappeared.

During the 7th and 8th centuries, power shifts and civil wars caused a decline in Anuradhapura's power and influence. By the 9th century, continual pressure from South India meant that Anuradhapura was no longer safe as a capital and political power gradually shifted to Polonnaruwa, although the city continued to be religiously important for at least another four hundred years. Finally, in the 13th century, the whole northern and eastern plain of Sri Lanka was abandoned and both Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa were gradually covered by the jungle. Although Anuradhapura was deserted for a thousand years, its sacred shrines were never forgotten. A few lone monks lived among the ruins and looked after the continual trickle of pilgrims who came.

With the advent of the British, the general improvement in roads and the construction of bridges, pilgrimage became much easier and for the first time in centuries large numbers of people started coming again. In 1834 Lt. Skinner, who accompanied the then governor on his inspection tour to Anuradhapura, wrote, "The road from Kandy through Matale and Dambulla was crowded with pilgrims on their way to the Sacred Bodhi Tree. ... When the governor reached the ruins of the old city, it was perfectly alive

with people.” But there was not much to see; the Thūpārāma was a jumble of pillars, bricks and stones, while the Great Stupa was little more than a steep-sided mound covered with jungle. Most places could not even be identified at all.

In the 1880s Anuradhapura was made a district capital, in 1904 the railway arrived and slowly the jungle gave way to habitation. The sheer size and splendor of the structures that emerged began to awaken in Sri Lankans a pride in their past and played a part in the revival of Buddhism and the call for independence.

The ruins of Anuradhapura are spread over a wide area and seeing everything at a leisurely pace will require at least two full days. I suggest the pilgrim start early when it is still cool, have a rest after lunch and perhaps a bath in one of the reservoirs until about 3 o'clock, and then continue looking around until dusk. Some places at Anuradhapura are always crowded with pilgrims and are rather noisy, but there are still plenty of places where you can enjoy the ruins undisturbed by others, sit in the shade of one of the majestic Māra trees and watch the monkeys or meditate.

WHAT TO SEE

• *Vessagiri*

The southernmost place of interest in Anuradhapura is an ancient monastery now called Vessagiri. The original name of this place was Issarasamanārāma, but in the late 19th century it was wrongly identified as the Vessagiri and the name has stuck. This is one of the loveliest places around Anuradhapura, quiet and shady and with monkeys often clamoring over the rocks.

The Vessagiri consists of a line of three hummocks lying in a north-south direction. Starting at the northern end of the site just near the road the pilgrim will notice that the first hummock has several attractive fig trees growing out of it, the ruins of a large structure on it with a staircase leading up to it. A little further along is a group of huge boulders with several caves on their eastern side. At the entrance of the second of these, walk up the stairs cut out of the rock. Until the 1970s there were several paintings here, but these have now all been destroyed by vandals. Walking through the cave and looking up, the pilgrim will see several inscriptions on the drip ledges. Now ascend the stairs onto the top of the hummock

where there are the ruins of a stupa and other structures. Proceeding along the top of the hummock towards the south, the pilgrim will see the foundations of a Bodhi tree shrine down on the ground.

At the end of the rock are several more caves including one under the huge isolated boulder balanced on the very end of the hummock. Note the three beds in this cave worn smooth by centuries of use. The inscription on the drip ledge above these beds says that this cave was prepared and gifted by a man named Tissa. Now climb down the stairs to the ground again and walk to the southernmost hummock and walk around it in a clockwise direction.

• *Sārānanda Pirivena*

Heading north along the road, just before the turnoff to Issaramuni, is a large modern monastery, the Sārānanda Pirivena, easily identified by the huge cement Buddha rising above it. In ancient times, the word *pirivena* meant a monk's cell or hut, while today it means an educational institution for monks. This is one of the better monasteries in Anuradhapura and a good place to get some idea of how a well-run modern monastery functions. If you come here in the evening at seven, you can watch or join the hundred or so monks as they do the evening *puja*. This monastery and the Sirisangbo Pilgrims Rest right next door both offer very basic accommodation to local pilgrims, although foreigners are welcome too.

• *Issaramuni*

The ancient name of the place now called Issaramuni is uncertain, although at one time it was known as Meghagiri Vihāra. At different times it was a monastery, a shrine to Kuvera, and probably a part of the nearby royal pleasure garden. During the 19th century, it became a monastery again and remains so today.

On passing through the gatehouse, the first thing the pilgrim will see is a large pool lined with stones. Carved in low relief on the boulder above the back left hand corner of this pool are several elephants that look as if they are coming to bathe in the water. Next to this, a stairway through a series of three terraces leads up to a cave-shrine cut out of a large partly cone-shaped boulder. At the top of the arch is a medallion depicting Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune, flanked by elephants which are tipping water

over her head. On either side of this medallion is an elaborately carved *makara*. Look carefully and you will notice a dwarf sitting on the *makara's* back and holding it by the snout so a man carrying a woman can emerge from its mouth. Outside the shrine, to the right, is a niche in which are the figures of a man in the royal ease pose (*mahārājajalīlā āsana*) with a horse peering over his shoulder. He wears large earplugs and chunky bracelets on his wrists. A great deal has been written about what these figures represent. Whatever their meaning, the figures show a distinct South Indian influence.

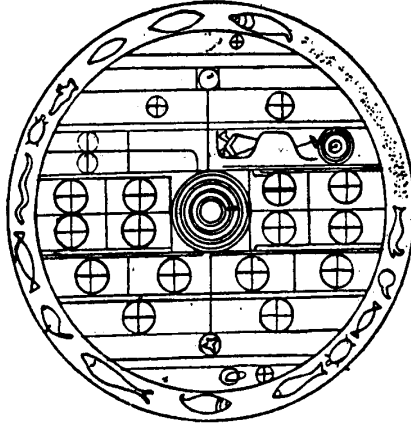
Further along is the main shrine room of the temple built in the 19th century. Next to this is the new museum displaying sculptures and other objects found around Issaramuni. Most of these sculptures are of a secular nature and date from the time when the place formed a part of the royal pleasure park. The sculpture now called "The Lovers" is the most famous piece on display. It depicts a young warrior (note the sword and shield behind him) with his arm around his girlfriend. She has her finger raised in admonishment and seems to be coyly urging him to desist. The couple wears large earplugs of the type that were popular from the 1st to the 7th centuries. Other sculptures include a king and his family, a beautiful stone couch, a lion and several Buddha images.

The caves at the back of the rock have inscriptions on them dating from the 3rd century BCE. A stairway leads to the top of the boulders where there are a stupa and an ancient stone with footprints of the Buddha.

• *The Goldfish Park*

If the pilgrim goes behind the Issaramuni to the bund of the Tissawewa and walks along it a little to the north, he or she will arrive at the Ranmasu Uyana, the Goldfish Park, the most well preserved of Anuradhapura's several royal pleasure parks. This is where Dutthagāmani's only son Prince Sāliya met the untouchable woman Asokamālā and renounced the throne out of love for her.

The area was used as garden for many centuries although the present ruins date from the 7th or 8th centuries. The park was 12 hectares in extent and was surrounded by a wall and a moat. Two ridges of rock run in a north south direction parallel with the bund of the Tissawewa from where water was piped into the park's pools and fountains. We will describe the ruins starting from the south.



Walking to the west side of the first rock ridge, the pilgrim will see an unusual circular diagram etched on the rock. What this diagram represents has never been explained; some say it is a Tantric *mandala*, while others say that it has something to do with astrology. Perhaps it was some sort of game board. Now walk to the east side of second rock ridge where there are two pools. On the rock are the foundations of a pleasure chamber made of brick that overlooked the pools and gardens. Directly below this and abutting the rock is a small pavilion made out of stone. There is a couch inside and a curtain of water once flowed over the entrance. Directly in front of the pavilion is a small rectangular pool and right next to it is another larger one. One can easily imagine the king lounging here on a hot afternoon with the ladies of his court, eating fruit and listening to music.

Walk a little further north to the next pool and climb to the rock above it. The pilgrim will see the pipes once underground, but now exposed by archeologists, that led water from the reservoir to the gardens. Water was first channeled under the marble floor of the brick chamber to cool it, then it flowed out over the rock and into the pool. The rock has several elephants frolicking amongst lotuses carved on it. Elephants often mate in the water and they appear here because of this erotic association. Walking around the park, the pilgrim will see both the foundations of pavilions that once perched on the rocks and the complex system of channels, sluices and drains. When the Goldfish Park had trees and flowering shrubs and vines, it must have been a delightful place.

- *Mayūra Parivena*

On the southern side of the Sri Mahā Bodhi are the ruins of the Mayūra Parivena, first built by King Buddhādāsa in the 4th century. It was here that Buddhaghosa resided during his stay in Sri Lanka. Buddhaghosa was the Indian monk who was invited to the Island to update, systemize and render into Pali all the ancient Sinhalese commentaries. In doing so, he also turned Theravada into a single monolithic system. Buddhaghosa's famous *Visuddhimagga*, his compendium of the doctrine, remains to this day the most widely read and studied of all Theravādin writings and his commentaries remain the standard by which Theravādin orthodoxy is judged. Buddhaghosa himself described the Mayūra Parivena as "beautifully appointed, agreeably endowed, with cool shade and with an ample water supply." Today, only a few calved pillars remain of the Mayūra Parivena and other parts of it may still lie buried under the nearby bungalow.

- *The Sri Mahā Bodhi*

After the first Sri Lankan men became monks, Anulā, one of Devānampiyatissa's sub-queens, and several other noblewomen expressed the desire to become nuns. According to the *Vinaya*, women have to be ordained twice; first by monks and then again by nuns. As no nuns had accompanied Mahinda to Sri Lanka, a message was sent back to King Asoka requesting some nuns to come. This message also included a request for a cutting of the Bodhi tree, the very tree at Bodh Gaya that the Buddha had sat under on the night he became enlightened.

So in the following year a group of nuns led by Sanghamittā, the daughter of King Asoka, arrived in Sri Lanka with a cutting of the famous tree. After the tree took root, thirty-two cuttings were taken from it and planted in locations around the Island. When Fahsien saw the Tree in the early 5th century, it was propped up because it was leaning so much to the southeast. Like the Tooth Relic, the Bodhi Tree gradually came to be associated with kingship. Every twelve years of a monarch's reign, a great festival of thanksgiving at the Bodhi Tree was held. Even during the centuries that Anuradhapura was abandoned and covered with jungle, the Bodhi Tree was looked after by monks and visited by pilgrims.

On passing through the gate, the pilgrim enters a large compound surrounded by a high thick wall made up of large rough-cut stones. Some of these stones are placed on angle to create triangular holes in which lamps are burned during special festivals. This wall was built by King Kīrti Srī Rājasimgha in the late 18th century after he received reports that elephants were damaging the Bodhi Tree. All the other buildings within the compound are recent and are of no interest. Along the north side of the wall is a line of stelas recording donations that have been made to the Bodhi Tree over the years. In the middle of the compound are a series of terraces that one should ascend on the north side. The two guard stones at the foot of the stairs are particularly fine and to the right of it is a bronze statue of Sanghamittā donated by the Buddhists of Thailand. At the top of the stairs, the pilgrim will see the highest and smallest terrace surrounded by a fence made of 18-carat gold. There are several shoots and branches of the Bodhi Tree. The one believed to be the original cutting brought from India can be seen on the northeast side of the terrace. It is supported by brightly painted crutches and its trunk is wrapped in yellow cloth.

• *The Brazen Palace*

Leaving the northern gate of the Bodhi Tree, the pilgrim will see on the right a veritable forest of stone pillars, forty rows of forty pillars each. This is the remains of the Brazen Palace or Lohapāsāda, first built in the 3rd century BCE by King Devānampiyatissa and later redesigned by Dutthagāmani as the chapter house or *śīmā* for the Mahāvihāra. A chapter house is a building where monks are ordained and where they assemble twice every month to chant the rules and discuss the running of the monastery.

The Brazen Palace was originally nine stories high, with a hundred windows on each story and with a thousand rooms altogether. It got its name from the sheets of gilt copper that covered its roof. Being made mainly of wood, it burned down and was rebuilt several times and it was restored for the last time by Parakkamabāhu I in the 12th century. The Brazen Palace also occasionally fell foul to sectarian rivalries. King Mahāsena had the whole structure demolished and all its materials given to the Abhayagiri monastery.

The first European known to have visited Anuradhapura was the Franciscan monk Negroa in 1630. He was both fascinated and intrigued by the Brazen Palace's many pillars and took the trouble to measure and count all the one thousand six hundred of them.

Walking to the northeast corner of the Brazen Palace, the pilgrim will see a stone-lined pond with its diameter decreasing as it gets deeper. A system of channels from here led water to the Bodhi Tree.

• *The Refectory*

Leaving the Brazen Palace and proceeding north along the path, the pilgrim will see the foundations of a building off to the right. These are the remains of the Catussāla, the "Hall of the Four," one of the Mahāvihāra's several refectories. The name refers to the four requisites of Buddhist monks—robes, alms, shelter and medicine. The Catussāla was built by Devānampiyatissa and renovated by Vasabha in the 3rd century CE. With so many monks around Anuradhapura, it was simply impossible for them all to be sustained by begging for alms so each monastery usually had huge dining rooms like this one. Monks who were entitled to eat in such places were issued with wooden ration tickets.

The main entrance leads to a large paved rectangular courtyard, which was originally surrounded, by a pillared veranda under which monks used to sit, probably on mats on the floor or on wooden benches. Note the drains where there would have been facilities for the monks to wash their bowls and their hands after their meals. Note also the small paving stone with footprints and an umbrella etched on it. This may have been where the monk who maintained order stood and watched to make sure decorum was maintained.

Against the east wall of the refectory is a huge stone trough 15 meters long made of several pieces of stone so finely finished that they fit together perfectly. In the *Mahāvamsa*, such troughs are called rice boats (*bhattanāvā*) while in some inscriptions they are referred to as stone boat (*galnāvā*). Steaming rice was tipped into these troughs, then doled out to monks as they lined up and walked passed with their bowls. It has been calculated that this particular trough would have held enough rice to fill three thousand eight hundred bowls. There is no sign of any stoves in the

refectory so perhaps the rice and curries were cooked elsewhere and brought here.

• *The Great Stupa*

Returning to the main path and continuing north, the pilgrim soon arrives at the eastern entrance to the Sri Lanka's most sacred stupa. After Dutthagāmani made himself king in 161 BCE he began an extravagant building program. His most ambitious project was the huge stupa which came to known as the Ruwanweliseya or simply as Mahā Thūpa, the Great Stupa.

The *Mahāvamsa* devotes four whole chapters to detailing the building of this monument. Dozens of architects submitted designs for the stupa, but one after the other these were rejected as inadequate. Finally, when asked how he intended to design the monument, one architect called for some water in a bowl, scooped up some of it and let it flow back into the bowl so that it formed a bubble. "I will make the dome of the stupa like that," he said and his design was accepted. Monks from all the famous monasteries including those in India were invited to the groundbreaking ceremony. Foundations of brick and stone more than 6 meters deep were laid. Tradition has it that plates of brass and silver formed part of the foundation as well, but because the stupa has never been excavated this cannot be confirmed. Teams of elephants were repeatedly driven back and forth over the foundations to make them more firm. Dutthagāmani was determined that he should have all the merit from this work of piety for himself so he made sure that everyone who labored on the stupa was well paid.

As the stupa moved towards completion, Dutthagāmani's health declined and it became clear that he would not live to see his masterpiece completed. Out of pity for the old monarch, his brother and heir Saddhātissa had white cloth stretched over the uncompleted parts of the stupa and then had his brother carried out so he could die thinking it was finished. When the Ruwanweliseya was finally completed, it was one of the wonders of the age, having a diameter of 90 meters and a height of 91 meters. The famous stupa at Sāñchī, which was built at roughly the same time, by comparison has a diameter of 37 meters and a height of 16 meters. The whole project had cost 6400,000 coins in cash; not including food, clothing and other expenses for the builders.

By the 19th century, the Ruwanweliseya was little more than a jungle-covered hill until in 1893 when Venerable Nāranvita Sumanasāra launched a campaign to restore it. The work was completed in 1940 when a huge crystal donated by the Buddhists of Burma was placed on the stupa's pinnacle. Unfortunately, because of lack of engineering skills, the restorers failed to reproduce the stupa's original perfect bubble shape.

Mount the stairs and pass through the gatehouse, of which only the pillars remain. Such gatehouses are at the four directions around this and all other great stupas. Note on the right a trough where pilgrims could wash the dust of their feet before entering the sacred precincts. The retaining wall of the stupa's platform is made up of a line of elephants which although much restored are substantially the same as the originals. Climbing the stairs and passing through the inner gateway, the pilgrim enters the vast paved courtyard. Note that just inside the gate is a large and much restored statue popularly believed to be of King Dutthagāmani, but probably of a bodhisattva and dating from about 650 CE.

Proceeding around the stupa in a clockwise direction, the pilgrim comes to a modern shrine. On the verandah is a line of large fine and much restored images of the Buddha dating from about the 7th century. On the right end of this shrine is an inscription of King Nissankamalla in beautifully inscribed letters. The inscription records some of the many good deeds the king did to make himself popular with his subjects: "He had himself, his son and queen weighed against gold and jewels and then gave it all to the poor." Expressing a rather modern sentiment, the inscription goes on to say, "Some people resort to robbery even at the risk of their own lives because of poverty. So as to remedy this, he bestowed gifts of gold and silver coins on them." Loath to disrobe immoral monks or perhaps fearful of doing so, the king tried to buy them out: "He saw that many monks lead impure lives or have little interest in religion, but do not leave the Sangha because of greed or because they will be liable to government service if they do. So he graciously proclaimed that if they disrobe of their own accord, he would provide them with a means of livelihood and exempt them from government obligations."

Proceeding further, one will come to the first *vāhalkada*, a kind of screen put up at the four cardinal points around stupas to serve

as focal points for the worship. Flowers and lamps were offered here and garlands were hung on the hook-shaped protrusions. This first screen is a modern copy of the original. Near this is a large paving stone with an inscription by Queen Kalyānavatī on it. The inscription says that the queen held a seven-day festival during which fragrant flowers and lamps with scented oil were offered to the Great Stupa. She also gave gifts to the staff who worked at the shrine; “scribes, appraisers, brahmins, painters, dancers, singers, drummers, the women who fill the foot washing troughs, the female slaves who clean the premises, garland makers and perfumers.” Note also that some of the other paving stones in the courtyard are inscribed with the names of the people who donated them or sometimes of the masons who cut and dressed them. This paving was mostly laid in the 9th century.

Next, the pilgrim will see a statue of King Bhātika Abhaya in the gesture of worship leaning against a pillar. This much eroded, but still impressive statue dates from the 4th century. A little further along is a model of the Ruwanweliseya. Popular legend says that this model was used as a guide for the architects when they were building the original; in fact, it dates from about the 7th century. The next *vāhalkada* the pilgrim passes is an ancient one and may date from the time of the stupa’s construction. Note the large flower altar shaped like a lotus. Further along is a huge stone trough once used for holding water for washing and refreshing flower offerings and now used for whitewash.

Now leave the inner gate of the Great Stupa, turn right and walk around it to the outer west gate. The pilgrim will see several things of interest. Just beyond the west gate is a stepped bathing pond made of huge finely cut pieces of stone. Near to this are several temples with finely carved pillar capitals, moonstones, stairs and balustrades. On the northeast corner of the perimeter wall of the stupa is a huge stone pillar made from a single piece of white crystalline stone. In ancient times, such pillars, called *indakhīla*, were placed at the entrance of cities, or in this case a monastic city, to emphasize their permanence and invincibility.

- **Monastery C**

Now take the paved path that leads from the Great Stupa north to the Thūpārāma. A little way along the path and through the trees

to the left is a collection of well-preserved ruins given the name Monastery C by archeologists. These ruins will give the pilgrim an excellent idea of what Anuradhapura's ancient monasteries were once like.

The monastery was surrounded by a wall and entered through a raised gatehouse on the eastern side. This led to a walled passage with an inner gatehouse at its far end. On either side of the passage, smaller gates on the left and right opened on to two compounds with residential buildings in them. In the compound on the right is the residential building, but also two elongated rectangular platforms connected to each other by a bridge. The second of these platforms has a stone couch and a stone with two concave basins carved into it. Several similar stones have been found around Anuradhapura; they may have been used for washing and dying monks' robes. The inner gatehouse opens onto the main buildings, which are in the classical *pañcāyatana* or five-part arrangement—a large central building with four smaller ones at each of its corners. The main building has an impressive entrance although the two guardstones are missing.

On the outer surface of the balustrade on the south side of the stairs is one of the most interesting and delightful sculptures in Sri Lanka. It depicts the mythical paradise around Mount Meru in the Himalayas, the ancient Indian Arcadia. This land was inhabited by all sorts of fantastic creatures—horse-headed women called *assamukhis*, *kinnaras* who were half bird half woman, huge maned lions known as *kesarasīhas*—as well as gods, demi-gods and angels. It was a land of carefree love, abundant food and eternal sunshine where all creatures lived in harmony.

In the centre of the sculpture two *kesarasīhas*, a male with his paw lifted and his mate, emerge from emerge from Kañcanaguhā, the cave where they live. Around them are eight thatched huts set amongst trees and creepers heavy with fruit and flowers and in which all kinds of animals like birds, squirrels and monkeys frolic. In the lower hut to the left of the lions is an *assamukhi* doing something very rude to a *rishi* who is in imminent danger of breaking his vow of celibacy. Above this is a group of monkeys, then two sages discussing the Dhamma while the figures under the topmost hut are indistinct. Right next to these are two more sages in discussion, then a deer lying down with a lion and a mongoose

playing with a cobra. In the hut below this are three figures together with a deer and a leopard. In the bottom hut is an animal that seems to be caressing a young woman. It is not clear why such a worldly sculpture should be found in a monastery.

The platform at the top of the stairs is made of a huge slab of stone with two couches on either side of it where the watcher would have positioned himself or monks would have relaxed in their free time. The two square holes cut into this stone once held the wooden stairs that led up to the monastery itself, which sat on the top of the pillars. This must have been a lovely monastery offering privacy and an environment conducive to unhurried study and meditation.

• *Thūpārāma Stupa*

This elegant little stupa was the first such monument in Sri Lanka and was built by Devānampiyatissa to enshrine the Buddha's right collarbone. Being such a revered stupa, the Thūpārāma was often endowed by wealthy patrons and kings, but not all the attention it received was welcome.

In the *Mahāvamsa*, it is said that once the famous monk Jotipāla pointed out to King Aggabodhi II that the stupa was in urgent need of repair. The King at once undertook the repairs and took the collarbone relic away for safekeeping in the Brazen Palace, where he honoured it day and night, neglecting the repairs. It was only after the gods dwelling at Thūpārāma threatened the king in a dream that they they would take away the relics, that he finally repaired the stupa and, more importantly, returned the relic.

During a fierce power struggle between the kings Dāthopātissa and Aggabodhi III, both parties looted the valuables of monasteries in order to get funds to carry on their struggle. Aggabodhi had the relic chamber of the Thūpārāma broken open and stole the golden caskets and other treasures inside them.

A more edifying story associated with the Thūpārāma is told in the *Visuddhimagga*. Two friends decided to become monks and both entered the Sangha at the Thūpārāma. One stayed there, while the other went and lived in a forest monastery. After some years, the forest monk decided to visit his friend in the city with the intention of inviting him to come and live in the forest with him. When he arrived, his friend welcomed him warmly and arranged a room for

him. The forest monk thought, "No doubt, my friend will bring me a drink," but he got nothing. When he awoke the next day, he expected to get an early morning drink or a small snack, but again there was nothing. "Well, we'll probably get a good breakfast when we go on alms rounds," he thought. However, when he and his friend did go, all they got was a ladleful of thin gruel. "Perhaps extra food will be offered when we eat," the visitor thought, but this did not happen either and they had nothing more than the gruel. When they had finished eating, the forest monk said to his friend, "Venerable sir, is it like this here all the time?" "It is," the city monk replied. "Then why don't you come and stay at my monastery? One always gets enough to eat there." "Alright," said the city monk.

The city monk spent the afternoon showing his friend the sights of Anuradhapura. When they were finished and came out of the southern gate of the citadel, the city monk took the road to the left. The forest monk asked, "Where are you going friend?" "I thought we were going to your place. "Yes we are." "But don't you have to go back to the Thūpārāma to get your things?" "I have my robe and bowl with me. There's nothing else; so let's go." "Well, I have to go back," said the forest monk. "Why?" asked his friend in surprise. "Because I have to get my staff, my umbrella, my towel, my sandals case and my oil jar and a few other things." "You've only been at the Thūpārāma for a day and you have already accumulated so much," said the city monk in surprise. The forest monk was a little ashamed, but then, filled with joy, he bowed to his friend and said, "For one like you the forest is everywhere. You, venerable sir, should stay here."

The Thūpārāma sits on a circular platform and is surrounded by four concentric circles of octagonal pillars each diminishing in height from the innermost circle. The tallest pillars are 7 meters long and are masterpieces of the stonemason's art. These pillars once supported the dome that was built over the stupa in the 8th century. At the entrance of the Thūpārāma is a beautifully cut stone trough. This trough would have originally been placed under a spout that filled it with water and its undulating lip would have created numerous streams of water allowing many devotees to wash themselves at the same time. The stupa was originally paddy heap-shaped, but was rebuilt in the bell shaped form in the 19th century.

Just a little to the southeast of the entrance to the Thūpārāma are the remains of several of its subsidiary temples. The capitals on the pillars are shaped like *vajras* suggesting the influence of Tantra. A *vajra* is a scepter with three prongs on either end representing the concept of unbreakable hardness and used in certain Tantric rituals. Wander around the back of the Thūpārāma and the pilgrim will see the ruins of an attractive temple and a stone medicine bath.

Now take the road from the Thūpārāma east and turn right at the sign pointing to the Jetavana. The ruins of this great monastery are set amidst pleasant groves and it is worthwhile to spend some time just walking around.

• *The Jetavana Stupa*

The first thing the pilgrim notices on entering this monastery complex is the enormous Jetavana Stupa. Like big American corporations vying with each other to build the tallest skyscraper, Anuradhapura's monasteries vied with each other to build the biggest stupa—and the Jetavana won easily.

Built by King Mahāsenā towards the end of the 4th century, this is the biggest stupa ever built and after the Great Wall of China is the largest brick structure in the world as well. The chronicles say it was originally 160 meters high; its present height up to the broken pinnacle is 70 meters and it has a diameter of 109 meters. It has been calculated that Jetavana stupa contains 62 million bricks and weighs 657,000 tons. The stupa sits on a huge terrace 173 meters square. The whole terrace is paved and could have accommodated up to thirty thousand devotees on special occasions. A most remarkable discovery was made during recent renovations while some of the paving stones were being taken up and relaid. A small clay pot was found that contained a book with nine pages made out of sheets of pure gold. This proved to be a copy of the Mahayana *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* dating from the 9th century. This beautiful book is now on display in the National Museum in Colombo.

The guardstones at the stupa's four entrances have vases of lotuses carved on them. One of the top stairs on the eastern side is several game boards indicating that this stone was originally somewhere else before being used here. The *vāhalkadas* around the stupa are much ruined, but they still display many ancient and interesting stone carvings.

- *Image House*

Leaving the stupa by the west gate, the pilgrim comes to the main image house of the Jetavana Monastery built in the 12th century, possibly by Parakkamabāhu I. The image was originally a standing Buddha at least 11 meters high and made of brick. The stone lotus pedestal on which this image once stood can still be seen. Below it, the pilgrim will notice the *yantragala* with twenty-five square chambers that once contained the precious stones and relics enshrined under the image. All the walls, including the circumambulatory passage around the image, would have been covered with paintings and the doorframes must have once held enormous carved and gilt wooden doors. In fact, the doorframes, which are 8 meters high, suggest that this building must have been of impressive height.

- *The Bodhi Tree Shrine*

Each of the three monasteries at Anuradhapura had their own Bodhi Tree, descended from the original one at Bodh Gaya in India. This is the remains of the Jetavana's Bodhi Tree shrine. The shrine is 42 meters long and 34 wide and originally consisted of a pillared structure built around a Bodhi tree. This, in turn, was enclosed by a railing reminiscent of the one at Bodh Gaya. Only parts of the railing on the west side survive, but it is cleverly conceived and beautifully carved. The gateposts have pot and foliage designs on them.

- *Others*

A little east of the Bodhi Tree shrine is the Jetavana's chapter house with its sixty-four pillars, all of which are now broken off. Some way to the east of this, just behind the Jetavana Museum, is a charming stepped pool with stairs leading down to the water. To the eastern side of the ruins are the refectory and another pond behind it.

- *The Citadel*

Leaving the Jetavana and taking the road back to the Thūpārāma, the pilgrim will notice a side road called Sanghamittā Mawatha turning off to the right and leading through what were once the walls of the citadel of Anuradhapura. The walls of the citadel were

5 meters thick in parts and about 4 meters high. The modern road runs a little west of the citadel's ancient main thoroughfare, the famous Mangulmahā Street. Archeological investigation has shown that the nearby south gate had two entrances, one for incoming and another for outgoing traffic and that the road was 17 meters wide. The curbstones of this road have also been found.

After proceeding for a while, the pilgrim will notice some ruins on the left of the road. These are the remains of a palace built by Vijayabāhu and date from the end of the 11th century. It is a very modest structure and indicates the low ebb the Sri Lankan monarchy had reached at that time. On the right of the road is the platform the king used for mounting his elephant. Further along the road and then off it some distance to the right are some more interesting ruins.

• *The Temple of the Tooth*

In a deep depression are the ruins of an unusual and interesting temple. This, and several other structures in the area, represent the remains of Anuradhapura's Temple of the Tooth, one of the most famous temples in the ancient Buddhist world.

The temple is built on a polygonal plan. The steps lead up to the entrance and inside is a small rectangular room with an altar in it. It is possible that this is where the Tooth was enshrined or perhaps where it was viewed by the public on special occasions. The small room is surrounded by a circumambulation passage that was lit by the light from eleven windows, the stone frames of which can still be seen.

The Chinese pilgrim I-ching mentions that when he was in India he heard that a Chinese monk visiting Sri Lanka had been so enamoured by the Tooth that he actually tried to steal it. However, the relic casket was attached to a kind of mechanical device so that when it was moved an alarm went off and all the doors automatically closed. The monk was caught and only saved from extreme punishment by his yellow robe.

Apart from its sacred relic, the Temple of the Tooth was also famous for the enormous ruby set on its highest spire. When Hsüan-tsang was traveling down the east coast of India, he was told that the red hue he could see in the sky towards evening was the light from this gem. This fabulous stone later passed into the

hands of the kings and may have been the same as the one that Marco Polo was shown in the 13th century.

Although Hsüan-tsang was unable to visit Sri Lanka because of political strife, he met some Sri Lankan monks in India who told him a wonderful story concerning one of the lesser chapels in the Temple of the Tooth complex. This chapel, like the main temple, was filled with gold and jewels and one day a desperately poor man decided to steal some of it so he could feed his hungry family. He tunneled into the chapel, saw a huge gem between the eyes of the image of the Buddha and decided he would take that. He stood in front of the image and reached up, but the gem was just out of reach, then he stood on the altar, but again he could not reach it. Finally, he stood in its lap, but still the gem was just out of reach. Realizing that the image must be growing each time he reached up, he said, "I have read in the Jātakas that in the past the Bodhisattva gave even his own life to benefit others, but this statue of the Lord will not even give a poor man this gem." Suddenly, the image lowered its head, lifted its hand and taking the gem from between its eyes, dropped it in the astonished man's palm.

Despite making his escape, the thief was eventually caught and dragged before the king. "What do you have to say before I pass judgment on you," asked the king in an angry voice. The terrified man replied, "Sire, I did not actually steal the gem. It was given to me," and then he explained what had happened. The skeptical king went to the chapel and to his and the whole court's amazement there was the image with its head still lowered and its hand extended. Being a devout and kind man, the king bought the gem from the man and made it into a crown for the image. Hsüan-tsang was also told that up to his own day, the image still had its head lowered.

• *Mahāpāli Refectory*

A little behind the Temple of the Tooth are the remains of the Mahāpāli Refectory which was a part of the royal palace. Fa-hsien came here when he was in Anuradhapura and noted that six thousand monks were fed every day at the king's expense. The modern pilgrim will notice a huge stone rice trough 8.4 meters long that has two inscriptions on its eastern end.

The first reads, "For this Mahāpāli shall be taken from each sack brought into the city one *pata* of rice." The second inscription

suggests that the monks who were usually fed here decided to forgo their usual dole so it could be used to feed workmen who were repairing a stupa. It reads, "All of us who receive food from the Mahāpāli have given our share of rice for the new works being carried out on the Jetavana Stupa. Those who violate this shall take upon themselves the faults committed by the inhabitants of this land." Along the eastern side of the trough is a third inscription of the person who donated it. It says, "This stone boat was constructed by Salavaduna who guards the shrine where the *Dhammasangani* is kept." The *Dhammasangani* is, of course, the third book of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.

Just near the trough is a step well, the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka and still used by local people. Beyond the Mahāpāli, the pilgrim will see numerous pillars and a large slab of stone with an inscription on it. This inscription mentions that a percentage of the produce of certain villages was to be set aside for the maintenance of the Temple of the Tooth and sets out how any disputes concerning the division of income were to be settled. The *Cūlavamsa* says that Aggabodhi I gifted a huge bronze trough to the Temple of the Tooth, but, of course, this has not survived.

• *The Twin Ponds*

Returning to the road and continuing to head north, the pilgrim will eventually pass through what was the northern gate of the citadel and enter the southern edge of the Abhayagiri, the second of the three great monasteries around Anuradhapura.

The opulence and splendor of this monastery is hinted at by the Twin Ponds, the Kuttam Pokuna, which the pilgrim will soon encounter. Sinhalese have always maintained a high standard of personal hygiene and a good bath is an essential part of the daily routine. As several thousand monks and staff lived at the Abhayagiri, proper bathing facilities were necessary. The Twin Pond is the most impressive of several such baths in the monastery.

The Twin Ponds date from the 8th century, the larger one being built first, while the smaller one was added some time later. The larger pond is 40 meters long, while the smaller one is 28 meters long, and both are 16 meters wide. Both have a flight of stairs at each end, as well as steps around their sides, allowing many people to bathe at the same time. The size of some of the stones and their

finish is impressive and the whole design is particularly pleasing.

At the far end of the ponds, the pilgrim will notice the sophisticated filtering device. Water flowed into the first part where sticks and leaves were trapped and then into the second part which allowed silt to settle before finally flowing into the pond via a dragon-headed spout. Next to this spout, is an impressive *nāga* stone. Nāgas were mythical creatures who were believed to live in the watery depths and stones honoring them were always placed near sluices, fountains and waterspouts. The water then flowed from the smaller into the larger pond through a duct some towards the bottom of pond. After being used for washing, the water was carefully channeled out to the adjoining rice fields. Near the northwest corner of the retaining wall around the ponds is a spout where people washed their feet before bathing.

- *Samādhi Buddha*

Continuing west along the road, the pilgrim will come to a large and much weathered Buddha image. This image dates from about the 4th century and may be the one Fa-hsien mentioned seeing and that is sometimes referred to in the chronicles as the “Great Stone Image.” Excavation has shown that it was one of four images originally placed with their backs to a Bodhi tree.

Until recently, this image was surrounded by trees and covered with fallen leaves and moss and the occasional monkey would amble up and sit in its lap. It used to be a wonderful experience to encounter this image while walking through the the silent forest. Now the sylvan environment has been destroyed by ugly and inappropriate buildings.

- *The Abhayagiri Stupa*

Dominating the Abhayagiri is the monastery’s huge stupa that was built by King Vattagamani Abhaya in the 1st century BCE, and enlarged to its present size by Gajabāhu I in the 2nd century CE. Legend says the stupa was built over a stone on which the Buddha had left his footprints.

The stupa rises 72 meters from the terrace to the top of its now crumbling pinnacle and has a diameter of 94 meters. Sena III laid the paving stones in the huge courtyard around the stupa. When Fa-hsien saw the stupa, it was covered with gold and jewels.

For six hundred years, the stupa was neglected and in a state of decay. When Major Forbes saw it in 1828, it was completely covered with jungle. The next year, a Buddhist monk on pilgrimage to Anuradhapura and saddened by the state of the stupa, arranged to have much of the jungle cut away. Unfortunately, this caused the sides of the stupa to collapse, severely injuring the monk. At present, the Cultural Triangle is endeavoring to renovate the stupa, but it is an enormously difficult task and may take many years.

The guardstones that were once on the stairs of the main entrance of the stupa are now both housed in separate shrines. Carved on each stone are fat-bellied dwarfs with grins on their faces and holding whips. Both dwarfs are worshiped by both locals and pilgrims in the belief that they will reveal hidden treasure or grant prosperity. Walking around the stupa, the pilgrim will see several objects of interest. Notice the huge round flower altar in the form of a lotus and the segments of an enormous octagonal pillar. The *vāhalkada* on the south and east have been partly reconstructed giving some idea what they were like when complete. While one of these was being excavated, several Roman coins from the reign of Constantine II were found.

• *Mahāsena's Pavilion*

This small and attractive monastery was built by King Mahāsena. It is of interest because of its beautiful moonstone, the finest in all of Sri Lanka.

The moonstone consists of a half-lotus from which a series of concentric bands proceed outwardly each respectively displaying a curving creeper, a line of geese, foliage, a procession of elephants, horses, lions and bulls and, on the outermost band, flames or waves. While the creeper, foliage and flames are highly stylized, the animals are depicted in the most realistic and detailed manner. The overall design is very pleasing and the workmanship is of the highest order.

There are numerous other moonstones at Anuradhapura and elsewhere, but this by far is the best. Notice also the wide-eyed dwarfs on the vertical surface of the steps above the moonstone. Now the pilgrim should walk through the trees making his or her way towards the south. The first structure the pilgrim will come to is the Ratanapāsāda, the Jewel Palace.

- *The Ratanapāsāda*

This huge monastery was built by King Kanitthatissa for the monks of a sub-sect of the Abhayagiri. The name Ratanapāsāda means “Jewel Palace” and suggests that this monastery was richly decorated and well appointed. The *Cūlavamsa* tells us that it was repaired in the 8th century by Mahinda I and again for the last time in the 9th century. An inscription found nearby eulogizes the Ratnapāsāda as an institution “where bands of scholars dwell directing their wisdom to great literary works ... and which resounds with the voices of those versed in the scriptures and who expound the Dhamma.”

At the left of the stairs leading to the monastery is a guard stone, widely considered to be the most beautiful in Sri Lanka. The Ratanapāsāda originally had two hundred and sixty eight huge pillars of which only nine remain. These pillars are 7 meters high with another 2 meters below the ground. Excavations have shown that the roof of the Ratanapāsāda was covered with blue glazed tiles.

- *Pavilion*

A little to the south of the Ratnapāsāda is one of the most charming buildings in the Abhayagiri complex, a small pavilion. It is not known what this pavilion was for, but I imagine that it was originally set in a beautiful garden and was used by monks for quiet study or meditation.

- *The Throne Temple*

A little to the west of the pavilion is the remains of what must have been the Abhayagiri monastery’s Bodhi tree shrine. Because this shrine was rebuilt and remodeled on several occasions over the centuries, it is somewhat difficult to make out its layout. The temple probably started as just a simple structure built around a Bodhi tree. At some later period, a large ancient throne or *āsana* and fourteen ancient stones with footprints on them were placed around the tree. The bases of some of the pillars can still be seen in the southwest corner.

In the southwest corner, is a fine Buddha statue dating from the 7th century in the gesture of meditation and with its right arm broken. The deep eye sockets originally held crystal eyes. In the

southeast corner are two slabs of stone with in an inscription on them. When this temple was excavated in 1962, it yielded the oldest Buddha image ever found in Sri Lanka dating from about 300 CE.

- ***Refectory***

This is the largest of several refectories at the Abhayagiri and its rice trough is the longest and most impressive in Sri Lanka. Note that the large paving stone next to the smaller rice trough has a much worn inscription on it. A 9th century inscription from the Abhayagiri says that the daily food allowance for monks consisted of five rice cakes, half a measure of curd and a twelfth measure of ghee. Another inscription from a century later mentions that the monastery provided the monks with rice, pulses, sesame, pepper, salt, betel nuts and lime. Amble around this refectory and you will see grindstones, cisterns and water pipes.

- ***Elephant Tank***

Walking to the southwest of the refectory and through the trees, the pilgrim will eventually come to the largest of the several bathing tanks at the Abhayagiri, popularly called the Elephant Tank. Until a few years ago, this tank was filled with silt and its sides had collapsed. Now it looks much as it might have done in ancient times.

On the north end of the east side of the tank was a mechanism like a shadoof that would have been used for drawing water. On the east side of this tank are also the ruins of a monastery with several attractive moonstones. At the southern end is the filter and sluice that fed water into the tank.

- ***Grotto and Monastery***

If the pilgrim goes to the west side of the tank, crosses the road and walks up the incline, he or she will come to a line of rock. Walk around this rock and you will find a grotto cut into it and yet more ruins. Few people come to this quiet shady place and the pilgrim will find it a good place to tarry or to meditate. Return to the road and proceed south.

- ***Lankārāma***

Continuing south, the pilgrim will arrive at the Lankārāma. This stupa was built in King Vattagāmani in the 1st century BCE. Like several smaller stupas, it was originally covered by a dome as is

clear from the numerous broken pillars around it. Despite being one of the sixteen sacred places, the Lankārāma has never attracted much attention and there are few references to it in the chronicles or other records. Inept restoration efforts in the early 20th century destroyed the Lankārāma's original form and beauty and now it is worth only a quick look.

From the Lankārāma, the road continues past the Fa-hsien Museum, along the east bank of the Basāvakkulam Reservoir, and then to the Mirisavetiya Stupa.

• *Mirisavetiya Stupa*

According to the *Mahāvamsa*, King Dutthagāmani built this stupa and its attached monastery after he had eaten a pepper-pod (Pali: *maricavatti*, Sinhala: *mirisvetiya*) without first offering some of it to the Sangha; hence its name "Pepper-pod Stupa." It has a diameter of 51 meters and is 59 meters high.

For centuries the Mirisaveti monastery was affiliated to the Mahāvihāra, but by the 8th century it had become derelict and deserted. Kassapa V had it completely renovated and granted it to five hundred monks from the Mahāvihāra who in time formed a separate sect. Excavations have shown that the monastery consisted of fourteen groups of shrines and residential buildings and covered an area of about 20 hectares. The stupa was renovated in the 1980s by Thailand's crown prince.

The *Papañcasūdanī* tells an interesting story that started to unfold at the Mirisavetiya Monastery. Several thousand monks and nuns attended the consecration ceremonies of the stupa. During a break in the proceedings, the monks were fed and a certain young novice was given a bowl full of piping hot gruel. So hot was his bowl that he had to pass it from one hand to another, hold it in the folds of his robe and so on. A young novice nun saw his predicament and gave him a plate to hold the bowl. The young monk smiled, the nun blushed and gave a shy smile in return, and they exchanged a few words and then parted company.

Years later, the nun went to India on pilgrimage and happened to be staying at Bodh Gaya. One day she heard that a monk from Sri Lanka arrived and she went to meet him. As they talked they remembered each other from years before, this led to friendship, then to love and eventually they both disrobed and married. The

point of this story is that affections cannot only be very strong, but also very enduring.

From the Mirisavetiya Stupa, continue along the road as it skirts the reservoir. Just after crossing the bridge, a road turns of to the right and leads to the Western Monasteries.

• *The Western Monasteries*

In ancient times, bodies were always taken out of cities through the west gate and the cemetery or charnel ground was always situated to the west of any town or city. Consequently, it was to the west of Anuradhapura that a group of monks called the Pamsukūlikas chose to situate their headquarters.

More ascetic than ordinary monks, and given to living in forests rather than in cities and towns, the Pamsukūlikas took their name from the rag robes they wore. While most monks concentrated on pastoral work or scholarship, the Pamsukūlikas were mainly occupied with asceticism and meditation, and for this they were treated with enormous respect.

Some time in 936, King Udaya III sent his men to the Pamsukūlika monastery at Anuradhapura and killed several ministers who had fled there for refuge. To show their strong disapproval of this violation of their peaceful monastery, the Pamsukūlikas decided to leave for Rohana. The people, and even the army, were so enraged by this that they killed the men responsible for the ministers' deaths and then rioted in the streets. Soon the king himself had to seek refuge in the Pamsukūlika monastery. Chastened and humiliated, he had to beg the monks for forgiveness, which they gave. After this, the mobs calmed down. For more on the Pamsukūlikas, read the section on Ritigala.

There are fourteen monasteries in this complex, but we will only make a brief mention of two of them. Proceeding from the turnoff for about a kilometer, the pilgrim will come to a large monastery on the left of the road. Entering the main entrance and going to the right of the central structure, the pilgrim will see what is popularly believed to be a toilet. Such unusual and highly decorated objects are often found in Pamsukūlika monasteries. This particular one has miniature guard stones and a flight of stairs leading up to it; two-foot rests for standing on and an elaborately carved screen, perhaps to provide privacy.

However, is this really a toilet, as most people believe? The claim that it is raises many questions. Firstly, why would Pamsukūlika monasteries and no others have these objects? Why would these monks locate an impure thing like a toilet right next to buildings that were likely used for some ritual purpose? These supposed toilets always have a tiny hole in them, suitable for leading urine away, but not solid waste. Why make an elaborate toilet that could be used for urinating but not defecating? I would suggest that at least some of these supposed toilets were actually used for some kind of washing or anointing ceremony unique to the Pamsukūlikas. In Mahayana, there were *abhisheka* ceremonies with which involved tipping consecrated water over the initiate's head.

Another kilometer further along the road, after the checkpoint, is another large monastery, this one surrounded by a moat. Nearby is the most beautiful of all these supposed urinal stones. It has lions, architectural elements and floral designs on it and was clearly used for some ritual purpose.

HOW TO GET THERE

Anuradhapura is 206 kilometers from Colombo, 121 kilometers from Kurunegala and 138 kilometers from Kandy and is easily reached from all three places by private buses and public transport.

POLONNARUWA

Throughout the 10th century, Sri Lankan politics was marked by continual power struggles, regional revolts and civil wars. The Colas of South India took advantage of this instability to launch a series of invasions, which led to yet more disunity and chaos.

In 954 Sena IV became king and took the decision to move the capital to Polonnaruwa, a large regional city which, being much further to the east, was thought to be safer. The city was also important because it commanded the main crossing point on the Mahāveli River. Polonnaruwa was known as Pulatthinagara and was also sometimes called Kandavuru, Camp City.

The shifting of the capital to Polonnaruwa was the beginning of the end for Anuradhapura. On several occasions it became capital

again for brief periods and two or three kings had their coronations there, but the city went into a slow sad decline. In 992, the Colas invaded Sri Lanka, sacked Anuradhapura and even succeeded in capturing the king, Mahinda V. For the next seventy-seven years, the whole of northern Sri Lanka was ruled by the Colas from Polonnaruwa, which they renamed Jananāthamangalam. The Sinhalese monarchy established itself in Rohana in the southeast corner of the Island.

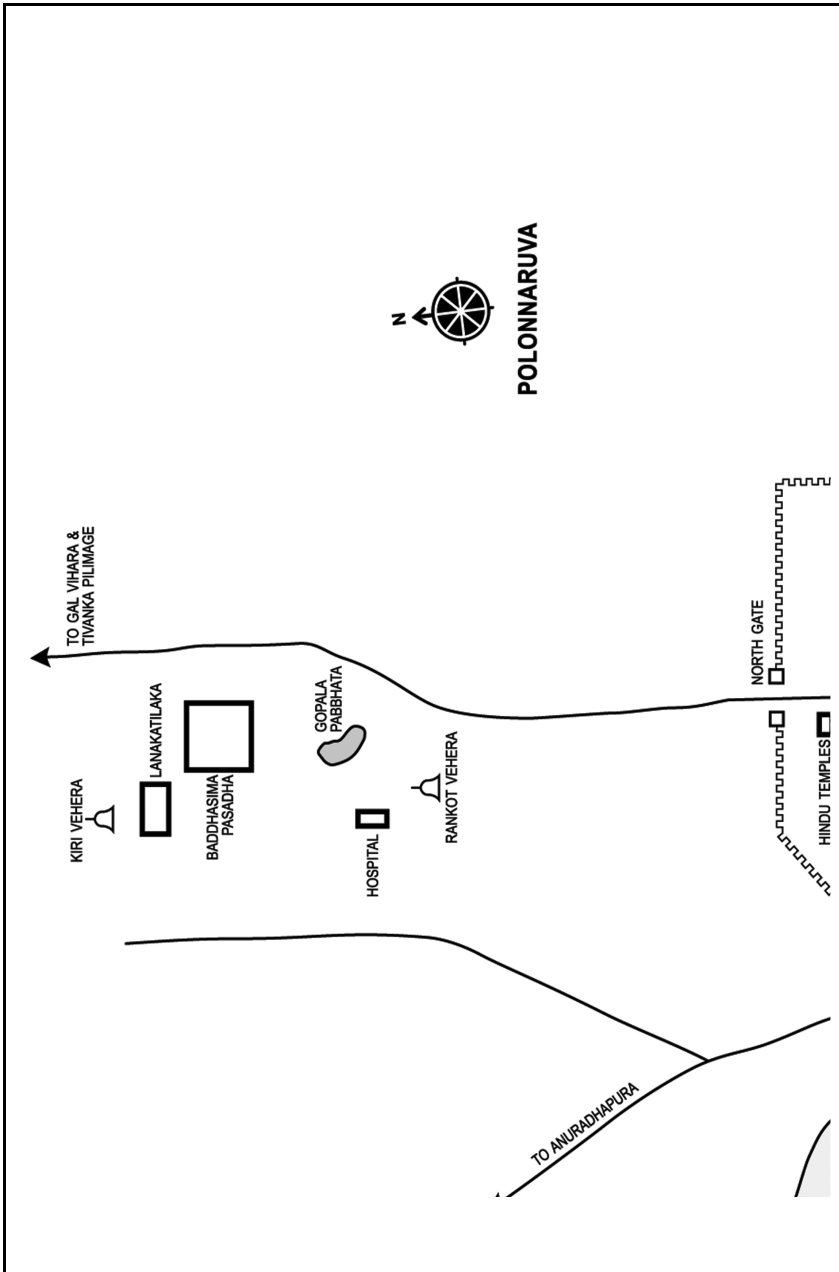
There is no evidence that Buddhism was persecuted during this time, which was not just sound policy on the part of the Colas, but in keeping with the general tolerance of Hinduism. However, Buddhism did not get the lavish support it had come to depend upon and it declined accordingly. Even in the south where the Sinhalese maintained their independence, the various princes were usually too busy squabbling with each other to give the religion the attention and encouragement it needed. The quality of practice, monastic discipline, and scholarship suffered accordingly.

In early 1070, prince Vijayabāhu launched a campaign to free his country from the Colas. By the end of the year, he had conquered most of the country except for Polonnaruwa, where the Cola garrison put up stiff resistance. After a one and a half month siege, he captured the city and then marched to Anuradhapura where he proclaimed himself king to widespread rejoicing. He returned to Polonnaruwa after a three-month stay and commenced an extensive building program meant to make the city a fit capital.

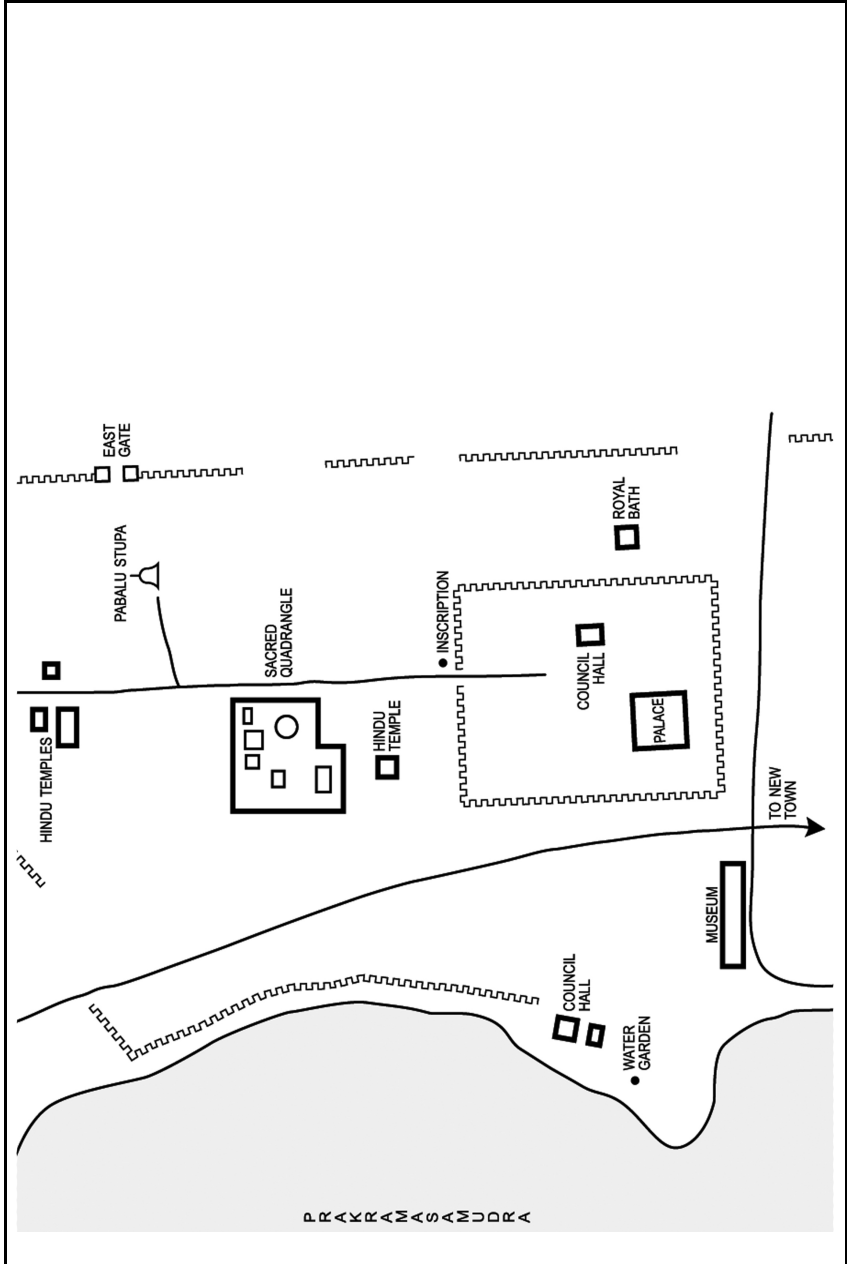
Two of Sri Lanka's most capable kings, Vijayabāhu I and Parakkamabāhu I, ruled from Polonnaruwa, the first for forty years and the second for thirty-two years. Both monarchs were great builders and generous patrons of Buddhism and most of the monuments the pilgrim sees today in the city can be attributed to them.

After the death of Parakkamabāhu I in 1186, the only king who managed to rule for any length of time was Nissankamalla. This king was an Orissan by birth and probably converted to Buddhism in order to be able to assume the throne. If his numerous inscriptions and edicts are anything to go by, he was vain to an almost comical degree. Nonetheless, during his nine years reign Nissankamalla adorned Polonnaruwa with several fine monuments, was a generous patron of Buddhism and undertook to reform the Sangha.

SACRED ISLAND



SACRED CITIES



Of the eleven kings who succeeded Nissankamalla after his death in 1196, eight ruled for less than two years before being assassinated, overthrown or dying in suspicious circumstances. Finally, in 1215 a marauder named Māgha invaded Sri Lanka with an army of mercenaries from Kerala. He managed to kill the king and captured Polonnaruwa. Māgha was to Sri Lanka what Atilla the Hun was to Europe and Sri Lanka's ancient civilization never really recovered from his twenty one-year reign of terror. By the time Māgha and his marauders were driven out, much of the country was devastated and Polonnaruwa was half-empty and crumbling. The capital was moved first to Yāpahuwa and then to Dambadeniya. In 1262, an attempt was made to restore Polonnaruwa's shrines, temples and palaces, but with the king and his court in the west, people had little reason to stay in the faded city and soon it was completely abandoned.

The ruins of Polonnaruwa lie in a long line from north to south and can easily be seen in a day. The ruins are surrounded with forest that offers cooling shade and the great Parākramasamudra (Parākrama's Sea) stretching along the west side of the ruins is a good place for a bath. There are numerous monkeys in the area, but biscuits and bread are not good for their teeth and visitors are asked not to feed them. Please respect this request. The new museum at Polonnaruwa is outstanding and perhaps it should be visited before seeing the ruins.

WHAT TO SEE

- *Potgul Vehera and Statue*

To get to the southernmost monuments at Polonnaruwa, it is necessary to take the road that runs besides the museum and along the bund of the Parākramasamudra, the great reservoir built by King Parakkamabāhu. The bund is 14 kilometers long and 12 meters high, while the reservoir itself has a surface area of 2165 hectares and can irrigate 7365 hectares of rice fields.

After about 2 kilometers, the road turns to the Potgul Vehera. This building is popularly believed to be a monastic library, but there is nothing in its layout or structure to suggest that it was. It consists of a rotunda with a circumference of 48 meters with an oblong vestibule attached to its eastern side. A long inscription was

found here, but it is of no help in identifying this building or what it was used for and the pilgrim will find it of little interest.

North of the Potgul Vehera, and a short walk from it, is a large statue carved out of a cliff. This statue does not seem to be the idealized type usually seen in Sri Lankan sculpture, but rather a portrait with very distinct individual characteristics. The figure, bearded and wearing a tall rounded cap, holds either a book or a yoke in its hands. It is an imposing figure, but is saved from being overbearing by its serene downcast eyes. Some have argued that this statue is of Parakkamabāhu I, which is quite possible.

• *The Water Garden*

The pilgrim should now return to the museum. Behind it, and just below the bund of the Parākramasamudra, are the remains of a royal pleasure garden built by King Parakkamabāhu I. A small solidly built sluice fed water into a bathing pool that is now rather muddy, but once must have been a pleasant place for a refreshing dip. To the right of the sluice is a smaller pool with stairs leading down into it. Above this are the remains of a round pavilion, around which a stream used to flow. When this garden had flower beds, vines and hedges, it must have been a delightful place.

• *Council Hall*

Further along the bund is an interesting building consisting of a high platform with a staircase on its northern end and pillar on its top. The platform has a band of lions around it and the staircase is elaborately decorated.

The hall was built by King Nissankamalla next to his palace, and was where he met with his ministers and courtiers. When the court met, a strict order of precedence was maintained and who sat where was very important. Some of the forty-eight pillars have inscriptions on them giving the title of the person who sat against them. They include the heir apparent, the commander in chief, the president of the chamber of commerce, the chief secretary and the record keeper.

At the far end of the hall is a magnificent stone lion with an inscription on it. It reads, "This is the mighty lion throne on which sat the glorious powerful Nissankamalla." Exactly how the king sat on this lion is not clear.

- *The Royal Palace*

The pilgrim should now return to the main road and take the side-road to the entrance of the royal palace citadel. The whole royal palace complex is surrounded by a high thick brick wall with a gate on the northern side. The huge structure at its southern end is the Vejayanta Pāsāda (Victory Palace), which Parakkamabāhu I built for himself.

The entrance leads to a pillared hall, which in turn leads to the huge central edifice made of brick. To the left of this is a flight of granite stairs, which led to the upper stories of which the *Cūlavamsa* says there were seven. Around the hall and central edifice is a gallery containing more than fifty small chambers or rooms. These must be some of the one thousand rooms mentioned in the *Cūlavamsa*. They are very small rooms and one wonders what they were used for.

To the east of the palace is a high-pillared hall. An inscription at the entrance calls this building "The Council Hall." This is where the king would meet ambassadors, consult his ministers, and occasionally address his subjects or listen to their petitions. The hall consists of a three-tiered platform with an impressive staircase in three parts on its north end. On the sides of the bottom platform are figures of elephants, on the second, lions and on the third dwarfs. There are four rows of pillars, twelve in each row, and all are decorated with floral designs and once held the wooden and tiled roof. Beyond this hall and outside the wall is the Kumārapokuna, the royal bath.

- *The Sacred Quadrangle*

Having seen the royal palace citadel, walk north along the road, through the north gate of the citadel to what is sometimes called the quadrangle, a collection of temples and shrines all built on a large raised terrace. In ancient times, none of these temples was accessible to the public and the Tooth Relic was only displayed on very rare occasions.

Just before the quadrangle is a Hindu temple, one of several built at Polonnaruwa during the Cola occupation. It is an excellent example of Cola architecture and almost perfectly preserved. The positioning of this temple says much about the Cola's religious policy in Sri Lanka. Their rule was harsh at times, but they were

tolerant as far as religion was concerned. They could have built this temple to their gods amidst or even on top of the nearby Buddhist temples, but instead they chose to place it discreetly near them. It is also interesting that when the Sinhalese finally succeeded in driving the Colas out and regained their capital, they did not destroy this or the other Hindu temples at Polonnaruwa. The main entrance to the quadrangle is by the stairs on the east side of the terrace.

• *Sat Mahal Prāsāda*

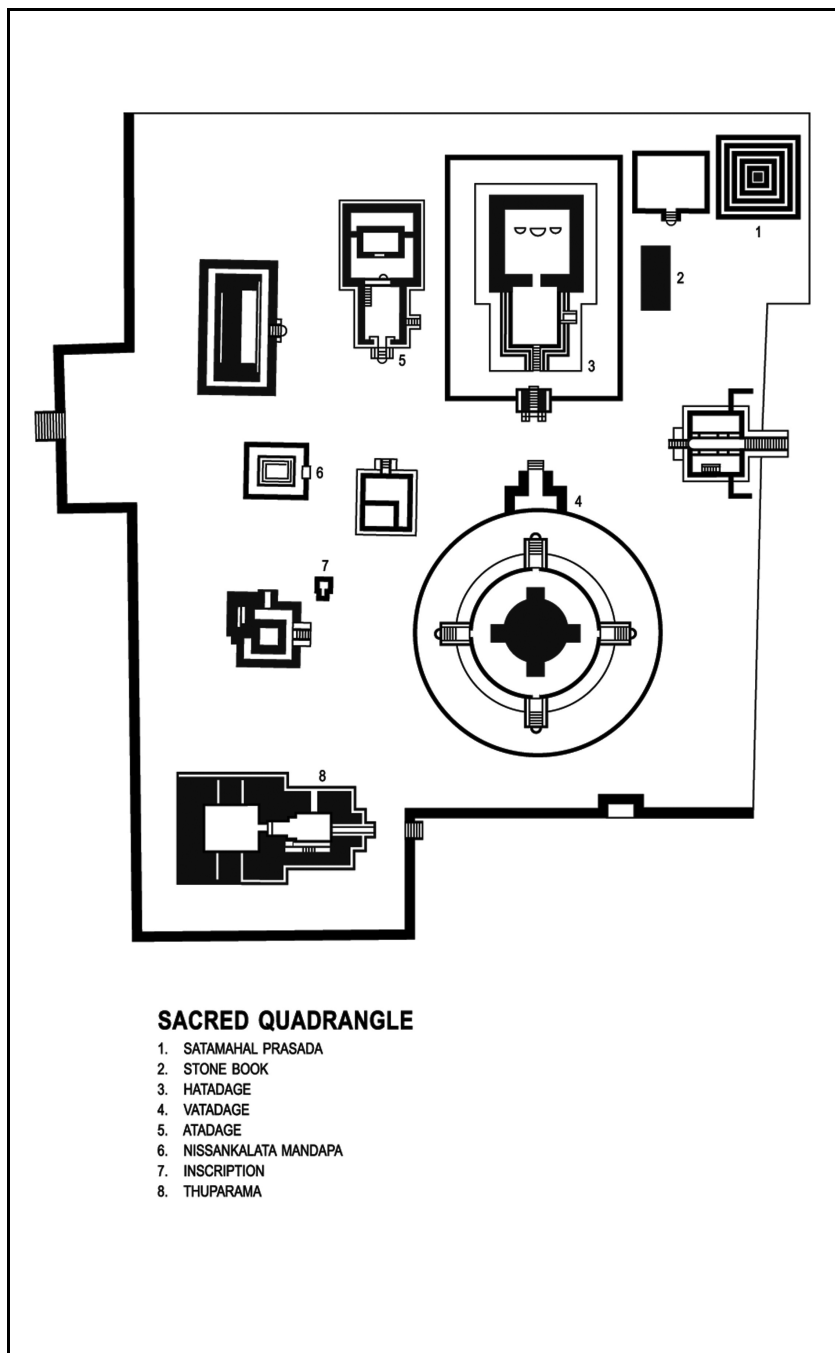
Climbing the stairs and turning right, the pilgrim will see a tall structure in the northeast corner of the sacred quadrangle. This unusual monument is now called the Sat Mahal Prāsāda, the “Seven-storied Palace.” It consists of a square pyramidal tower built in seven diminishing stages, each stage having an arched niche housing an image of a god. Who built this monument, why it was built, and what was its original name, is not known. However, it seems likely that it was meant to be a model of the mythical Mount Meru, the home of the gods and the centre of the world according to ancient Indian cosmology.

• *The Stone Book*

Right next to the Sat Mahal Prāsāda is a huge slab of rock in imitation of a palm leaf book with an inscription by King Nissankamalla on its upper surface. This stone is more than 8 meters long, more than a meter wide and up to 66 centimeters thick. Carved on each end is a line of geese. Below these is a figure of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi with two elephants tipping pots of water over her head. The postscript on the southern end says that this stone was dragged from Mihintale, about 75 kilometers away, by a team of men under the command of Totadanavu Mandnavan.

The inscription was written towards the end of Nissankamalla’s reign, but is just as bombastic as his numerous earlier ones. It reads in part:

SACRED ISLAND



SACRED QUADRANGLE

1. SATAMAHAL PRASADA
2. STONE BOOK
3. HATADAGE
4. VATADAGE
5. ATADAGE
6. NISSANKALATA MANDAPA
7. INSCRIPTION
8. THUPARAMA

His commanding personality is made dazzling to the eyes of the world by the fact that at his coronation he dispersed the clouds that gathered in the sky by merely frowning at them. His great majestic power is such that once when hunting in the forest, a fierce she-bear sprang at him with a snarl and he fearlessly killed her and her cubs. He possesses the powers of a lion-king who can extract water from any spot he likes while traveling in the wilderness. His power of command is such that it cannot be transgressed. For example, once when he was swimming in the sea, a huge dragon appeared before him and he said to it, 'Your presence is unwelcome. Be off and ascribe to yourself a fit punishment!' The dragon then bit itself and died.

It continues like this for several paragraphs.

• *Hetadāge*

Directly opposite the Stone Book is the Hetadāge, Polonnaruwa's Temple of the Tooth. The Hetadāge is surrounded by a solid wall with a gate flanked by two prosperity vases, only one of which remains.

Passing through this gate, the pilgrim arrives at the entrance of the temple itself with its elaborate moonstone, guardstones and balustrades. On the right of the entrance is an inscription by King Nissankamalla that is recording some of the king's good deeds. Climbing the steps, one enters the main vestibule. Note the six richly carved pillars, the small door on the north side where the presiding monks would have entered and the stairs in the corner. These stairs would have led up to the second floor of the temple, which was made entirely of wood and, of course, has completely disappeared.

On the wall on the right is yet another inscription by Nissankamalla. This inscription is unusual in that the king actually manages to talk about something other than himself. In the prologue, he says, "This Dhamma which gives happiness and which alone deserves to be honored in the world should always be preserved. Nissankamalla makes this appeal over and over again to the rulers of the earth in the name of their good fame."

Proceeding further, one now enters the main shrine, where three standing Buddha images once stood. The one remaining image is two meters tall and its deep eye sockets once held gems.

• *Vatadāge*

Next to the Hetadāge is the Vatadāge, the finest temple at Polonnaruwa. King Nissankamalla claims to have built this gem of Sri Lankan architecture, whereas in fact he only repaired and embellished what had been originally built some three hundred years earlier. This beautiful building represents the apex of the Vatadāge or stupa temple.

Climb the stairs to the lower circular platform and walk around it. The four entrances leading to the upper terrace are beautifully carved, especially the moonstones. Note also the stone panels carved with four-petaled flowers between the outer rings of pillars. Return to the main entrance on northern side, climb the stairs to the upper terrace and enter the temple. A small stupa sits in the middle of the terrace with four Buddha images placed around it. The hair on the head of these images is not treated in the usual manner, i.e., with ringlet-like curls, but rather with what looks like a skullcap. In addition, the robes are depicted tight fitting and without folds. There are sixteen flower altars around the stupa. The wall around the upper terrace was once decorated with beautiful paintings and was covered with a dome, neither of which survived. Of the three circles of pillars that once supported the dome only the outer one remains. In the Polonnaruwa museum is a model showing what the Vatadage probably looked like when intact.

• *Atadāge*

A little to the west of the Hetadage is shrine called the Atadāge, which had been built by Vijayabāhu to enshrine the Tooth. Stepping over the elaborate moonstone and climbing four steps, one enters the vestibule with its richly calved pillars. On the left is a large inscription written in Tamil. The inscription records that the senior prelate Moggallāna had asked the Velakkāras to protect the Tooth and the income derived from it. The Velakkāras were a group of Tamil mercenaries who had managed to assume a great deal of power in Polonnaruwa. The inscription also records that on two occasions King Vijayabāhu had himself weighed in gold and given it all to the Sangha.

In the corner of the vestibule is a flight of stairs that led up the second story, which was completely made of wood and of which nothing remains. Further along, in the inner sanctum of the

Atadāge, the pilgrim will see a standing image of the Buddha.

• *Nissankalatā Mandapa*

To the left of the Atadāge, in the northwest corner of the sacred quadrangle, is a temple that once enshrined a reclining image of the Buddha. A little to the south of this is the Nissankalatā Mandapa. According to the *Cūlavamsa*, Nissankamalla built this lovely little pavilion so he could sit within it either listening to the chanting of Buddhist scriptures or could worship the Tooth Relic on special occasions.

A stone railing, plain except for the cone-shaped tops of the posts, encloses an area 10 by 9 meters that is entered by a gate on the east side. Inside is a stone platform with a small stupa at its centre and with eight pillars, carved in imitation of lotus stalks, rising from it that supported the roof. At the top of each pillar is a separate octagonal capital in the shape of a lotus blossom. The king and the members of his court would probably have sat on the ground around the platform, listening to the chanting of the assembled monks sitting on the platform.

• *Inscription*

Between the Nissankalatā Mandapa and the Vatadāge is small temple enshrining a standing image of a bodhisattva—probably Avalokitesvara. Directly south of the Nissankalatā Mandapa and near another temple is a stone throne with molded sides and an inscription on its top. This inscription is of a type unique to Sri Lanka, rather than being written one line below another, it spirals from the edge of the stone towards the middle. It says that Nissankamalla sat here while watching musical and theatrical performances.

• *Thūpārāma*

In the southwest corner of the sacred quadrangle is the Thūpārāma, the most complete structure still to be seen at Polonnaruwa.

The door leads to a small chamber with stairs on the left that lead up to the roof where there is a cupola with a circumambulatory path around it. The smaller chamber leads to the inner sanctum, which originally enshrined a sitting Buddha image made of brick. Now there are two stone images in it. The Thūpārāma looks impressive from outside, but the interior cramped and dark. The Sinhalese never

really mastered the art of making the arch and thus had to make the walls of their temples very thick. The inner sanctum of the Thūpārāma is only 7 meters wide while the walls are 2 meters thick. Having seen the inside, now walk around the outside of the Thūpārāma. The walls are decorated with panels divided by pilasters, each of which has models of temples or pavilions in them.

Leaving the sacred quadrangle and continuing north, the pilgrim will pass through the north gate of the citadel and eventually come to a large stupa.

• *Rankot Vehera*

This was the last great stupa to be built in Polonnaruwa and, according to the nearby inscription, was meant to be the city's equivalent to the Ruwanweliseya at Anuradhapura. The Rankot Vehera was built by Nissankamalla, has a diameter of 57 meters, and was originally about 61 meters high. Brick and plaster *vāhalkadas* and small shrines, some of which still have images in them, surround it. It is not known what relic was enshrined in the Rankot Vehera.

Near the path that leads from the road to the stupa is another stone throne with an inscription by King Nissankamalla, mentioning that he sat here supervising workmen as they built the Rankot Vehera.

• *Ālāhana Parivena*

If the pilgrim leaves the Rankot Vehera by the stairs on the north side of the terrace, he or she will enter the Ālāhana Parivena, a huge monastic college complex built by Parakkamabāhu I. It once must have accommodated hundreds of monks. A hundred sixty-five meters long wall surrounds the whole complex.

The first building on the left is the Ālāhana Parivena's hospital, a long rectangular building with a courtyard in the middle. During recent excavations here, numerous surgical instruments were found and these can now be displayed in the museum. In one room there is a medical bath. Two inscriptions by Nissankamalla were found at the entrance of the hospital, but these have not yet been deciphered.

Further along the path and to the right, the pilgrim will see a small rocky hill called Gopāla Pabbata, the Cowherd's Hill. When the monastery was built, this area of natural beauty was left so it

could serve as a place of meditation. There are strangely shaped boulders, several small caves and tree roots hanging over the rocks. Carved on the back wall of one of these caves is a line of four seated Buddha images of rather crude workmanship that date from the 12th century. An inscription on the drip ledge dates from the 1st century CE and reads “Madalaya’s Cave.”

Returning to the path, proceeding further and climbing the stairs on the right, the pilgrim will come to the Baddhasīmāpāsāda, the monastery’s chapter house. Note the unusual and graceful boundary stones at the corners of this huge structure.

• *Lankātilaka Image House*

From the top of the Baddhasīmāpāsāda the pilgrim will see a building looming over the trees. This is the Lankātilaka, the Ālāhana’s main image house, and the largest such building in Polonnaruwa. The Lankātilaka is 38 meters long, 20 at its widest place and 17 meters high, although originally it must have been much higher.

An inscription on the guardstone on the left of the entrance says that Parakkamabāhu did major renovations at the Lankātilaka a hundred years after Vijayabāhu had built it. Flanking the entrance are two unusual polygonal shafts that give the impression of height and grandeur. The huge wooden doors that must have once been here have of course disappeared. The stairs at the vestibule and the pillars in the side indicate that there must have been a second story probably with a wooden floor. The roof must have originally been barrel-vaulted, but has completely collapsed. The walls of the Lankātilaka were once covered with paintings, but these have all disappeared. At the far end of the hall are the remains of the image.

When finished inside, the pilgrim should walk around the outside of the Lankātilaka and look at the stuccowork. Some of the decorations are of gods and bodhisattvas in various attitudes and postures, while others give some idea of what Polonnaruwa’s ancient temples and palaces must have looked like when complete.

• *Kiri Vehera*

On the north side of the Lankātilaka is the so-called Kiri Vehera, the Milk Stupa. This stupa has a diameter of 27 meters and is 24 meters high up to its broken spire. If the pilgrim continues to walk north, he or she will soon arrive at the Gal Vihāra, arguably the most impressive ancient Buddhist monument in Sri Lanka.

- *Gal Vihāra*

Gal Vihāra means Rock Temple, while the name given to this place in the *Cūlavamsa* is Uttara Vihāra, the Northern Temple.

The rock from which Gal Vihāra is cut is about 51 meters long and falls away gradually at each end; nearly 5 meters of solid rock has been cut away to form the three large images and the cave. The mortise holes in the rock above all the images and the ruined walls in front of them show that buildings once enclosed all these images

The beauty of these images and their lovely natural setting have long attracted the admiration of visitors. H. C. P. Bell described them as "... calm, immovable, majestic, amid the hush of the surrounding forest, gazing ever fixedly into space with the pensiveness of profound meditation, wrapped in eternal slumber, must inspire in the thoughtful beholder wonder and admiration mingled with an instinctive sense of silent awe." The famous Trappist monk Thomas Merton fell into a state of exaltation when he came here. We will discuss Gal Vihāra's images starting on the left and moving to the right.

The first image depicts the Buddha sitting with his eyes closed and his hands in the gesture of meditation. The image, which is 5 meters high, sits on a low pedestal with niches on its front and sides, each containing lions and *vajras*, objects usually associated with Vajrayana Buddhism. Behind the image's head is an elaborately patterned oval halo, instead of the usual round plain type. Behind the Buddha is an elaborate backrest with three horizontal bars on it having *makara* with lions coming from their mouths as finials. Above these are two small shrines with tiny Buddhas in them, which are carved on the cliff behind this image.

Next to this first image is a rectangular cave cut into the rock, its front open and its roof supported by four decorated pillars. In the centre of this cave is an image of the Buddha with its hands in the gesture of meditation and with legs in *vajrāsana*. The image sits on a large throne with lions and *vajras* on its front and sides and is sheltered by an umbrella that is carved out of the roof of the cave. The back of the throne on which the image rests has three horizontal crossbars with *makara* finials, which in turn are flanked by two rearing lions. On either side of these are attendants with flywhisks. If you look very carefully at the halo behind the image's head, you will see on the right a four-armed Vishnu and on the left

three of Brahma's four faces. When M. H. Fagan visited Gal Vihāra in 1820, the cave's wooden doors were still in place and there were still paintings on its roof. If one looks at the wall behind the furthestmost pillar on the right, one will see the last fragment of these paintings, their colors still vivid and bright.

On the sloping rock between the cave and the standing image is one of the longest inscriptions from ancient Sri Lanka. The inscription details King Parakkamabāhu's efforts to reform and unite the Sangha in 1165. It quotes him as saying, "Seeing again and again a blot on the immaculate Buddhist religion, if a mighty monarch like me were to remain indifferent, the religion might perish and many living beings would be destined for hell. Let me serve the religion that it might last a thousand years." The inscription then proceeds to detail a new code of conduct for monks as drawn up by the famous ascetic monk Mahā Kassapa of Dimbulāgala. This code is interesting in that it gives a glimpse of the everyday life of Sri Lankan monks in the 12th century. Parts of the code and more details about Mahā Kassapa will be given in the section on Dimbulāgala.

To the right of this inscription is a 7 meter high standing Buddha with his arms crossed in front of his chest. Because of this unusual hand gesture, some have speculated that this particular image is not of the Buddha, but of Ānanda grieving after his master passed into final Nirvana. However, nearly all Sri Lankan temples have a sitting, a standing and a reclining Buddha image in them, while none with images of Ānanda are known. Further, at least three other Buddha images with crossed arms have been found in Sri Lanka. The final image is 14 meters long and depicts the Buddha in the lion posture (*sīhāsana*) just as he attains final Nirvana. He rests his head on a beautifully decorated cylindrical pillow. Walking to the far end of this image the pilgrim will notice that the sole of each foot has a large blooming lotus on it.

All the images at Gal Vihāra have particularly beautiful expressions, but this one especially so. The sculptor has succeeded in creating an expression of transcendental serenity that cannot fail to move all who see it. All the images were originally painted, probably in bright colors. The disappearance of the paint allows the black and gray veins of the rock to be seen adding considerably to the images' beauty.

- *The Lotus Pond*

As the pilgrim proceeds north along the road from the Gal Vihāra, he or she will see a clearing on the left. At its far end is the Lotus Pond. This pond is cleverly designed to resemble a blooming eight-petaled lotus. It is 8 meters at the top, with five steps and made of well cut blocks of stone. The Lotus Pond may have been the bathing place of a monastery or perhaps a part of an ornamental garden. It is a lovely piece of work and shows that the modern landscape designer might well learn something from the ancients.

- *Tivanka Pilimage*

About half a kilometers further north of the Lotus Pond is the Tivanka Pilimage, a large image shrine built by Parakkamabāhu I and renovated by Parakkamabāhu II some sixty years later. As in the case of the Lankātilaka, monks and perhaps lay people too must have assembled in this shrine every evening.

The Pilimage contains the largest collection of paintings to survive from the Polonnaruwa period. At the beginning of the 20th century there were more paintings than there are now, but delays in protecting them from the elements destroyed many of them.



Painting of Gods from Tivanka Pilimage

As the pilgrim enters the shrine, he or she will notice three niches on the left and right, each of which has three bands of paintings in them, mostly fragmentary and faded. The method used in the paintings was tempera, that is, the pigment was applied to the dry plaster wall. Only three colors were used—red, yellow

and green—although the artists were able to do a great deal with this very limited palette. The figures were first drawn in an outline of red and then the pigment was applied. As with almost all temple paintings then and today, the Jātaka stories and the life of the Buddha form the subject matter.

At the far end of the shrine is the large Buddha image made of brick. Although now much ruined, it is in the relaxed and sensuous thrice bent (*tribhanga*) posture, a style rarely found in Sri Lanka. High on the wall to the right of the image is a large and dramatic painting of the Buddha. He is descending from the Tāvātimsa Heaven with the gods accompanying him and holding an umbrella over him.

After leaving the inside of the Tivanka Pilimage, walk around the outside and look at the elaborate stucco work. Note in particular the whimsical expressions on the faces of the dwarfs and the lively frolicking lions.

HOW TO GET THERE

Polonnaruwa is 100 kilometers from Anuradhapura, 140 kilometers from Kandy and 57 kilometers from Habarana and is easily reached from all three places by private buses and public transport.



HOLY MOUNTAINS

Mountains have always had a particular attraction for spiritual seekers. Until recently, at least they were lonely places and often of great natural beauty, making them attractive to those wishing to live the life of prayer or meditation. The silence and spaciousness they offer seem to have a natural tendency to still the mind and calm the senses. Mountains have also long been associated with the gods, probably because they lift the eye upward to the clouds and the filaments where humans have always assumed that divine beings live.

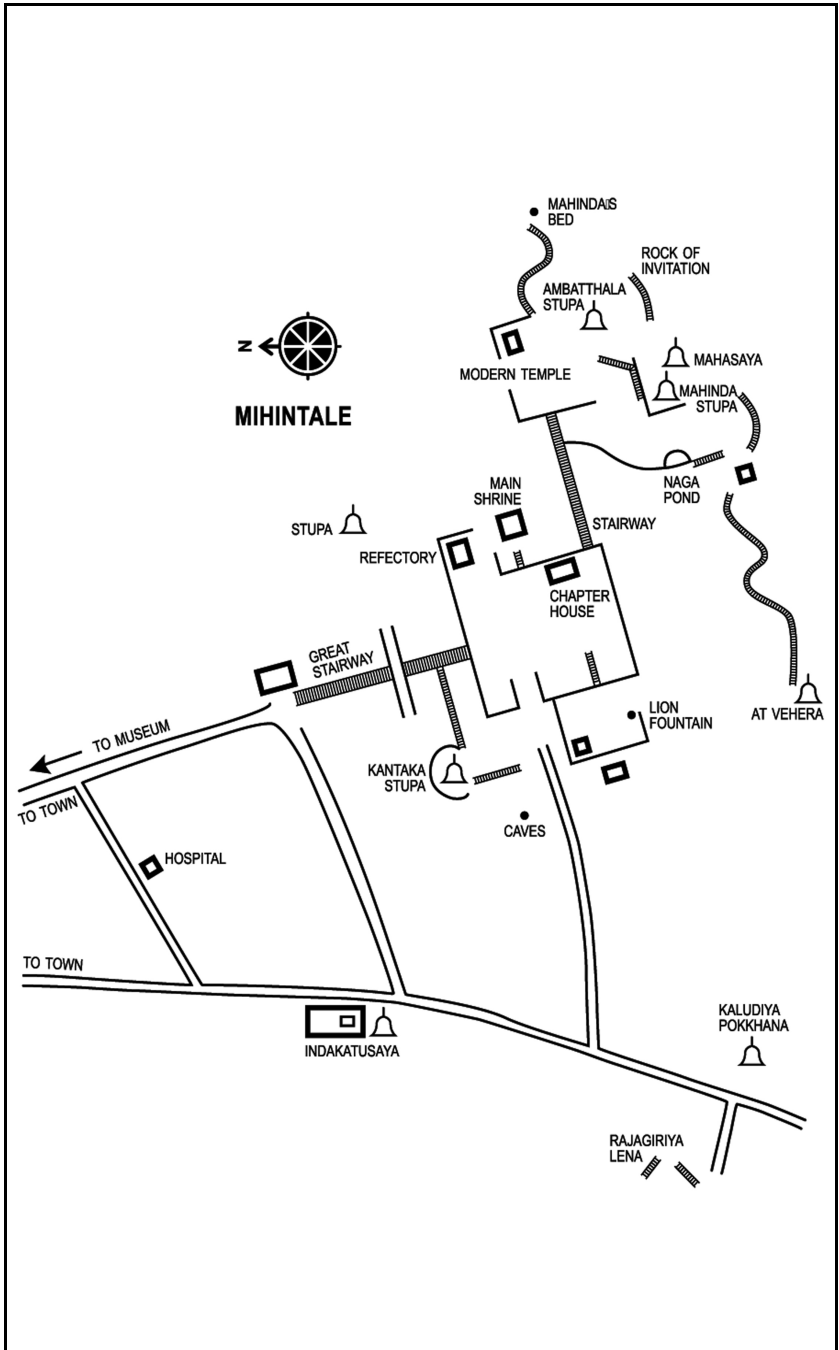
Nearly all religions have some mountains that are considered holy for one reason or another—Judaism and Christianity’s Mt Sinai, Hinduism’s Mt Kailash, Islam’s Mt Arafat and Shintoism’s Mt Fuji. The same is true of Buddhism. The Vulture’s Peak in Rājagaha is still considered special because the Buddha so often used to stay on its rocky summit. In Mahayana Buddhism, bodhisattvas like Avalokitesvara, Mañjusrī and Samantabhadra are associated with mountains.

The south-central region of Sri Lanka is covered with mountains, the highest being Pidurutalagala at 2524 meters. On the northern and eastern plains, there are numerous isolated high hills, some of them of very dramatic appearance. Several of these mountains and hills are considered holy either because they are the abode of a god or because saints sanctified them.

MIHINTALE

In about the fifth decade of the 2nd century BCE the Indian emperor Asoka held a great council of monks, nuns and religious scholars in his capital at Pātaliputta (Patna). Disputes over points of Dhamma were settled, corrupt monks and nuns were expelled from the Sangha, and a decision was made to send religious missions to the different regions of India and even beyond. Asoka’s son, Mahinda, was selected to head a mission to the southern regions.

HOLY MOUNTAINS



The royal monk and his companions left Pātaliputta for Vedisa where they stayed for a while, probably at the great monastery at Sāñchī. Legend says they then flew from there to Sri Lanka, but a very ancient tradition from South India attributes the introduction of Buddhism to that region to Mahinda, so it is likely that the missionaries were active there before going to Sri Lanka. Whatever the case, the monks probably landed at Gokanna (ancient Trincomalee) and finally stopped at a mountain just east of Anuradhapura in the year 246.

The king Devānampiyatissa was hunting on the mountain together with some of his courtiers when he suddenly encountered the yellow robed strangers. The king was somewhat taken aback by the monks, but Mahinda reassured him saying; “Oh great king, we are monks, disciples of the King of Truth. We have come from India out of compassion to you.” After having put the king at ease, Mahinda asked him a series of questions meant to test his powers of comprehension. Having passed the test, Mahinda taught the king and his retinue the Dhamma. The king invited the monks to come to Anuradhapura the next day and then returned to the city to prepare for their arrival.

Mahinda arrived at the appointed time and preached to the royal household, but the common folk, who had no access to the palace, were clamoring to hear the new teaching as well. Therefore, the next day huge crowds assembled in the elephant stables and Mahinda taught the Dhamma to them there. After spending years teaching the Dhamma and guiding the fledging Sri Lankan Sangha, Mahinda retired to Mihintale and died there in 202 BCE. After a grand funeral, his ashes were enshrined in stupas throughout the country including in one on Mihintale itself.

Mihintale was originally named Missaka Pabbata, although in the proceeding centuries it was more commonly called Cetiyaḡiri or Cetiyaḡabbata, both names meaning “Mountain of Stupas.” Of course, its present name is derived from Mahinda. From the introduction of Buddhism right up to the 13th century, Mihintale was the third largest monastic complex in Sri Lanka. When Fa-hsien visited in the early 5th century, there were two thousand monks living there and records show that in later times the numbers were even greater.

For the first few centuries, monks led simple and austere lives; Devānampiyatissa is said to have prepared sixty-eight caves on the

mountain for monks to live in. In time though, Mihintale's monasteries became wealthy and influential and the lives of the monks changed accordingly. But even then, there were always monks who lived in caves and groves away from the main complex and devoted themselves to meditation rather than academic pursuits, administration and pastoral duties. One monk whom Fashien met was particularly revered for his holiness. He had so much love that it affected a mouse and a snake in his cave so that they lived together in perfect harmony.

In the 4th century, control of Mihintale passed from the Mahāvihāra to the Abhayagirivihāra and there is evidence that Mahayana dominated from that time onwards. Over the centuries various kings and wealthy individuals built stupas on Mihintale so that by the 11th century there were sixty-four of them, some very large. The mountain must have been quite a sight at that time. Mihintale is actually made up of three mountains, Mihintalekanda, Atveherakanda and Rājagirilenakanda.

WHAT TO SEE

- *Hospital*

From Mihintale town's bus-stop a road runs through a shady park to the foot of the mountain. Soon, to the right of the road, the pilgrim will see the ruins of an ancient hospital set amidst a grove of lovely mango trees. This may be the remains of the hospital that Sena II established in the 9th century according to the *Cūlavamsa*.

The entrance is on the southern side where a gatehouse leads to an outer courtyard. On the right are the remains of what was probably a hot water bath or perhaps a steam bath. Beyond this, a flight of stairs leads to the accommodation area. There are twenty-seven rooms for patients and four larger rooms for other purposes, all built around a courtyard with a small temple in its middle. In the large room on the northeast corner is a stone medical bath just like the one behind the Thupārāma at Anuradhapura. The exact purpose of such baths is not certain, but they were probably used for immersing patients in medicinal oils. The hospital was probably situated some distance from the main monastery for quarantine purposes. Hospitals like this one were not meant for the general population, but for the monks and staff of the larger monasteries.

During excavations of this hospital, a clay jar with a blue glaze similar to those known from Iran was found.

• *The Great Stairway*

Leaving the hospital and walking towards the foot of the mountain, the pilgrim will arrive at the great stairway that leads up Mihintale. The one thousand eight hundred and forty steps, some of them cut out of the living rock, rise for nearly 122 meters and from the bottom make a very impressive sight. As you ascend, notice the length of some of the stone steps and imagine the labor needed to cut, dress, transport and then place them. At the foot of the stairs and half way up are the ruins of several monasteries and stupas. The ruins of the large stupa on the hill on the left can be reached by way of a path starting behind the refectory. Towards the top of the stairway, another smaller stairway on the right leads to the Kantaka Stupa. Reaching the top of the stairs and passing through the gatehouse, the pilgrim arrives at Mihintale's lower terrace.

• *Refectory*

Turning left, the pilgrim will come to the main refectory built around a courtyard. Along the north and east walls of the refectory are two stone rice troughs. The size of these troughs suggests that they provided rice to a very large numbers of monks, certainly more than could have been accommodated in the modestly sized refectory itself. It seems likely therefore that monks received their meals here and then took it somewhere else to eat. Note the elaborate drainage system and the overhead pipe that provided water to the refectory. Note also the game board carved into one of the paving stones near the end of the smaller trough where the kitchen staff would have played some sort of game in their spare time. A nearby inscription tells us that twelve cooks were employed in this refectory, as well as a warden and several laborers whose job it was to provide firewood. A path leads down from behind the refectory to a large pond and the ruins of a stupa.

• *The Main Shrine*

Directly above the refectory is Mihintale's main shrine, which is approached by the large staircase in the retaining wall. The shrine has small stupas at each of its four corners. Passing through the entrance, one enters the vestibule. On either side of the door to the

inner sanctum are two huge highly polished slabs of stone with a 10th century inscription on them written in beautiful letters. The inscription, by King Mahinda IV, is one of the longest and most interesting from ancient Sri Lanka. It contains the code of rules and regulations (*katikāvata*) that the king drew up for the proper administration of Mihintale. The shrine originally had a standing Buddha image in it of which only the pedestal remains.

MAHINDA'S CODE

On the 10th day of the waxing moon of the month of Vap, in the sixteenth year of his reign, the great King Sirisanghabodhi Abhaya (Mahinda) ... convened an assembly of the great community of monks resident in Cetiyaḡiri Vihāra and the Abhayaḡiri Vihāra. At this assembly, His Majesty conferred with competent persons about selecting such monastic rules as pleased him out of those in use.

The monks residing in the monastery shall rise at dawn, meditate on the four protective formulas and, having cleaned their teeth, shall dress as prescribed in the rules of training. They shall go to the assembly hall and with love in their minds chant, and then they shall go down to the refectory and receive gruel and rice. Monks who are unable to go to the assembly hall because of illness, shall be granted a portion of food when they get a recommendation from the physician. To the monks who teach the *Vinaya Pitaka* shall be granted five portions of food and robes, to those who teach the *Sutta Pitaka* seven portions and to those who teach the *Abhidhamma*, twelve. ...

Employees of the monastery shall be ordered and dismissed only by the monks in council, not by any individual monk. Monks residing here or at any place belonging to the monastery, shall under no circumstances own fields, orchards or other property. They shall not allow their relatives to have control over any places owned by the monastery. Those who, having put on the yellow robe, commit acts inconsistent with the dress, such as buying and selling or killing animals, shall not be allowed to live on the mountain. ...

The monk who looks after the establishment shall be given one *naeliya* of raw rice daily. For the expense of the ceremony of commencing the rains retreat, one *kalanda* and four *aka* of gold shall be given, and for the closing ceremony a similar amount. For flowers and whitewashing, fifteen *kalanda* of gold per annum shall be allowed. ... The physician who applies leeches shall be given two *paya* of land for his maintenance, the astrologer two *kiriya* [of land] and a share from Damiya [village], the barber one *kiriya*, ... for providing wicks and oil for the lamps in the relic house, one *paya* of land from Karanda village shall be given. The two florists who provide white lotuses for the relic house shall receive two *paya* of land from this village, the person who provides a hundred and twenty blue water lilies per month shall receive two *kiriya* of land from Sapu village. ...

(Condensed from the *Katikāvata* inscription by King Mahinda IV at Mihintale.)

• *The Chapter House*

Going back down the stairs and turning left, the pilgrim will see the remains of a large pillared hall. According to the *Vinaya*, all the monks residing in a particular monastery should meet twice a month to recite the rules, confess any infringements of them and to discuss the Dhamma. Such convocations were probably held in this hall. There are four entrances so that large crowds could easily enter and leave. Note that the stairs at the main entrance have an inscription carved on them in Sinhala characters from about the 8th century. The inscription warns the monks to meet together in harmony and to disperse in harmony. In the middle of the hall is a raised platform with a stone seat from where the abbot would address his monks or eminent teachers would sometimes give sermons.

• *Lion Fountain*

Proceeding towards the foot of the hill, the pilgrim will see one of the most interesting ancient hydraulic works in Sri Lanka: a fountain consisting of a lion frozen in the act of pouncing and a water tank above it. The lion and part of the tank are carved out of a single mass of rock. When the tank was being cut, one side was not sufficient to form the whole so other pieces of stone were added. These additional stones fit in place so perfectly as to make the tank waterproof. Around the sides of the tank are pillared niches with figures of dancers, wrestlers, elephants, dwarfs and musicians carved in them. Water was piped into the tank from the Nāga Pond further up the mountain, from where it flowed out of the lion's mouth. This water would not have been used for drinking, but for bathing and washing.

• *Nāga Pond*

Having seen everything on the lower terrace, now take the stairs leading further up the mountain. Towards the top of the stairs, the pilgrim will notice a path leading off on the right. Proceed along it through the jungle and he or she will arrive at the Nāga Pokuna, the Nāga Pond, so called because of the huge five-headed cobra carved out of the cliff at the back of the pond. The *Mahāvamsa* calls this pond Nāgacatuḅka or sometimes Nāgasonḁi. Originally, Mahinda and his companions bathed in a small natural pond here.

As the demand for water grew, Aggabodhi I enlarged and deepened the pond by constructing an embankment around it. The large area of exposed rock above the pond acts as a catchment area. Stone pipes from the pond fed the refectory and Lion Fountain on the lower terrace. The water in the Nāga Pond is dark but clean and can offer the pilgrim a refreshing bath.

If one now returns to the main stairway and proceeds a little further, one will notice on the right an inscription now marked off with a railing. Proceeding a little further, one will arrive at the upper terrace of Mihintale. This upper terrace, called Ambatthala, consists of a large flat area on which are a modern monastery, a stupa, and several other structures, all shaded by coconut, tamarind and jack trees.

• *Ambatthala Stupa*

At the far end of the terrace is a small attractive stupa, the pillars around it indicate that it was once enclosed by a *Vatadāge*. There is some confusion about the identity of this stupa—popular opinion calls it the Ambatthala Stupa, which was built by Mahānāga in the early 1st century CE, while the historical records suggest that it is the Silā Stupa. According to the chronicles, the Ambatthala Stupa was built to enshrine some of Mahinda’s ashes, while a medieval chronicle says that the Silā Stupa was erected at a place where the Buddha alighted during one of his visits to Sri Lanka. Whatever its original name and purpose, the stupa’s dazzling white dome contrasts most attractively with the green coconut tree fronds gently swaying above it.

On the western side of terrace is a modern railing enclosing an ancient stone with a symbolic Buddha’s footprint on it. The stone has an inscription in early Sinhala script and pilgrims throw coins on it. Nearby, besides the terrace, is a much-worn and damaged statue of a bodhisattva popularly believed to be of King Devanampiyatissa. The pillars around it once supported a roof above it.

• *The Rock of Invitation*

Just near the stupa is a pinnacle of rock called the *Ārādhanaḡala*, “Rock of Invitation.” This is where, according to tradition, Mahinda and his companions landed when they arrived in Sri Lanka and from where Sumana, one of the monks who accompanied Mahinda,

announced the preaching of the Dhamma in Sri Lanka. Stairs cut into the rock lead to the summit, which offers a panoramic of the whole of Mihintale and the surrounding countryside.

• *Mahinda's Cave*

A path near the modern monastery leads 150 meters down through the forest on the east side of the mountain to the low cave called Mihinda Guhā, Mahinda's Cave. Here Mahinda stayed when he lived on Mihintale. Carved on the floor of this cave is a raised rectangular panel meant to represent the folded robe Mahinda rested on. Having seen the cave, take the stairs back up to the upper terrace and go left up the stairs to the great white stupa.

• *The Mahāseya and Mahinda Stupas*

Mahinda lived in Sri Lanka for about forty years and died about 199 BCE. His body was cremated with great ceremony and his ashes were divided into several parts and enshrined in stupas built around the Island. The smaller ruined stupa is almost certainly one of those built to enshrine a portion of Mahinda's ashes.

When this stupa was excavated in 1951, an earthenware casket with two separate compartments and a lid was found inside it. Both compartments contained tiny gold stupas, one of which had fragments of burnt human bone in it. There seems little doubt that the burned bones are the mortal remains of the great Mahinda himself. Nothing like this unusual casket has ever been found in either India or Sri Lanka.

Right next to Mahinda's Stupa is the gleaming white Mahāseya, built by King Mahādāthika in the early 1st century CE. With a diameter of 41 meters and a height of 44 meters, it is the largest stupa ever built on Mihintale. A vast amount of labor must have been required to carry the bricks needed to build this stupa all the way up the mountain.

• *Et Vehera*

Rather than descending by the way one has come, one should go behind Mahinda's Stupa, walk over the area of bare rock and follow the path that leads down the west side of the of the mountain to a pleasant shady glen. Here there are the ruins of a small temple and a little beyond it the first of the six hundred steps leading up to Etkanda, the highest point of Mihintale.

It is quite a climb to get to the summit, but the pilgrim will be rewarded by a sweeping view. The three great stupas at Anuradhapura can also be clearly seen in the distance. The small stupa at the summit is known as Et Vehera, the Elephant Stupa, although why it was given this name is not known. Note the stone trough beside the path close to the stupa. This was used to provide water for weary pilgrims who made the climb in ancient times. Now return to the glen. From here one can go back down directly to the lower terrace by taking the stairs to the left, or one can climb the smaller staircase to the right and go back down passing the Nāga Pond. From the lower terrace walk to the nearby car park at the right edge of which is a staircase leading up to the Kantaka Cetiya. These stairs are often sprinkled with blossoms from the Frangipani trees that shade it.

• *Kantaka Cetiya*

It is not known who built the Kantaka Cetiya; it is first mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa* as the place where the sixty-eight caves were built by King Devānampiyatissa and then that King Lañjatissa had a stone mantle made for it in the 1st century BC. Later the dome of the stupa collapsed, covering the *vāhalkada* around it and in effect perfectly preserving two of them. These *vāhalkadas* contain the oldest sculptures and stone work still to be found in Sri Lanka and thus are of considerable interest.

On arriving at the top of the stairs, the pilgrim faces the Kantaka Cetiya's southern *vāhalkada*. In front of it is a large flower altar. The *vāhalkada* itself is made of brick faced with white sandstone and rises in eight stages. Within these stages are rows of crouching elephants, geese and dwarfs. Look at these dwarfs carefully, some are dancing, others are playing musical instruments, one is even standing on its head. In one stage on the right, there is a mural of lions, showing that these *vāhalkada* were once covered with paintings. On either side of the *vāhalkada* are richly carved pillars with bull capitals. The capitals on the pillars on the other *vāhalkadas* have the animals corresponding to each of the four directions: the horse facing the west, the lion facing the north, and the elephant facing the east.

• Caves

To the west of the Kantaka Cetiya, the pilgrim will notice a cave under a huge boulder. Walking through the cave, one will come to yet more caves in two layers. They are the caves where Mahinda and his first Sinhalese monk disciples are said to have lived according to the *Mahāvamsa*. The inscriptions on the drip ledges of these caves are amongst the oldest in Sri Lanka and even mention some individuals from the time of King Devānampiyatissa.

In the *Mahāvamsa* it is said that King Kanirajānutissa once had sixty monks flung off a cliff at Mihintale for attempting to assassinate him in the monastery's convocation hall. The dramatic cliff at the southern edge of this cave monastery may have been where these errant monks met their gruesome end.

• Rājagiri Lena

After having seen the Kantaka Cetiya and the nearby caves, walk back down the stairs to the car park and follow the road down the mountain to the intersection and turn left. After walking for a while, the pilgrim will see a cluster of huge rocks on the right. Take the unpaved road towards these rocks, climb the stairs and the pilgrim will soon arrive at Rājagiri Lena, the "King's Mountain Cave." There are several caves on and around this hill and the inscriptions on the drip ledges show that the site was first inhabited in the 2nd century CE. The *Mahāvamsa* says that King Saddhātissa used to spend full moon days meditating in a cave at Rājagiri Lena. The picturesque brick and plaster temple in the main cave may date from the Kandyan period, although it could be much older. On the right is a stone cistern for holding water. On one of the rocks above the cave are the ruins of a small cetiya. One can climb there by way of the ancient stairway, which is located behind the main cave to the west.

These silent ruins, the monkeys clamoring over the rocks, the Frangipani blossoms sprinkled on the steps and the fine view make Rājagiriya Lena one of the loveliest places around Mihintale and an excellent place to pause and do some meditation.

• Kaludiya Pokuna

Now return to the main road. On the other side of it you will see a path leading to some rough steps shaded by Frangipani trees. Climbing these stairs, you will come to a collection of ruins and a

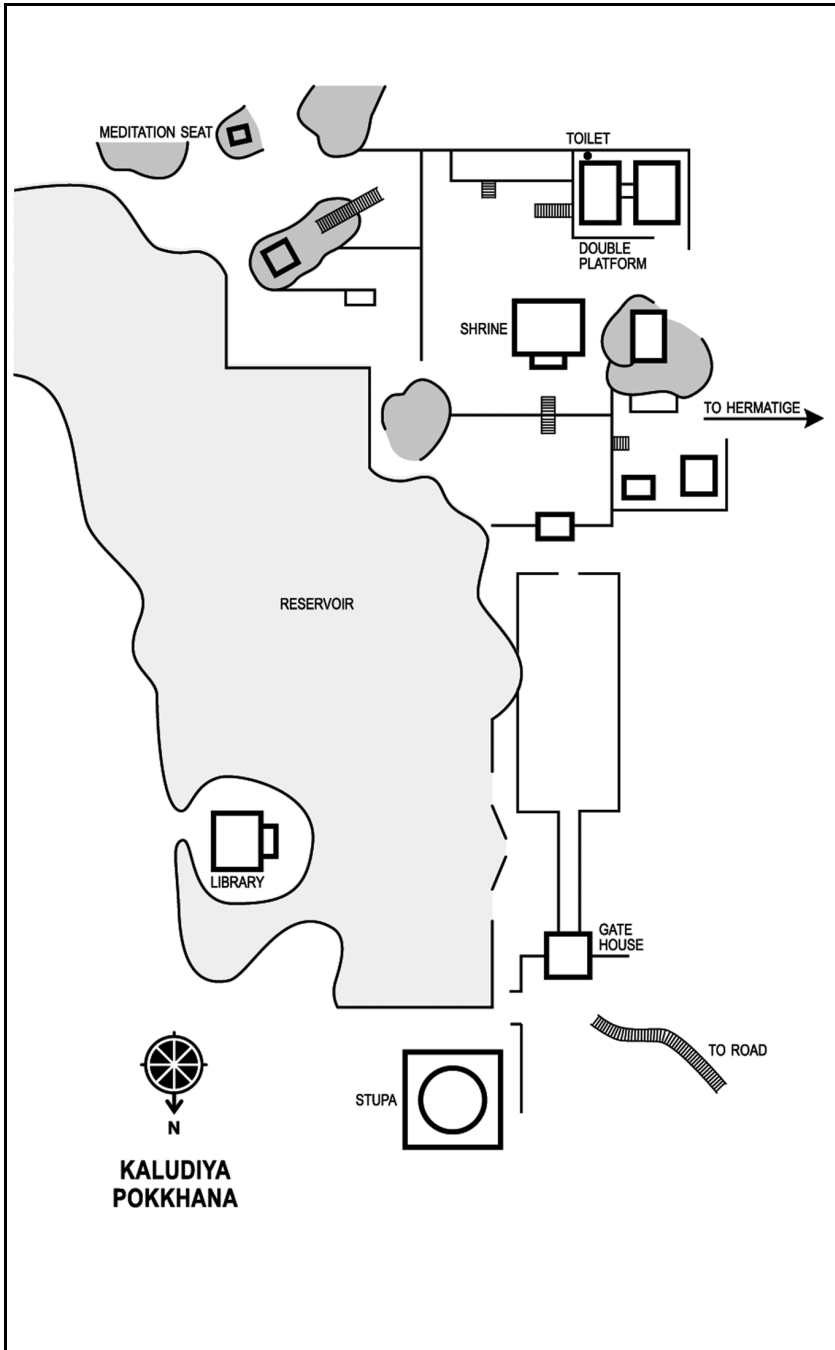
large pond now called Kaludiya Pokuna, "Black Water Pond." The ancient name of this monastery is uncertain, although at least at one period it was called Dakkhinagiri, "Southern Mountain." On the other hand, Kaludiya Pokuna is a particularly sylvan place and another inscription says that Kassapa IV built a monastery at Mihintale called Hadayunha Vihāra, Heartwarming Monastery, which might have been its alternative name.

On one occasion, King Saddhātissa is said to have stood all night at the Southern Mountain monastery in rapt attention as the great teacher Buddharakkhita gave a sermon on the Kālakārāma Sutta. The rest of the audience was apparently equally absorbed because they failed to notice their king.

The layout and structure of Kaludiya Pokuna has much in common with monasteries like Ritigala and Arankele and so it seems to have belonged to the Pamsukūlika sect. The stairway leads up to the main gatehouse, besides which is a second gate leading to a ruined stupa overlooking the pond. Returning to the main gatehouse and passing through it, the pilgrim will see the whole complex. On the left is the lotus-filled lake on the far side of which is a small rocky island with the ruins of a building on it, probably a library. Being surrounded by water, the palm leaf books would have been protected from termites and other insects that might damaged them. A wide walkway leads to a second gatehouse. The stairs on the right lead down to a delightful pavilion built under a large rock. From here, a path through the trees goes to a modern meditation monastery where eight or so monks live. They have renovated some of the ancient caves here and on the hill above the pond and now live in them. If you decide to visit this monastery, please act in a quiet and unobtrusive manner and respect the monks' privacy.

Back up the stairs and further along is the monastery's main temple and, directly behind it, two double platforms built from the bare rock. Note the so-called urinal stones on the upper platform. Next to these urinal stones is a small path that leads up a rocky, forested hill to some caves which are used by the monks of the mediation monastery. Near the double platforms is a long high rock pointing towards the lake. Stairs lead to the top of this rock where a small meditation cell used to look out over the water. Climb down from this rock, walk around it, and you will find a meditation seat cut out of a boulder and positioned to face a boulder.

SACRED ISLAND



• *Indikatuseya*

Having seen the Kaludiya Pokuna, return to the road and follow it back to the main road leading to Mihintale town. After a while you will come to two ruined, but beautifully designed stupas, the Katuseya and, next to it in a solid stone wall enclosure, the Indikatuseya. The Indikatuseya stupa sits on the top of a low, square platform with a stairway leading up to it. The dome of the stupa is in ruins, but note the attractive lotus petal design around its base. When this stupa was opened by archaeologists in 1923, a copper lotus and ninety-one copper plates, dating from about the 9th century, with inscribed extracts from the Mahayana *Kāsyapayapabbata Sūtra* were found. The enclosure also contains five image shrines and two bathing ponds. The road next to the stupas leads back to Mihintale town and the bus stop.

HOW TO GET THERE

Mihintale is 12 kilometers East of Anuradhapura. Buses from the city's main bus stand leave at regular intervals. Seeing the sacred mountains requires a lot of climbing, so it is good to go early and to bring water. As there is so much to see and it is such an enchanting place, it might be a good idea to stay overnight here rather than in Anuradhapura.

ŚĪGIRIYA

After the Buddha himself, the most revered and universally popular figure in Buddhism is Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Since his appearance in about the 1st century BCE, this beloved bodhisattva has been worshipped with almost unparalleled fervor by the followers of all schools of Buddhism. Tradition says Avalokitesvara has a hundred and eight names, one of which is Nātha and it is under this name that he is still worshipped in Sri Lanka.

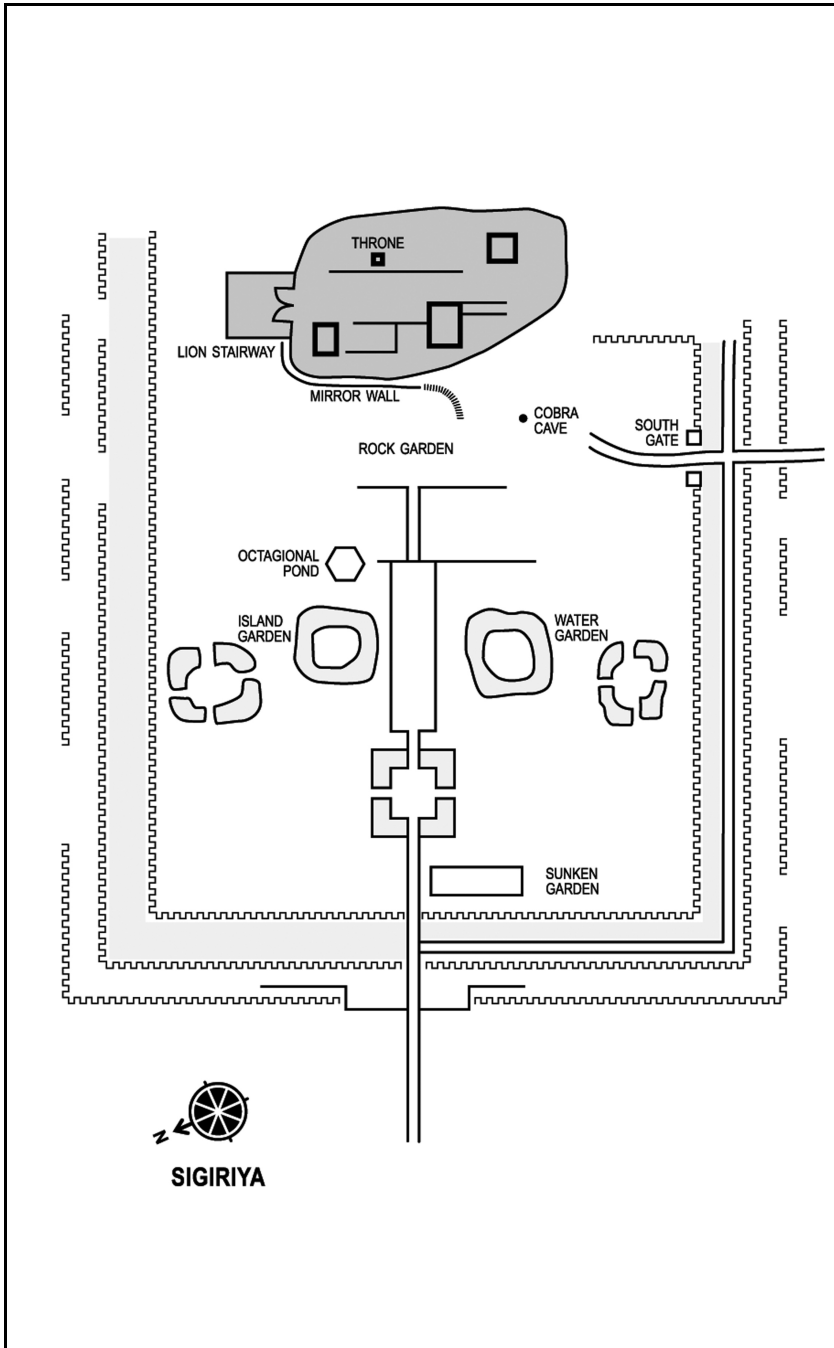
Although Avalokitesvara was believed to be accessible through prayer and supplication to anyone anywhere, he was also believed to abide on a mountain in a remote part of India where, from its lofty and cloud-decked heights, he could be as his name suggests,

“the regarnder of the cries of the world.” This mountain was called Potala. It seems that from about the 1st century CE pilgrims began visiting Potala although records are very scant.

When the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-tsang was in Nālanda in the 7th century, he met a Brahmin who had made a vow to worship a statue of Avalokitesvara on the mountain, a vow he had been able to fulfill. The famous Tantric *siddhas* Buddhāsanta and Buddhaguhāya are said to have climbed Potala and worshipped this same statue. The poet and philosopher Candragomin went to Potala by ship and is said to have spent the last years of his life there. He wrote his most famous work, the *Sishyalekha*, while there and gave it to some merchants to pass to his disciples in north India. Both of the great Tamil Buddhist epics, the *Manimekhalai* and the *Silappadhikāram* refer to pilgrims going to Mount Potala.

Hsüan-tsang traveled through South India in the 7th century and although he was unable to visit Potala himself, he left this description of it based on what others had told him. “To the east of the Malaya Mountains is Mount Potala. The passes on the mountain are very dangerous; its sides are precipitous and its valleys rugged. On the top of the mountain is a lake; its waters are as clear as a mirror. From a grotto proceeds a great river that encircles the mountain twenty times as it flows down to the southern sea. By the side of the lake is a rock palace of the gods. Here Avalokitesvara in coming and going takes his abode. Those who strongly desire to see the bodhisattva do not regard their lives, but fording the streams; climb the mountain forgetful of its difficulties and dangers. Of those who make the attempt there are very few who reach the summit. However, even those who dwell below the mountain, if they earnestly pray and beg to behold the god, sometimes he appears as Isvara, sometimes under the form of a yogi, and addresses them with benevolent words and then they obtain their wishes according to their desires.” This description is clearly a blend of fact and fiction, a trend concerning Potala that increased as time went by. Gradually the sacred mountain came to be seen as a kind of magical fairyland, a paradise where rare medical herbs and exquisite flowers grew, where mythological animals frolicked and where those blessed enough to be reborn in Avalokitesvara’s presence abided in bliss. The *Āryatārānāmaśtōttrasatakastotra*, the celebrated hymn to Avalokitesvara’s consort Tārā, describes the mountain like this:

HOLY MOUNTAINS



The beautiful and delightful Potalaka is resplendent with various gems,
 Covered with manifold trees and creepers,
 Resounding with the sound of many birds,
 And with the murmur of waterfalls,
 Thronged with wild beasts of many kinds.
 Many species of flowers grow everywhere,
 And it is furnished with many savory fruits;
 One hears the humming of the bees there,
 And the sweet songs of the *Kinnaras*.
 Herds of elephants frequent it,
 And hosts of accomplished holders of the magical lore,
Gandharvas and sages free from passions,
 A profusion of hosts of Bodhisattvas,
 And other masters of the ten stages,
 Thousands of goddesses and queens of the sacred lore,
 Tārās and others.
 Hosts of wrathful deities guard it,
 Hayagriva and many like him.
 There, seated on a lotus, dwelt the wonderful Lord
 Avalokita,
 Who strives for the good of all beings;
 A great ascetic, full of love and compassion.

In the *Gandavyūha Sūtra*, Potala is one of the places the youth Sudhana visited during his long quest for truth. The sutra describes the young man's ascent to the summit and his meeting with Avalokitesvara. "Going continually on and on, he made his way up the mountain. On it he looked everywhere for the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara who he finally found on the western slope. Everywhere there were running springs and bathing pools: the woods grew dense and the ground was softly mantled with vegetation. Avalokitesvara sat crossed-legged on a diamond treasure-throne surrounded by innumerable adoring bodhisattvas preaching for them a discourse on compassion and empathy."

So strong was the desire to visit Mount Potala, but so difficult was it to do so, that replicas of the holy mountain began to appear. In North India, there was one such mount to the north of Rājagaha. The Chinese Buddhists had their own called Putuo Shan in

Zhejiang Province. The Sinhalese created their own replica of Avalokitesvara's mountain abode at Sigiriya.

Rising 200 meters above the jungle-covered plain, Sigiriya is a huge flat-topped rock covered with ruins and represents one of the most astonishing Buddhist monastic complexes ever built. For at least a century after its rediscovery, Sigiriya was thought to be the fortress-palace where the patricide King Kassapa I lived in fear of his brother. At least, this is the story the *Cūlavamsa* tells. However, this chronicle was written some seven hundred years after Kassapa and at a time when Mahayana Buddhism had disappeared from Sri Lanka. The chronicler may have either suppressed Sigiriya's Mahayana origins or, more likely, did not know of them.

Sigiriya was possibly a Mahayana monastic complex and a great temple meant to suggest Mount Potala or be an imitation of it. The *Cūlavamsa* calls the place Sihagiri, Lion Mountain, but the earlier and probably original name was Sihigiri, Mountain of Remembrance.

There are numerous caves around the main rock with twenty-four inscriptions dating from the 3rd century BCE to the 2nd century CE, indicating that ascetic monks inhabited it during that period. Later it became a branch of the Abhayagirivihāra and continued to function as a monastery up to at least the 10th century.

WHAT TO SEE

- *Walls and Moat*

The mountain, monasteries and gardens of Sigiriya are surrounded by a series of impressive walls and moat nearly 2 kilometers long. The now barely visible outer wall was made out of rammed earth and next to it is a moat. Beyond this are a second moat and a wall made out of brick. The inner moat is 24 meters wide, 4 deep, lined with stone blocks while the inner wall is made of rubble, stone and earth dug from the moat, and is 9 meters high.

The main entrance was on the west and was probably approached across a drawbridge. There are other gates through both the northern and southern walls. The real purpose of the moats may have been to suggest the river that circled Potala twenty times and to guarantee seclusion to the monks of Sigiriya.

• *The Water Garden*

Crossing the inner moat and passing through the inner wall, the pilgrim enters what were once a series of extraordinary gardens in imitation of the ones on Mount Potala. On the right is a sunken garden, the corresponding part on the left has not yet been excavated. The whole complex is sunken and hard to make out, but it seems to have consisted of flowerbeds and variously shaped ponds at different levels that were fed by waterfalls, springs and fountains.

The main path then leads to the second part of the water garden that is 160 meters long, 24 wide and leads upward in a series of low steps. Water stored on the lower slopes of the mountain was fed under pressure through underground pipes into fountains from where it flowed into meandering streams, over small waterfalls and into little pools and ponds. The circular limestone slabs with holes in them are the fountains. After heavy rain they still work.

On both sides of this garden are two islands which originally had buildings on them, the outermost of these islands were approached by four causeways. Only the islands on the right have been restored. Further along on the left are several large rectangular brick lined pools with stepped passages leading to them and on the left is a large octagonal pool with one of its sides formed by a huge rock.

• *The Rock Garden*

The path through the Water Gardens now rises in a series of terraces to the Rock Garden. On the right is a cave with three temples, a large one flanked by two smaller ones, sheltered under it. The large temple still has a broken Buddha image in it.

Going towards the south, the pilgrim will eventually come to an immense boulder that has cracked in half. The top of the half that has broken off and fallen away has been cut into a level floor and has a large low throne carved out of it. Directly below this rock on the west is another throne carved out of a boulder, and a cave. On the east side is a narrow paved gallery with a small seat facing the rock wall. Like all these seats and thrones, this was probably used for meditation. At the end of the gallery is a cave with a low wall around it and a throne in it both again cut out of the living rock. Fragments of paintings can still be seen on the roof of this cave.

Right opposite this cave is another one with a brick wall around it that monks may have lived in. From here, a flight of stairs leads down to the dramatically shaped Cobra's Hood Cave. The small areas of painting on the roof of this cave give some idea of how sumptuously the monasteries and temples of Sigiriya were decorated. Here and elsewhere around Sigiriya the monks of old have very skillfully enhanced the bucolic beauty of the environment to make it conducive to meditation.

Retracing one's steps back past the large throne, up the stairs and onto the other half of the huge broken boulder, the pilgrim will see a rectangular cistern cut out of the rock. Note that water from this cistern formed a waterfall down the side of the gallery below.

• *The Mirror Wall*

After ambling through the Rock Gardens, the pilgrim should take one of the several staircases that lead to the gallery by which one ascends to the top of the mountain. The gallery is formed by the cliff on one side and a remarkable wall on the other. Observe the shiny surface of this wall and you will notice amongst the crude scribbles of recent times some written in small neat letters. In the centuries after Sigiriya was abandoned, visitors used to come to explore the ruins and many of them inscribed little poems to these ladies painted on the cliff.

About six hundred and eighty five of these poems can still be read and some of them are of considerable literary merit:

I am Devī, wife of Mahamata,
The doe-eyed lady of the mountain side made me angry,
In her hand is a string of pearls
and in her expression the look of a rival.

We saw Sigiriya, the King of Lions,
Whose fame has spread throughout the world,
And the wonderful maidens
With eyes like blue water lilies.

Enamoured by the long-eyed ones, people come
Without looking at the wall of crystal.
We were different. We looked at the Mirror Wall
And were satisfied with that.

Youth is crushed by old age;
The body is afflicted by many complaints;
Life spends itself and then peters out;
But here are beings beyond those states.
I am Kirti and I wrote this song.

Many of the poets included little postscripts in which they mentioned their names, where they came from and their professions. Most of them were from the educated class; aristocrats, scribes and courtiers, but some were of the more humble origins; a bookkeeper, a soldier, a guard, a trader and an assistant in an elephant stable—suggesting that literacy was widespread in ancient Sri Lanka.

Thirty-five of the poets were monks and at least twelve were woman. Most of the poems celebrate the beauty of the female figures painted on the mountain or describe their effect on their admirers. However, other subjects are dealt with also. One poet complained that the supposedly beautiful paintings were hardly worth the climb while another grumbled that the crowds of “tourists” prevented him from getting a good look.

Notice that apart from the small carefully written graffiti, there is also a lot of crude writing and scratches as well. This graffiti was done after Sīgiriya started to be visited again at the end of the 19th century. Comparing the contents and the script of the ancient graffiti and the modern scribbling, one would have to conclude that there has been a dramatic decline in civilization.

• *The Paintings*

All sorts of gods, demi-gods and mythical beings were believed to dwell on the slopes of Mount Potala in ascending order, with bodhisattvas like Tārā towards the top and Avalokitesvara in his glory above them all. The sides of Sīgiriya rock were actually painted to resemble the abodes of these deities. All these paintings have now disappeared except for those in a small concave area sheltered from the elements. There are nineteen figures altogether. Probably they are representing Tārā, the consort of Avalokitesvara, and her attendants.

For several centuries, the worship of Tārā was very popular in Sri Lanka. Two of the important lineage holders of the Tārā Tantra, Dhanamitra (8th century) and Sākyaarakshita (9th century?), were Sinhalese and both are still remembered in Tibet. Sākyaamitra

studied in Arakan and is once said to have used his *siddhi* powers to stop King Cangala from damaging some temples there. Several statues of Tārā have been found in Sri Lanka, two in particular, one in gilt bronze and the other in pure silver, are of extraordinary beauty. The artists of Sīgiriya depicted Tārā numerous times in accordance with one of her characteristics as mentioned in the *Mañjusrīmūlakalpa*, “She dwells multiplying herself again and again in a thousand places to increase everyone’s contentment.”

The figure that archeologists number as B 10 is the loveliest of these and to my mind is one of most superb representation of a female from the ancient world. Tārā is shown looking down from her lofty abode and she has an almost ethereally beautiful smile. Her left hand is in the gesture of teaching (*vitarka mudrā*), while her right hand holds blossoms which she is about to toss so that they sprinkle down. She is naked from the waist up and wears jeweled bracelets, armlets, a three-stringed pearl necklace and another necklace with a large jeweled brooch hanging from it. Rather than earrings, she wears large earplugs. Some of her hair is gathered up in a jeweled crown while the rest with flowers tied in it is left to fall down her back. Looking at this beautiful image, one is reminded of Atisa’s description of the bodhisattva in his *Āryatārastotra*:

Arrayed in rich cloth and numerous gems,
With your right hand boon-granting,
Which gives practitioners confidence,
And in your left hand a faultless lotus—the sign of purity,
Your two hands are wisdom and skillful-means united.

Below this figure and a little to its left is another Tārā with an attendant (B7 and B8). Here the bodhisattva is shown contemplating a pink water lily whose petals she is gently opening. Behind her stands an attendant with a tray of flowers. She is ready to pass her mistress another blossom after she has fully opened the water lily and let it fall. Rather than being bare breasted this attendant wears a bodice remarkably similar to the ones Sinhalese women wear even today. A spiral iron staircase now gives the modern visitor to the privilege of seeing these glorious paintings up close. All the other figures will more than repay careful inspection and unhurried contemplation.

It is remarkable to think that the artists who painted these pictures took such care over their details despite believing that no one but they would ever see them except from a great distance. Clearly, the creating of the images was not just a commission for these artists; it was an act of the deepest faith and devotion. It is also worth considering the logistics that were required for painting the side of the rock. Were the artists suspended by ropes let down from above? Did they work on bamboo scaffolding erected from below? History is silent on this matter.

• *The Lion Staircase*

Proceeding along the gallery, the pilgrim will eventually come out onto a large terrace. The northern end of this terrace drops away some 12 meters and on the rock below are numerous holes indicating that a wooden staircase once led up to the terrace. Originally, a huge crouching lion made of brick sat on this terrace and people climbed to the top of the rock by a staircase that went through its mouth. Now only the lion's two huge paws remain. It is perhaps significant that Avalokitesvara was often depicted riding on a lion and then was called *Sīhanāda* ("Lion's Roar"). The lion must have been very impressive and some of the graffiti on the Mirror Wall refer to it. One of them reads:

Having climbed *Sīgiriya* to have a look,
I was content just seeing His Lordship the lion.
After that I had no interest to see
The golden-eyed ones on the cliff.

After the lion collapsed, it was no longer possible to visit the summit until the end of the 19th century.

• *The Summit*

Those coming to *Sīgiriya* to worship Avalokitesvara and *Tārā* climbed to the summit, made their way around its eastern side and then climbed the stairs on the west up to the main shrine which was on the highest point of the summit, that is, on its northern end. The summit of the rock takes up an area of about 1.6 hectares and is covered with the ruins of monasteries, pavilions, gardens and temples. A high wall surrounded the whole summit. It is worth spending a few moments contemplating the enormous effort that would have been needed to carry all the bricks, stones and other

material to the top of this rock.

On arriving at the top, the pilgrim should take the paved path that leads to the left thus keeping the main temple to his or her right. A little further along to the left of the path and below is a magnificent throne carved out of the living rock. The square holes on the floor in front of the throne were for the wooden pillars that once supported the canopy over it. This throne may have been for monks giving sermons, but as there is not much room for an audience this seems unlikely. More probably, it represented Avalokitesvara's throne on Mount Potala as mentioned in so many descriptions of the holy mountain.

Proceeding along the path, the pilgrim soon comes to a large reservoir again cut out of the rock and over 12 meters deep. This represented the one on Mount Potala, but was probably used for bathing too. Rock cut stairs lead down to the water. At the southeast corner is a small cistern cut out of the rock. Having seen this, now proceed along the west side of the summit up the stairs and through the ruins to the highest point. Here are the remains of the rectangular building surrounded by a paved veranda. This probably was the principle temple enshrining the image of Avalokitesvara. Note the brick lined cistern nearby.

HOW TO GET THERE

Sigiriya is 10 kilometers from Ināmaluva, which is on the main Anuradhapura–Kandy road. Regular buses go directly from Kandy and from Dambulla.

SRI PĀDA

Without any doubt the most famous, the most visited and the most revered place in Sri Lanka is Sri Pāda. For centuries, it was considered the highest mountain on earth and it has the unique distinction of being considered holy by four of the great world religions.

In Sanskrit literature Sri Pāda is called variously Mount Lanka, Ratnagiri (Mountain of Gems), Malayagiri or Mount Rohana. This last name, like its Arab and Persian equivalent, Al Rohoun, is derived from Rohana, the name of the southwestern region of Sri

Lanka where the mountain is situated. In several Tamil works it is known as Svargarohanam (Ascent to Heaven) while the Portuguese called it Pico de Adam and the English Adam's Peak. In the *Mahāvamsa* it is called Samantakūta (Samanta's Abode) while in modern Sinhalese it is often called Samanalakhanda (Saman's Mountain).

Long before Buddhism came to the Island, Sri Pāda was revered as the abode of the god called Samanta, or sometimes Sumana or Suman. This local mountain god was destined to go on to great things. The Theravada Buddhists of Sri Lanka later made him the guardian of their land and their religion. With the rise of Mahayana Buddhism—a movement that began in South India from where it soon spread to the Island—Samanta developed into Samantabhadra, one of the four principle bodhisattvas of Mahayana. Like his later manifestation, Samanta is usually depicted crowned and bejeweled, holding a lotus in his right hand and accompanied by a white elephant.

Sri Pāda soars upwards to a height of 2243 meters from the edge of the central highlands and when viewed from the southwest looks like a pinnacle on a verdant castle wall. For about half the year it is often hidden in clouds and the torrential rains that rush down its steep sides during this time makes visiting the summit almost impossible. This abundant precipitation feeds Sri Lanka's four main rivers, which all have their sources on the mountain's lower slopes. Over the aeons, these rains have also washed nearly 30 meters of rock and soil off Sri Pāda and its surrounding peaks and the alluvial deposits that extend from its foot towards the south and east are one of the world's richest gem mining areas. Like the mountain itself, many legends are told about these gems. The Arabs believed they were the crystallized tears Adam and Eve shed when they were expelled from Paradise. The story the Chinese told about them was even more beautiful. They said that when the Buddha visited Sri Lanka, he found the people poor and given to theft. So out of compassion and to turn them to virtue, he sprinkled the Island with sweet dew that crystallized into gems, thus freeing the people from poverty by giving them a means of making a living.

The mountain is surrounded by exceptionally dense forest, much of it now making up the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary.

Although not actually growing on Sri Pāda's slopes, but in the forests further to the north and west, Sri Lanka's famous spices have long been associated with the holy mountain too. The Arabs believed that these sweet spices grew from cuttings and seeds that Adam bought with him from Paradise. A 14th century Persian poem says that Allah created all Sri Lanka's spices and flowers so that Adam's transition from Paradise to earth would be less painful.

What makes Sri Pāda so special is not its height or beauty, but a mysterious mark on its summit that Muslims and Christians believe to be the footprint of Adam and Hindus believe is that of Shiva. However, centuries before these faiths laid claim to the mark, perhaps as early as the 1st century BCE, the Sinhalese believed it to be the footprint of the Buddha himself. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, during the Buddha's third visit to Sri Lanka he flew from Kelaniya to Sri Pāda, leaving the impression of his foot on the mountain and then left for Dīghavāpi. Legend says that after King Vattagāmini was driven from his throne in 104 BCE, he lived in a remote forest wilderness for fourteen years. On one occasion, while hunting, a deer led him up the mountain to the sacred footprint. The gods revealed to him that the Buddha had made it.

Fa-hsien mentions Sri Pāda in his travelogue, although it is not clear whether he actually went there. The Indian monk Punyopaya "climbed Mount Lanka" while on his way to China in 655. At about the same time the Kāshmiri Tantric master Vajrabodhi visited Sri Lanka and after a six month stay in Anuradhapura, set out for Sri Pāda. "When at last he reached the foot of the mountain, he found the country wild, inhabited by wild beasts and extraordinary rich in precious stones." Like many pilgrims before and since Vajrabodhi was moved by the spectacular view from the mountain's top. "After long waiting, he was able to climb to the summit and contemplate the impression of the Buddha's foot. From the top he saw to the northwest the kingdom of Lankā and on the other side the ocean."

In 1411, the grand fleet of the emperor of China commanded by the eunuch admiral Ch'ing-ho arrived in Galle harbor to offer gifts to the sacred footprint. According to the inscription that the admiral later set up and which is now in the National Museum in Colombo, he offered lavish gifts to the shrine on the mountain on

the emperor's behalf. In 1423 a large group of Thai and Cambodian monks who were in Sri Lanka studying and collecting sacred Theravada texts climbed the holy mountain before returning to their homelands. The leader of this group made a copy of the footprint and took it back to Thailand with him.

The first western reference to Sri Pāda is in Ptolemy's *Geography* where it is called Valspada and the first specifically Christian mention of it is found in Valentinus' *Pistis Sophia*. In this 2nd century Gnostic work, Jesus tells the Virgin Mary that he had appointed an angel-guardian over the mark, "impressed by the foot of Adam and placed him in charge of the books of Adam written by Enoch in Paradise." There are only occasional Christian references to the mountain in the proceeding centuries. Marco Polo did not visit Sri Lanka specifically to make a pilgrimage to Sri Pāda; he was on a diplomatic mission for Kublai Khan at the time. Nevertheless, he was the first European to leave a reasonably accurate account of the mountain: "In this island there is a very high mountain, so rocky and precipitous that the ascent to the top is impracticable, as it is said, excepting by the assistance of iron chains employed for the purpose. By means of these some persons attain the summit, where the tomb of Adam, our first parent, is reported to be found. Such is the account given by the Saracens. However, the idolaters assert that it contains the body of Sogomon Barchan (Sakyamuni Buddha), the founder of their religious system, and whom they revere as a holy personage."

Some thirty-five years after Marco Polo, Friar Odoric of Pordenone, who was returning to Europe from China, broke his journey in Sri Lanka to make a pilgrimage to the holy mountain. In about 1348, another Christian monk, Giovanni de' Marignolli, the legate of Pope Clement VI to China, climbed Sri Pāda. He wrote of it: "It is a pinnacle of surpassing height, which, on account of the clouds, could rarely be seen; but it lighted up one morning just before the sun rose, so that they beheld it like the brightest flame. It was the highest mountain on the face of the earth and some thought that Paradise existed there." Coming from his cold gloomy medieval cloister to the eternal spring of Sri Lanka, de Marignolli had no difficulty believing that Paradise was nearby, but he was not one to swallow everything he was told. He estimated that Paradise was in fact 60 kilometers further north of the mountain.

The climate of religious tolerance in Sri Lanka was also very different to what de Marignolli was used to. He wrote, "The Buddhist monks on the mountain and elsewhere are very holy, though they have not the Faith. ... They welcomed me into their monasteries and treated me as one of their own."

Hindu reverence for Sri Pāda and its sacred footprint was mainly confined to South India and even there does not seem to have been very strong or widespread. Ibn Battuta was accompanied on his pilgrimage by four Hindu yogis who went yearly, four Brahmins and ten companions of the king of Jaffna, indicating that at least in the 14th century it was popular with Hindus living in the northern part of Sri Lanka. Hindus actually controlled the shrines on the sacred mountain at one time. In 1581 the crown prince of Kandy murdered his father and proclaimed himself King Rājasimgha I. When he asked the Buddhist monks how he could expunge the evil kamma he had made, they, to their credit, told him that like everyone else he would have to take responsibility for his own actions. This was not what he wanted to hear. The Brahmin priests on the other hand were only too willing to perform a *puja* to help the king ease his guilty conscience, and so he converted to Hinduism. The Buddhist monks were driven off Sri Pāda and it was handed to the Brahmin priests who administered it for the next hundred and sixty years.

All Muslims accept that after Adam was cast out of Paradise he left the mark of his foot on the top of a mountain. However, there was a difference of opinion in ancient Islam about exactly where Paradise was. Some said it was on earth while others contended that it was in heaven. It was this second school's opinion that eventually prevailed. Paradise was in heaven and when Adam was expelled, his foot first touched the earth at its loftiest point, which was Sri Pāda. Jarir al-Tabari in his great history of the world, the *Tarikh al-Tabari*, asserts that the mountain was so high that "when Adam was cast upon it, his feet touched it while his head was in heaven and he heard the prayer and praise-giving of the angels." This apparently annoyed the angels, "they eventually complained to Allah in their various prayers, and Allah therefore, lowered Adam completely down to earth."

Ibn Battuta was told that the first Muslim to visit Sri Pāda was Shaikh Abu Abdullah, but the evidence shows that others had

preceded him by at least a hundred years. The Arab trader Sulaiman is known to have gone to Sri Pāda in 850. Al Qazwini, who died in 1282, quotes a saying of the Prophet which says, "The best spot where the camel knelt down is Mecca, thereafter this mosque of mine (i.e., Medina) and Al Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem) and the island of Sarandib where our father Adam had descended." If this saying is authentic, it shows that Muslim reverence of Sri Pāda began with the Prophet Mohammed himself.

Sri Pāda's religious associations, its height and its great natural beauty have long made it a favorite with writers and poets and its glories are celebrated in the literature of a dozen languages. The most famous such work is the *Samantakūtavannanā*, a Pali poem composed in the 13th century by Vedeha Thera. Some twenty of the poems' verses are devoted to praising the mountain's sylvan beauty. The *Selalihini Sandeshaya* (15th cent.) is a similar work in Sinhalese, while the *Sevul Sandeshaya* (16th cent.) is a poem beseeching Samanta to protect Lankādīpa and her king.

Sri Pāda is often mentioned in Hindu literature. The *Mahābhārata* describes it from the sea as being "an exceedingly wondrous sight, which is endowed with supreme splendor." The *Anargharāghava*, a 9th century retelling of the *Rāmāyana*, has Rāma in his magic chariot flying back to Ayodhyā pointing towards the south and saying to Sitā, "There appears to view the Island of Simhala, a blue lotus arising from the ocean, made even more beautiful by the filaments of the Mount of Jewels." The *Rājatarangini*, written in Kāshmir in the 11th century, includes a tale about the mythological King Meghavahana who came to Sri Lanka to receive homage from Vibhishana the lord of the Rakshas and then climbed Sri Pāda.

In other works, Sri Pāda is used as an exotic destination or a colorful backdrop. In *The Thousand and One Nights*, written in Persia between the 9th and 13th centuries, it is one of the strange places that Sinbad visited: "I made, by way of devotion, a pilgrimage to the place where Adam was confined after his banishment from Paradise, and had curiosity to go to the top of the mountain."

In the Tamil epic *Manimekhalai*, one character describes her pilgrimage to Sri Lanka, "where stands the lofty Mount Samanta, on whose summit is the footprints of the Buddha, that ship of righteousness for traversing the ocean of birth and death." The sacred mountain also gets a mention in the old Malay version of the

Rāmāyana, in the Persian captain Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar's *Book of the Wonders of India*, and even in the 14th century apocryphal *Voyages and Travels* of Sir John Manderville. Sri Pāda's most recent appearance in literature is in Arthur C. Clark's science fiction novel *Fountains of Paradise*.

WHAT TO SEE

• *The Ascent*

The Dalhousie path from the bus stop to the summit is about 3 kilometers long and, if there are no delays, takes about four hours. Both sides of the path are lined for some way with stalls and shops selling all manner of things. Among the trinkets you will notice small booklets of poems, songs and verses that have traditionally been sung by pilgrims making the pilgrimage. The ascent proper starts at the Makara Gateway (*Makara-dvāra*) some way from the bus stop. Beyond this point you will notice that much of the path consists of cement or rough stone stairs and that the whole way is illuminated with electric lights.

Before the lights were installed pilgrims had to provide their own illumination, candles or hurricane lamps and before that "tubes filled with a resinous substance ... giving out a strong flaming blaze when lighted." William Skeen describes the dramatic impression created by these burning torches as he looked down from the summit during his visit to Sri Pāda in the 1860s. "The heavens above were clear, the stars were shining bright, and the glorious full-orbed moon was scarcely passed its zenith. From the Peak, ablaze with light to Heramitipana station similarly lighted up, the whole of the pilgrims' path was filled as it were, with a living chain of fire, connecting the two points together and formed by the torches of the multitudes going to and fro."

As you proceed, you will pass numerous pilgrims' rests offering shelter, medical assistance and sometimes food and water to pilgrims. The tradition of offering hospitality to pilgrims is an ancient one in Sri Lanka. The *Mahāvamsa* records this concerning King Vijayabāhu: "Saying: 'Let no one endure hardship that goes along the difficult pathways to worship the Footprint of the Chief of Sages on Samantakūta Mountain,' he caused the village of Gilimalaya, which abounds in rice fields and other lands, to be

granted to supply pilgrims with food. And at the Kadaligāma road and at the Ūva road he built rest houses.”

Pilgrims going to Sri Pāda traditionally greet each other by saying *Karunāva* meaning “Compassion to you.” If you say this to the people you meet, you are sure to get a warm smile and a similar greeting in return.

• *The Sama Cetiya*

After a while you will come to the Sama Cetiya, the World Peace Pagoda. This stupa was built by the famous Japanese Buddhist monk Ven. Nichi Fuji in 1976. It is maintained by several Japanese monks. At night there is little to see, but during the day the brilliant white stupa stands out dramatically against the vast gray cliff behind it.

• *The Bhagavā Cave*

About 45 meters from the summit, just next to the last teashop, is the Bhagavā Cave. To get there climb on to the retaining wall and just walk into the undergrowth for a few meters. For centuries this cave was the only refuge for pilgrims caught on the mountain at night and for those seeking shelter from storms. Ascetic monks used to spend the nine months of the off-season up here, completely isolated from the world below, living off wild fruit, herbs and moss.

There are three inscriptions on the wall of the cave. King Nissankamalla wrote the first when he climbed Sri Pāda during one of the many tours he made of his kingdom. This inscription records the improvements he made to the path up the mountain and the generous gifts he offered to its shrines. To the left of this is a figure of the king himself in a gesture of worship and beside it another inscription saying, “In this manner Nissankamalla stood worshipping the footprint.” Further to the left is the third inscription in Arabic dating from the 13th century that reads, “Mohammed, may Allah bless him ... the father of Mankind.” There is another cave on the slopes of Sri Pāda, the Divāguhā, where the Buddha is said to have rested. It is one of the sixteen sacred places and is referred to in many ancient sources, but its whereabouts today is not known.

THE SACRED FOOTPRINT

There is little to see on the top of Sri Pāda—a few buildings, the belfry with the bell that people traditionally ring once for each time they have made the pilgrimage, the shrine to Samanta and right next to it, the shrine over the sacred footprint. It is to worship at this last place that pilgrims and travelers throughout the centuries have risked hardship and danger to come to Sri Pāda.

Nearly as much has been written about the sacred footprint as has been about the mountain itself. According to Giovanni de' Marignolli in the 14th century, "The size, I mean the length thereof, is two and a half of our palms, about half a Prague *ell*. And I was not the only one to measure it, for so did another pilgrim, a Saracen from Spain." Robert Knox, an Englishman who lived in Sri Lanka in the 17th century, wrote that it was "about two feet long." John Ribeyeo, in his account of Sri Lanka presented to the king of Portugal in 1687, claimed that the footprint "could not be more perfect had it been done in wax" and in 1859 James Emerson Tennent described it, perhaps most accurately, as "a natural hollow artificially enlarged, exhibiting the rude outline of a foot about five foot long."

Obviously, people's perceptions of the sacred footprint differ according to their expectations and their faith, or lack thereof. Look carefully and see what you think of it. Remember also that the footprint is an object of enormous religious significance to Sinhalese Buddhists, so an attitude of quiet respect while near it, and indeed throughout your stay on the summit, is appropriate.

• *The View and Sunrise*

Sri Pāda is not actually that high, but its steep sides and the many lower mountains surrounding it give the impression of exceptional loftiness. It is sometimes possible to watch from above as clouds silently drift past. James Emerson Tennent's description says it all: "The panorama from the summit of Adam's Peak is perhaps the grandest in the world, as no other mountain, although surpassing it in altitude, presents the same unobstructed view over land and sea. Around it, to the north and east, the traveler looks down on the zone of lofty hills that encircle the Kandyan kingdom, whilst to the westward the eye is carried far over undulating plains, threaded by

rivers like cords of silver, till in the purple distance the glitter of the sunbeams on the sea mark the line of the Indian Ocean.”

Every morning a series of intriguing phenomena can be observed from the summit of Sri Pāda. Just before sunrise, everyone will assemble on the eastern side of the summit waiting for the sun. When the sun appears, it seems to leap over the horizon rather than rise gradually. The more pious people will shout “*Sādhu!*” at this moment. The Sinhalese say that the sun is paying homage to the Buddha’s footprint. Everyone will then move to the western side of the mountain. Join them there and, if the weather is clear, you will see the perfectly triangular shadow of the mountain lying over the landscape. Sometimes, if there is a light mist, the shadow will appear to stand upright. Within moments, as the sun climbs higher, the shadow will move rapidly towards the base of the mountain and finally disappear. This strange phenomenon is supposed to occur in only one other place in the world, somewhere in Arizona.

• *The Ancient Chains*

Go to the stairs leading down to Ratnapura and descend for about 30 meters. You will notice that soon the stairs become very steep. Everywhere else the handrails are helpful, but here they are absolutely necessary. On the right, you will notice large chains riveted into the rock. In the thousand or so years that the Ratnapura path was the only way up the mountain, these chains assisted the final ascent and they are mentioned in most ancient accounts of Sri Pāda.

The Muslims believed they were put here by Alexander the Great. The *Zaffer Namah Sekanderi*, a 15th century Persian poem celebrating the exploits of Alexander says: “He fixed thereto chains with rings and rivets made of iron and brass, the remains of which exist even today, so that travelers, by their assistance, are enabled to climb the mountain and obtain glory by finding the sepulchre of Adam.” In fact, they were probably first put here by an early Sinhalese king and replaced when needed over the centuries.

In 1815, Major Forbes witnessed a tragic, but at that time not uncommon accident at this very place: “Several natives were blown over the precipice, and yet continued clinging to one of the chains during a heavy gust of wind; but in such a situation, no assistance could be rendered, and they all perished.”

WHEN TO GO

The pilgrim's season to Sri Pāda traditionally starts on the full moon of December and ends on Vesak. It takes a while for the crowds to build up, but by the second half of the season they can be very large, so it is best to go earlier. Weekends and particularly full moon days are always crowded and should be avoided. People start the climb at about 2 a.m., so that they can arrive in time for the sunrise at around 6 a.m. Alternatively, you can climb up during the day, stay overnight, and go down the next morning. This way you can avoid the crowds, climb at a leisurely pace, have plenty of time to enjoy the view, see the sunset, spend the day quietly reflecting or meditating and get the best place to observe the sunrise in the morning.

Accommodation on the summit is basic and you would have to bring your own food and perhaps a blanket or sleeping bag. However, whenever you decide to go, check the weather report before setting out. Rain can make for a miserable trip and it is more likely that clouds or mist will obscure the view.

WHAT TO BRING

Whether making the ascent by day or night, it can be an arduous climb, so bring only what you are likely to need. There are food and drink stalls all the way up the Dalhousie path, but prices are considerably higher than normal so you might like to bring your own snacks and water. You are likely to be warm during the climb itself, but you can get very cold while waiting for the sunrise at the summit, so bring warm clothes. If the weather is uncertain, an umbrella or raincoat will be useful. A pair of binoculars, if you have them, will also be useful.

HOW TO GET THERE

During the pilgrim's season, buses go directly from Kandy, Colombo and Nuvara Eliya to Dalhousie. Likewise, you can take a train, the Podi Menike, from Colombo or Kandy to Hatton and take a bus from there to Dalhousie

TIRIYĀYA

During the Buddha's sojourn at Bodh Gayā after his enlightenment, as he sat in the shade of the Rājāyatana Tree, the merchants Tapussa and Bhalluka approached him. These two men were the leaders of a large caravan that was passing through Magadha. They offered the Buddha some food, listened as he explained the Dhamma and then took the two Refuges (there was no Sangha at that time) thus becoming the first Buddhists. According to the *Jātakas*, the Buddha gave Tapussa and Bhalluka several hairs from his head before they continued on their journey. Over the centuries many places have claimed to be the hometown of these two merchants or to have the hairs they were given, amongst them Balkh in northern Afghanistan and the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon.

From a very early period, Sri Lankans have believed that these relics were preserved in their country. The *Pūjāvāliya* relates the story of Tapussa and Bhalluka's encounter with the Buddha as told in the *Vinaya* and then adds, "They received those hair relics in a jeweled casket and took them to their own town and worshipped them. In the course of time, they went on a sea voyage and came to the island of Lankā and going in search of firewood and water, they came to a place called Girikanda. They placed the casket with the relics on the summit of the hill, but when they returned after having cooked and eaten their meals, they were unable to move the casket from where it was. Then they knew that this was a holy place and having honored it, covered the casket with stones, offered flowers to it they continued on their journey." The *Pūjāvāliya* concludes by saying: "In later times there was a monastery called Girikanda at that place."

The stupa came to be known as the Ākāsacetiya, "Stupa in the Sky"; a rather dramatic name considering that the hill is only 65 meters above sea level. The hill is now called Tiriyaaya. Inscriptions found in some of the caves at Tiriyaaya show that the place has been the abode of monks from the 2nd century BCE. From at least this time, Tiriyaaya was a port frequented by ships from all over the Bay of Bengal for a thousand years. In 1983, thirty-one bronze images including six of Avalokitesvara, one of them of North Indian make, and two of Tārā, were found buried under a paving stone of the small shrines just near the northern entrance to the stupa.

At Kuccaveli, just a few kilometers to the south, there are several strangely shaped rocks on the beach, one of which has an inscription written in a South Indian script dating from about the 6th century. It reads; "By this merit may I in my future lives be able to relieve all the suffering of the world and bestow complete happiness on humanity. May I also be full of patience and compassion. By this merit may I vanquish the foes, Māra and evil, and having attained the supreme state of Buddhahood may I with my own hand out of compassion deliver suffering humanity from the swamp of samsāra." All this shows that not only Sri Lankan pilgrims, but also those from India and perhaps even beyond used to come to Tiriyāya.

Buddhaghosa tells a story in the *Visuddhimagga* to illustrate the effect spiritual joy can have on the body. It is supposed to have taken place at Tiriyāya. There was a young woman living in the village of Vattakālaka near Girikandaka monastery. Her parents were about to go to the monastery in the evening in order to hear the Dhamma and worship the stupa and they told her: "My dear, you are expecting a child; you cannot go out at unsuitable times. We shall listen to the Dhamma and gain the merit for you." Thus they set off. Although the young woman wanted to go with her parents, she could not object well to what they said. She walked out of the house onto the balcony and stood looking at the Ākāśacetiya illuminated by the moon. She saw the flickering lamps at the shrine and the monks and nuns, the laymen and women as they circumambulated it to the right after offering flowers and incense and she heard the sound of their melodious chanting. Then she thought, "How fortunate they are to be able to go to the monastery and wander around such a shrine and listen to such sweet preaching!"

Seeing the stupa "as if it were a heap of brilliant pearls," she was filled with such joy that she levitated and came through the air to the stupa's terrace. When her parents arrived a few minutes later, seeing her sitting on the terrace, they were astonished. "What road did you come by?" they asked her. She told them what had happened, but they said, "My dear, those who have destroyed their defilements come through the air not people like you." She insisted that what she said was true, but her parents dismissed her words as the result of an overly vivid imagination.

Despite being such an important place, Tiriyāya is only rarely mentioned in the ancient records. The *Mahāvamsa* tells us that King

Vasabha constructed a reservoir there in the 1st century CE. The last we hear of the place is in the *Cūlavamsa* where it says that Vijayabāhu I restored the monastery and the stupa. After that, when the northern part of Sri Lanka was gradually abandoned, Girikanda and its stupa were swallowed up by the jungle. Gradually its significance and even its very name were forgotten.

WHAT TO SEE

• *The Approach*

The Tamil people who live near Tiriyāya call the hill Skandasāmimalai, Lord Skanda's Hill, although there is no tradition relating that Skanda, the Hindu god of war, visited or lived here. At the foot of the hill on the west side is a large rectangular reservoir filled with water lilies and shaded by trees. In 2003 there was a small crocodile in this reservoir but he will gradually grow bigger, so be careful if you decide to have a swim.

A causeway crosses the reservoir and leads to an impressive stairway made of stone that ascends the hill. About half way up a rough path on the left leads to a cave with an inscription dating from the 1st century CE. A little further up, another path on the left leads to a large flat rock with a very interesting Sanskrit inscription on it written in the Pallava Grantha script of South India. The writer, probably an Indian pilgrim, mentions that the stupa was built by Tapussa and Bhalluka who were "skilled in navigating the seas, engaged in buying and selling and who possessed a range of goods laid up in sailing vessels of diverse sorts." He then eulogizes the stupa thus: "I worship the Girikanda stupa, to which divine nymphs bearing perfumed water in receptacles made of lotus petals from the celestial river and carrying in their hands flowers, incense, jewel-lamps and other offerings, descend gracefully from the heavenly city and perform with great joy, the worship of the Lord. The king of the gods followed by numerous attendant gods also does obeisance at the excellent stupa sounding beautiful celestial conch shells and drums and scattering heaps of fresh blossoms from the heavenly trees worship the great hill daily. ... I too worship these relics." The inscription, which dates from about the 7th or 8th century, also mentions that Avalokitesvara resides on the hill.

Towards the top, the stairs turn to the right and lead to the summit. At this turn, a path leads to a large rock pool that was originally surrounded by a wall. This is where the monks of Tiriyāya used to get their drinking water. Returning to the stairs and continuing to climb the pilgrim will pass a ruined stupa on the right and eventually arrive at the top.

• *The Stupa Temple*

The whole top of the hill is artificially leveled and surrounded by a strong stonewall with the main gate on the south and another on the east. Apart from the stupa itself, there are six shrines within this enclosed area, the largest of which held a recumbent Buddha image. Another has a standing Buddha image in it now broken and much worn by time and the elements.

On the right of the main entrance to the stupa is a paved area on which is a beautifully cut stone trough used by devotees to wash their feet. On the bottom of this trough is a round concave depression, a simple, but clever way for allowing the last drops of water to be removed from the trough when changing the water. The stupa-temple or *Vatadāge* consists of a platform 24 meters in diameter and with entrances at each of the four cardinal directions. The moonstones at the entrances are plain except for the semi-circular edge that has a lotus petal design on it. The dragon kings on the guardstones are unusual for their relative lack of jewelry. Around the stupa, are four stone altars facing each entrance that once had Buddha images on them. On the front of the altars are three niches with lions in them. Two rows of pillars once held a huge dome over the stupa. Note that the inner circle of pillars is octagonal while the outer ones are square up to about a meter and then octagonal. Note also that the capitals are joined to the shafts of the pillars rather than being separate.

Archaeological investigation has shown that the stupa was originally 8 meters in diameter, but in about the 8th century, when the domed roof was built, it was enlarged to 10 meters. When archeologists got to Tiriyāya in 1951, vandals had already broken into the stupa and stolen the casket and its relics and they have never been recovered. The breach in the stupa clearly shows the earlier stupa inside the later one. There is a wonderful view from the top of Tiriyāya—the azure blue Bay of Bengal to the east and

the seemingly endless jungle to the north and west.

• *Other Ruins*

On the eastern side of the hill, another stairway leads down to two terraces on which are the ruins of Tiriyāya's monastery and other buildings.

HOW TO GET THERE

Tiriyāya is about 40 kilometers north of Trincomalee, which can be reached by bus from Habarana, a distance of 86 kilometers. Beyond Trincomalee, the road is poor in places and one has to take the ferry across the lagoon at Kodduvarakattu. At the time of writing, the army was not allowing foreigners beyond this point and no buses go to Tiriyāya.

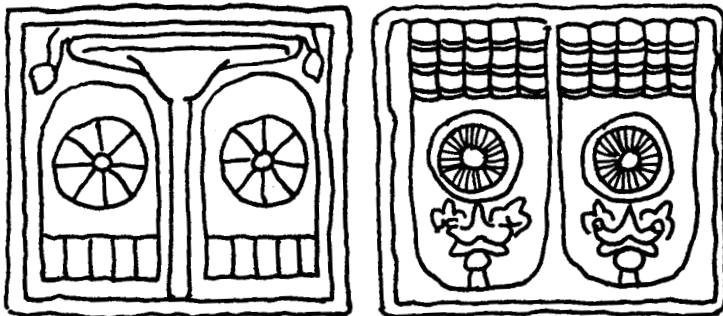


GREAT IMAGES

There is a story in the Tipitaka about a monk named Vakkali who was so fascinated by the Buddha's physical appearance that he used to sit at his feet all the time just looking at him. Seeing that he was neglecting to either meditate or study the Buddha finally gave Vakkali a mild rebuke. "Why do you want to see this dirty body of mine? See the Dhamma and you will see me."

Despite the Buddha's insistence that more attention should be given to what he said than what he was people of later times did have a desire to see the Buddha's physical form and this eventually led to the making of images of him. Prior to this, the Buddha was represented by various symbols and in Sri Lanka the most popular of these were either thrones (*āsana*) or footprints (*srī pāda*).

Thrones are large rectangular slabs of stone that were placed at the foot of Bodhi trees or enshrined in temples. Sometimes highly stylized footprints shaded by an umbrella were carved on square slabs of stone they are found at many ancient sites. Devotees paid respect to the Buddha by placing flowers on these footprints and thrones. A good collection of these objects can be seen in the museums at Colombo and Anuradhapura and others are often seen at ancient sites. By the end of the 3rd century, images came into vogue. It is usually assumed that the first Buddha images were made in India, but there is some evidence that the practice began in Sri Lanka or at least evolved there independently of India. Apparently, the monks of the Abhayagiri started with making and



Stone Slabs with Sacred Footprints, 1st century CE

worshiping images in Sri Lanka, while the more conservative Theravādins of the Mahāvihāra only accepted this practice several centuries later.

To the non-Buddhist it might seem that the Sinhalese treat Buddha images as if they were the Buddha himself, but this is not so. As long ago as the 17th century Robert Knox, an Englishman who lived in Sri Lanka for many years and got to know the Sinhalese well, wrote: "As for these images, they say they do not own them to be Gods themselves but only Figures, representing their Gods to their memories, and as such, they give them honor and worship." Nonetheless, ancient records show that the most elaborate rituals surrounded the worship of Buddha images; music was played before them, they were carried through the streets, they were bedecked with jewelry and food and water was offered to them.

Sri Lankan Buddha images generally conform to the iconography canons prevailing in India and other Buddhists countries. They are either standing, sitting cross-legged or reclining. Reclining images, it should be noted, depict the Buddha attaining final Nirvana, not sleeping. Images can have their hands in one of several gestures. In Sri Lanka one of these, the gesture of meditation (*dhyānamudrā*), showing both hands nestled in the lap, has always dominated. Gestures popular in India, such as the earth touching (*bhūmispr̥shamudrā*), the teaching (*dharmacakrapravṛtamudrā*) and the gesture of fearlessness (*abhayamudrā*), are rarely seen on Sri Lankan images.

Two gestures encountered in Sri Lankan sculpture seem to be unique to the country. Standing images dating from the Anuradhapura period are often depicted with the right forearm and palm vertical and the left hand touching the shoulder. It is not certain what this gesture represents, but it is probably a Sri Lankan development of the gesture of fearlessness. Occasionally, the Buddha is depicted with both arms crossed in front of his chest. No satisfactory explanation of the meaning of this gesture has ever been given either. However, notice that Sri Lankan monks commonly stand with their arms crossed; perhaps sculptors simply depicted the Buddha as they saw the monks.

Images of bodhisattvas usually have their hands in one of the several gestures common to South India. In the gesture of teaching or discussion (*vitarkamudrā*), the palm is bent at the wrist, thumb

and first finger are touching and the other fingers are slightly bent. The gesture of debate (*āhvānamudrā*) shows the fingers bent towards the palm and the third one actually touching it. In the ring hand gesture (*katakamudrā*) the thumb and first finger are touching while the other fingers are bent towards the palm.

While walking around ancient temples, the pilgrim will sometimes see rectangular stone slabs with numerous square receptacles cut into them. These stones are called *yantragala* and they were buried under images. The receptacles were filled with relics, gems and sometimes thin sheets of gold or silver with extracts from the Buddhist scriptures written on them. These objects were believed to “activate” the image and turn it from being just stone into sacred object.

Under the influence of Mahayana, the belief developed that making Buddha images created spiritual merit and it followed logically from this that the more images made or the bigger the image, the greater the merit earned. Thus, in temple paintings, representations of the Buddha are often repeated again and again and huge images were and still are very popular. Some large images were constructed of brick and plaster, but only those made out of stone survive complete. Sri Lanka’s particular topography made it relatively easy to make colossal images, the numerous bare hummocks and clusters of boulders that dot the landscape lent themselves well to being carved. However, sometimes an image was needed where there was no convenient rocky cliff or outcrop and thus massive blocks of stone were sometimes dragged long distances to where they were needed. Apart from the great images mentioned in this book there are others at places like Ataragallewa near Elaheera, the Dova Vihāra at Ella and Budupatuna in thick forest north of Yāla.

AVUKANA

The ancient name of the small village of Avukana is unknown and nor is the king who had made the magnificent Buddha image there. In the 18th century, the place was called Kalāgal, which in Pali would be Kālasela. A place of this name is mentioned in the *Cūlavamsa* as having a large image for which King Dhātusena made a diadem. As Avukana's statue dates from around the 5th century CE, it may well be the place mentioned in the chronicle. There are numerous caves around Avukana with inscriptions dating from the 1st century BCE to the 2nd century CE showing that the place has had a religious importance for many centuries.

The approach road to Avukana passes along the bund of the Kalāwewa, one of the biggest reservoirs in Sri Lanka that was built by King Dhātusena in about 470. Its bund is nearly 8 kilometers long, 12 meters high and holds back 658,000 cubic meters of water. Even today, the Kalāwewa is able to irrigate about 2365 hectares of rice fields. A short distance on the left from where the road turns off the bund, there are the remains of the huge ancient sluice and spillway of this hydraulic marvel. Continuing another 2 kilometers, the pilgrim will arrive in Avukana.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Avukana Buddha*

Being 12 meters high, the Avukana Buddha is the largest of Sri Lanka's great images. It is also the most finely executed and the best preserved. Considering its great size, the sculptor did his work with considerable finesse and produced an image of great dignity. Although carved out of the cliff behind it, the image is nearly free standing being attached to the cliff by only a narrow strip of rock. In fact, the whole back of the image is as carefully carved as the front. The image's eyes are wide open, giving it a rather severe expression, and the creases on the robe are carved with the greatest skill. The flame on the top of the head, representing the Buddha's halo, is a recent addition. The lotus pedestal at the image's feet is also a later addition. When it was moved by archaeologists, a very interesting discovery was made. In a cavity, some 2 meters below the surface, were five bronze statues, one of Brahma with Indra,

Kuvera, Yama and Varuna arranged around it. These statues had been placed there in about the 9th century.

The huge stones around the image indicate that the temple that originally housed it must have been as impressive as the image itself. An inscription found on one of these stones dates from about the 9th century and suggests that major renovations were done at Avukana at that time.

HOW TO GET THERE

Buses directly to Avukana leave from Dambulla bus station every morning. Several buses a day also go from Kekirāwa on the main Kandy-Anuradhapura road.

BUDUREWAGALA

About 8 kilometers southeast of Wellawaya is a small reservoir surrounded by an area of forest. The place is alive with wildlife attracted by the solitude and the water. In the middle of this forest is an impressive blue-gray cliff some 90 meters long and about 21 high with seven large images carved out of it.

Budurewagala is not mentioned in any ancient records and its original name has been forgotten, although the modern name means “Rock of Buddhist Sculptures.” Further, there are no inscriptions in the area that might help to find out more about the history of the place. Perhaps it was a hermitage for meditating monks or nuns who were content to live in the forest, doing their practice without attracting the attention of the outside world.

Several of Budurewagala’s images differ significantly from how they are usually depicted and they clearly represent local iconography developments. The arrangement of the trios of bodhisattvas around the Buddha is similar to that described in an elaborate *mandala* mentioned in the *Mañjusrīmūlakalpa* and suggests that Budurewagala might have been a centre for that particular Vajrayana practice.

WHAT TO SEE**• *The Buddha Image***

Budurewagala's huge images are in three groups; a central Buddha flanked on the left and right by three smaller images of bodhisattvas. The central Buddha stands 13 meters high with its right hand in the gesture of fearlessness. For some reason the sculptor was reluctant to cut deep into the rock and even if he had finished his work, the image would have been rather flat and elongated. At the Buddha's feet is a lotus-shaped pedestal that has been added later. Like all the other images, this one has mortise holes around it showing that it was originally enclosed in a temple, probably a wooden one. It was originally painted and a fragment of the yellow of the robe and its pleats can still be seen under the image's left arm.

• *The Left Group*

To the left of the Buddha are images of Avalokitesvara attended on the left by Bhṛkūtī, sometimes also called Pandaravāsina, and on the right by her sister Tārā. The Avalokitesvara image is 7 meters high, crowned, but otherwise unadorned and with his hands in the gesture of debate. The image's eyes, nose and mouth are slightly too small for its face giving it a rather unusual look. Remarkably, the original plaster and even a few fragments of paint still cover the torso.

To Avalokitesvara's left is Bhṛkūtī, the second of his two consorts who also represents his wisdom. She wears a tall crown and has one hand in the gesture of debate while the other hangs at her side with several lotus buds in it. The lower parts of this image are indistinct and were apparently never finished.

To the right is Tārā who represents Avalokitesvara's compassion. One of the many beautiful and meaningful legends about Tārā says that she was born from a tear Avalokitesvara shed as he beheld the suffering of the world. Tārā's right hand is raised in the gesture of debate and in her left hand she holds a pot of ambrosia. Her bare breasts and gracefully curving hips emphasize her feminine grace and tenderness.

• *The Right Group*

To the right of the Buddha are three more images that can be observed more closely by climbing on the rocky area that rises in front of them. In the centre of this trio is an image of Maitreya, the

future Buddha, with a stupa in its crown and both its hands in the gesture of debate. The image had a slim waist and pronounced hips giving it a slightly feminine appearance. The image on the left has both its hands in the gesture of debate; it wears what looks like a cap on its head and has a large earring on its right ear.

Although the identity of this bodhisattva cannot be established for certain, it has the most serene and lovely face of all the images at Budurewagala. The figure to the right of Maitreya is very clearly meant to be Vajrapāni. This bodhisattva is usually depicted holding a *vajra* in his right hand; here he is to be seen balancing it upright on the tip of his fingers.

HOW TO GET THERE

Budurewagala is 8 kilometers from Wellawaya. From the turnoff, it is a walk of about 4 kilometer through very pleasant countryside. The road is unpaved all the way, but easily passable for ordinary vehicles. There is a small monastery a little before the images.

MALIGAWILA

Until recently, Maligawila was an area of impenetrable jungle inhabited mainly by wild animals. However, it is located only a short way from the ancient highway that led from Mahāgāma, the modern Tissamahārāma, to Anuradhapura and was a place of some importance in the distant past. Maligawila's ancient name is not known for certain. However, in the *Cūlavamsa* there is a verse probably referring to the King Aggabodhika who ruled during the 7th century. It says: "In Kānagāma ("Village of the One-eyed") he built a hospital named 'The Image.' There the wise king set up a stone statue of the Buddha that he had made. It was called 'the Great,' because it was produced as if by a miracle." It seems likely that this is referring to Maligawila and its temple, hospital and remarkable images.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Buddha Image*

Walking from the bus stop through the jungle, the pilgrim will soon come to a ruined temple, which is 22 meters square, the biggest such

building from ancient Sri Lanka. The temple consists of a central room with a broad passageway around it. The thickness of the walls suggests that this temple was originally very high. The round pillar bases in the passageway probably once had wooden pillars in them that supported a roof. On the left of the entrance is an impressive stone water trough for washing the feet before entering the temple, an unusual composite moonstone and two guardstones. These guardstones are unusual in that they depict the dragon kings in rectangular pavilions rather than in the usual arched niche.

Against the back wall of the temple is a huge Buddha image carved out of a single block of stone, weighing about 100 tons and standing 14.5 meters high. It is easy to understand how such a huge and finely sculptured image could earn the name "The Great." The image was discovered in 1951 lying in the jungle with its head and feet broken off. In 1974 efforts were made to raise it, but without success. Eventually in the 1980s, the image was raised and restored and some of the ruins around it were excavated. Cutting such a huge block of stone, transporting, and raising it, must have been a major feat of engineering. About 3 kilometers away through the jungle is a huge hole in the side of a cliff where the stone for the image was quarried. If you are interested in seeing this, ask one of the locals who might be able to show you the way to get there.

• *The Avalokitesvara Image*

About half a kilometer from the Buddha image is a series of five terraces with a stairway leading up the side of a low thickly forested hill. On the second of these terraces are two small temples and on the top one is a huge image of Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. The image is carved out of a single piece of stone weighing about 60 tons and is 9.85 m tall. The image wears a high pointed crown with a small image of Amitābha on its front and its face has a particularly loving and serene expression. Around the image's neck, chest and waist is elaborate jewelry and there are bracelets on its wrists. Both its hands are in the gesture of instruction. The image stands on a large round lotus pedestal and is facing the north. This beautiful image probably dates from about 750–800 CE, the high point of Mahayana in Sri Lanka.

When first discovered, it was broken into several pieces and had been lying face down for centuries, which had preserved the

details on its front. Sometime after its discovery, local people thinking that it might contain treasure blew the image up with dynamite breaking it into over a hundred fragments. It was finally restored in 1990 and, as with the nearby Buddha image, the restorers have done an excellent job. Recently an unsightly roof has been raised over the image that spoils the ambiance considerably.

The fame of some of Sri Lanka's images of Avalokitesvara spread throughout the Buddhist world in ancient times. There is an illuminated palm leaf manuscript from Nepal dating from the 10th century that has an illustration of Avalokitesvara in it and a caption saying, "the Lokesvara of the hospital in the island of Simhala." It is quite possible that this refers to Maligawila's beautiful image.

• *Ruins*

In the jungle around Maligawila are the ruins of numerous buildings. The main one consisted of a walled compound in which there were four residential buildings arranged around a larger central building. This central building was probably the abbot's quarters while the other four other buildings probably provided accommodation for monks and staff. About twenty-four monks could have been accommodated in the whole complex. There was also a hospital, temple, stupa and other buildings attached to the monastery, but this section has not been excavated yet.

HOW TO GET THERE

Regular buses from Wellawaya, Buttala and Monarāgala go to Maligawila via Okkampitiya.

TANTIRIMALE

Tantirimale is a collection of low rounded hills consisting of bare granite boulders that rise above the utterly flat countryside. It was on or near the highway that led from Anuradhapura to Mahātittha (modern Mannar), ancient Sri Lanka's main port, and may have been one of the stopping places on the highway. History says that Sanghamittā and her retinue rested here when bringing a cutting of the Bodhi Tree from India. Several large pools amongst the rocks remain full all year and this made habitation possible in this otherwise remote and dry place. Looking southeast from the top of the highest point at Tantirimale, the pilgrim will get a fine view of the Ruwanweliseya at Anuradhapura and the stupas on Mihintale.

WHAT TO SEE

- *Reclining Buddha*

On the highest point at Tantirimale are a Bodhi Tree and a stupa. This stupa was built in about the 1st century BCE, but has recently been completely renovated. Climbing down the rocky incline towards the west, the pilgrim will come to a cliff with a huge reclining Buddha image carved out of it. This image is 12 meters long and rests on an undecorated pedestal. The face and part of the arm supporting the head have been damaged by treasure hunters. While lacking the dignity of the Gal Vihāra's reclining Buddha, the skillful treatment of the creases in the robe on this image creates a graceful fluid effect pleasing to the eye. The image dates from about the 9th century.

- *Sitting Buddha*

If the pilgrim climbs back up to the top of the hill and walks down the other side, he or she will come to a short flight of stairs cut out of the rock which leads to Tantirimale's second image.

This Buddha image is in a shallow niche cut out of the side of a cliff that stretches for about 45 meters. The image sits on a throne that has five niches on its front, each of which has a crouching lion in it. The back of the throne is made up of two rampant lions and a crossbar with *makara* finials and above this are two gods with flywhisks. The Buddha has a serene expression on its face. Behind

its head is a plain round halo and its hands are in the gesture of meditation. The throne and the image together are 2 meters high.

This image was once enclosed within a temple, as is clear from the stone doorframes, the pillars in front of it, and the mortis holes in the cliff above it that would have once held rafters. Although slightly weathered, this is a particularly fine Buddha image. It shows some Dravidian influence and may have been made by a South Indian sculptor.

• *Other Things to See*

On one side of a pleasant shaded glen, some way below the Bodhi tree, is a conical shaped rock with an unusual building perched on its top. This building is popularly called “the Library” although it was probably originally a shrine. Made of well-cut blocks of stone, the building is rectangular, with a flat roof, an entrance on one side and with pilasters carved on each of its corners. Below this building is a rectangular cave 4 meters long, 2 wide and 2 high cut out of the rock. Such man-made caves are common in India, but very rare in Sri Lanka. There is a stonewall in front of this cave. Above the entrance are four large square holes that once must have held rafters that supported a veranda. The numerous natural caves around Tantirimale were inhabited by monks in ancient times. The caves at Andiyagala and Billewa, just a few kilometers away, have prehistoric paintings in them.

HOW TO GET THERE

The journey from Anuradhapura to Tantirimale is about 50 kilometers. It will probably take most of the day, so leave early. When you arrive at the temple, find out when the bus returns to Anuradhapura so you will know how long you can stay at the temple.

WELIGAMA

Several of the bodhisattvas of the Mahayana tradition were associated with certain mountain peaks—Maitreya with Kukkutapādagiri, Mañjusrī with Wu Tai Shan, Avalokitesvara with Mount Potala and Samantabhadra with Sri Pāda. Consequently pilgrims from India and even further afield used to come to Sri Lanka to worship both Samantabhadra and the miraculous footprint he watched over.

For foreign pilgrims determined to make the trip, several roads to Sri Pāda went inland from the coast to Ratnapura, the City of Gems, and from there to the holy mountain. On the return journey, pilgrims would usually take a boat or raft down the Kaluganga River to the coast at Kalutara. Ships plying the west coast of Sri Lanka between Mannar and Galle would anchor briefly in the shallow bay at Weligama, then known as Mahāvālukāgāma, to let pilgrims off. As these pilgrims commenced their journey into the interior, they passed a large rock with an image of Samantabhadra on it, the bodhisattva's calm reassuring countenance giving them courage for the arduous journey ahead.

So completely has Mahayana disappeared from Sri Lanka that the identity of this image has been forgotten. Local legend says that the image is of Kushtharāja, the "Leper King," supposedly a monarch of a far off land who came to Sri Lanka seeking a cure for his skin disease. A diet of coconut milk is said to have restored the king to health.

WHAT TO SEE

- *Kushtharāja*

The place now called Kushtharājagala is a cluster of large moss-covered boulders shaded by several majestic old trees. On the face of one of these boulders is an image of Samantabhadra carved in low relief. It is situated in an arched niche with two recesses on its sides to allow for the flourish from his *dhoti*. The bodhisattva is standing, with his left hand in the gesture of debate, and in his right hand he holds a *cintamani* or wish-fulfilling gem. His dhoti and belt, bracelets, the jewelry around his neck and his crown are all richly carved. Notice that there is not one image of the Buddha in

front of the crown, but two and another two on the sides. These represent the four Dhyāni Buddhas and show conclusively that this image is of Samantabhadra and not Avalokitesvara as most guidebooks contend. The bodhisattva's eyes are open and his face is almost expressionless. The image dates from either the 8th or the 9th century when Mahayana was flourishing in Sri Lanka.

HOW TO GET THERE

Weligama is on the main coast road and railway line to the south and is 28 kilometers from Galle and 15 kilometers from Mātara. From the centre of town, take the main road west. It is a pleasant 15-minute walk.



TEMPLES

By about the 5th century CE, the structure and layout of Sri Lankan temples reached their full form and have remained relatively unchanged ever since. Nearly every temple (*vihāra*) had and still has the same elements—a Bodhi tree shrine, a stupa and an image house.

The earliest objects of Buddhist worship in both India and Sri Lanka were Bodhi trees and stupas. The Bodhi tree (*Bodhi*) whose botanical name is *Ficus religiosa*, meaning “the religious fig,” was revered because it was under such a tree that the Buddha attained enlightenment. Further, it was only natural that people should see such trees as a symbol of the Buddha—they are majestic, silent and give their cooling shade to anyone who sits under them. At first, a Bodhi Tree shrine consisted of the tree itself with a rectangular stone slab at its foot. However, in time fences and sometimes even whole buildings were built around the trees and the remains of such structures and their modern equivalents can be seen all over Sri Lanka.

Stupas (*cetiya*, *chaitiya* or *dāgaeba*) were originally earthen or brick mounds enshrining a relic of the Buddha or some revered saint.

Buddha images began to appear in Sri Lanka towards the end of the 3rd centuries CE and were probably first placed at the foot of Bodhi trees or at the four directions around stupas. As images came gradually to be seen as religious objects in their own right rather than just embellishments of Bodhi trees and stupas, they began to be placed in shrines built especially for them. Image houses (*pilima geya*) in smaller temples usually had one sitting image in them. Those in larger temples had three images, the main one sitting, another standing and a third lying down. In some places, these images were so large that they were each housed in separate shrines.

Like the temples themselves, the Sri Lankan way of worshipping in temples has changed very little over the centuries. The traditional Theravādin *puja* is not as long or as elaborate as its Tibetan or Chinese equivalents, nonetheless it has a simple beauty of its own. When people go to a temple, they will usually bring

with them a handful of flowers, a small bottle of coconut oil and a few sticks of incense. At the more popular temples, there are stalls near the entrances that sell such things. At the temple, they will go the stupa first, then the Bodhi tree and finally to the image house. At each place the worshippers will offer some flowers, then light the lamps and incense, placing them at the special places provided for them. After this, a few verses in Pali will be chanted, then they might sit quietly in meditation for a few minutes. Perhaps they finish by chanting the ever popular Metta Sutta or Mangala Sutta.

KELANIYA

In ancient times, Kelaniya was both a kingdom and a city. As a kingdom, it was sometimes independent from Anuradhapura or if not then only nominally under its control. Under the name Kalyāni Pattanam, the city was the ancient predecessor of Colombo, a major port and a meeting place for traders and merchants from all over South and Southeast Asia. Their ships found shelter at the mouth of the Kelaniya River and the goods they brought made their way from Kelaniya to every part of the Island.

According to the *Mahāvamsa*, the Buddha stopped at Kelaniya twice, during his first and third visits to Sri Lanka. It was during his first stop that he mediated in a dispute between two dragon (*nāga*) chiefs and out of gratitude they gave him a beautiful golden jewel-studded throne. During his second visit, he is said to have bathed in the river at a spot near the temple, which is still pointed out. Yatthālayatissa, a nephew of Devānampiyatissa, is said to have built the stupa at Kelaniya and it is popularly believed to enshrine the Buddha's throne.

The development of Buddhism in Kelaniya seems to have taken place independently from what was happening in the rest of the Island. Perhaps Buddhism was brought here directly from India rather than spreading from Anuradhapura. At the time of Dutthagāmani, there were five hundred monks in and around the city. King Vohārikatissa placed a jeweled ring on the stupa's pinnacle and Nissankamalla made a pilgrimage to Kelaniya. During the Cola period, the stupa was badly damaged, probably by being broken into to get the treasure it was believed to hold. After

Vijayabāhu I drove the Colas out, he had the stupa restored and a new golden pinnacle placed on it.

To become a monk, one must receive one's ordination (*upasampadā*) from monks who themselves have been fully accepted and who possess certain qualifications. If the accepting monks lack these qualifications, the candidate's full acceptance can be considered invalid. During the 15th century, King Dhammaceti of Pegu in Burma came to doubt the purity of the ordination within his country and consequently he sent twenty-two monks to Kelaniya so they could receive the Sri Lankan full acceptance that was believed to be unimpeachable. The monks were accompanied by an ambassador carrying letters and expensive gifts for the king of the Island. The Burmese were welcomed by the religious leaders and King Bhuvanekabāhu VI and were taken on a pilgrimage to Anuradhapura and Sri Pāda while arrangements were made for their ordination. The ceremony itself was conducted on a boat moored in the Kelaniya River just opposite the temple.

When the now properly accepted monks returned to Pegu, Dhammaceti built a chapter house or *simā* where all Burmese monks subsequently received their full acceptance into the Sangha. This *simā* was named Kalyāṇisimā after Kelaniya and still exists today. This was not the first time foreign monks came to Kelaniya to be reaccepted; in 1425 a group of Burmese, Thai and Cambodian monks came also for this purpose.

In the 15th century, Kotte, now a suburb of Colombo, became the capital of a kingdom of the same name and the kings of Kotte had their summer palace at Kelaniya. King Bhuvanekabāhu VII was murdered in this palace in 1550. His successor Don Juan Dharmapāla was a Catholic and launched a campaign to destroy Buddhism and make Catholicism the dominant religion. He began by confiscating all the Kelaniya Temple's estates and gave them to the Franciscans. Twenty years later the temple itself and much of the stupa were demolished as the campaign to destroy Buddhism intensified.

With the expulsion of the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1656, the persecution of Buddhism eased, but not by much. In 1682 the Dutch issued an edict forbidding people from worshipping even the overgrown ruins of the stupa. Seven years later the King of Kandy wrote to the Dutch governor asking permission to rebuild

the temple and the stupa, but his request was denied. The governor wrote, "In the contest between the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light the cause of God must prevail over the cause of the Devil." In the 18th century, the Dutch governors were more tolerant and gradually Kelaniya was rebuilt.

Apart from its famous temple and great stupa, Kelaniya is most known today for its association with a famous Pali poem, the *Telakatāhagāthā*, the Verses Spoken in the Oil Cauldron. The poem relates that Prince Uttiya, the younger brother of King Kalyānitissa, fell in love with the queen and she for her part was enamoured by her handsome brother in law. An affair ensued, but the king found out what was going on behind his back. Fearing the wrath of the King, Uttiya fled the kingdom. Longing for word from his beloved, he sent a man disguised as a monk with instructions to pass a letter to the queen. The messenger joined a group of monks, which included a revered elderly monk who had previously been Prince Uttiya's tutor, as they were being fed at the royal palace. At the appropriate moment, the messenger dropped the letter at the queen's feet, but the king saw it, picked it up and read it. Noticing that the handwriting was nearly the same as the old monk's and forgetting that the elder monk had taught his brother to write, the king assumed that he and the queen were having an affair. In a fury, he had the queen tied up and thrown in the river and the old monk thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. The monk hovered above the cauldron for a moment "like a royal swan" and then slowly descended into it, reciting the eighty-eight verses as he did so. He attained enlightenment just as he died. It is said that the god of the sea was so outraged by the king's actions that he caused a huge tidal wave that did great damage. The legend adds that before this deluge Kelaniya was 40 kilometers from the coast and afterwards only 6 kilometers from it.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Gateway*

The bus from Colombo stops at the new entrance to the temple that is on the opposite side of the traditional entrance facing the river. The flower stalls on both sides of the path sell beautiful blue water lilies and pink lotuses that the steady stream of devotees buy to

offer in the temple. At the old entrance is an impressive and unusual gateway. This gateway dates from the beginning of the 19th century and shows both traditional Sri Lankan and European features. The three arches are flanked by pilasters and at the very top is a dragon arch. For some strange reason an exact copy to this gateway has recently been built just to the left of the original, effectively destroying its esthetic impact.

- *The Stupa*

The Kelaniya stupa is about 27 meters high and has a diameter of 30 meters at the base. This is the most well-known paddy heap shaped stupa in Sri Lanka. A picture of the stupa painted by a Dutch artist in 1735 shows it as a grassy mound with trees and shrubs growing on it.

- *The Temple*

Very few modern Sri Lankan temples have any artistic or architectural interest, but the Kelaniya Temple is certainly an exception to this. After circumambulating the stupa, the pilgrim should go to the entrance of the temple and walk around it in a clockwise direction. On the walls are pavilion-like niches with various figures in them. These figures are firstly Ganesh, the god of good fortune, and then Ganga, the goddess of India's most sacred river.

An amusing story is told about this rather beautiful and sensuous figure. In 1942 Admiral Layton, head of the Naval Forces Southeast Asia Command, visited Kelaniya accompanied by a phalanx of reporters and cameramen. He stopped in front of this figure and contemplated it for a while. The reporters waited for this man of the sea to make some wise or whimsical pronouncement on this lady of the river. Finally, he said, "Isn't she cute" and then walked on.

The next figure is Vishnu, then Vibhishana the patron god of Kelaniya, Maitreya the next Buddha, Maniakkhika the dragon king of Kelaniya, Skanda or Kataragama, and finally the Buddha placing his footprint on Sri Pāda. Arriving back at the entrance the pilgrim should climb the stairs and go inside. Note that the balustrades on the stairs are formed by two lion-elephants (*gajasimha*) the medieval equivalent of the *makara* balustrades of the Anuradhapura period. Note also the fine modern moonstone at the entrance.

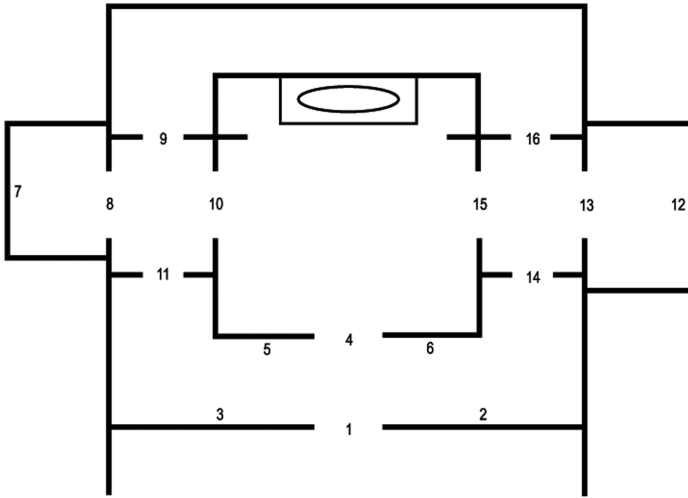
On crossing the threshold, the pilgrim enters a long high room. The panels on the ceiling are decorated with various astrological signs. The wall on the left is covered with paintings depicting several Jātaka stories. Now walk towards the far wall with the door leading to the inner sanctum. To the right of the door are portraits of the devotees who sponsored these paintings. Above the door are more Jātaka stories and above these is a depiction of the Buddha's seven weeks at Bodh Gaya. The right wall has several large images of gods on it and above the two doors are *makara* arches.

Passing through either of these doors, the pilgrim enters a room enshrining a large reclining image of the Buddha. The lower part of the wall opposite the image is covered with paintings of gods, while the paintings on the upper part depict processions of monks. All the paintings in this and the first room are extremely interesting and are well worth looking at carefully. They were all done in the early 19th century while the medieval style of painting was still alive.

Return now to the first room and enter the room on the left. The walls and ceiling of this room are completely covered with painted panels illustrating important events in the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The pilgrim will notice depictions of the Buddha's three visits to the Island, the old monk being boiled in oil, and the Portuguese destroying the temple. All these paintings, as well as those in the inner sanctum, were done by Solius Mendis in the 1920s and are of the highest quality.

Now return to the first room and from there go into the inner sanctum.

1. Above the door is a depiction of Mahinda and Devānampiyatissa with a plough marking out the boundary of the Mahāvihāra.
2. The wall on the left shows Vijaya, the legendary founder of the Sinhalese people, arriving in the Island; while that on the right shows the writing down of the Tipitaka at Aluvihāra.
4. Above the door leading to the inner sanctum is a depiction of the Buddha's *parinibbāna*.
5. The painting on the left shows Buddhaghosa presenting his great work, the *Visuddhimagga*, to the elders of the Mahāvihāra while one on the left, 6, shows King Kīrti Sri Rājasimgha conferring on Saranankara, the great 18th century reformer and scholar, the office of head of the Sangha (*Sangharāja*) in Sri Lanka.



Paintings in inner shrine, Kelaniya Temple

Now proceed to the left and go into the small room. On the far wall of the side room, 7, is a painting of Sanghamittā bringing the Bodhi Tree to Sri Lanka while Devānampiyatissa wades out into the sea to receive it. The upper parts of the walls show, 8, Mahāmāyā, the Buddha's mother, dreaming of a white elephant, 9, the infant Prince Siddhattha being presented to the sage Asita, 10, Siddhattha receiving his education and, 11, the plowing festival during which he spontaneously fell into a deep meditative state.

Walk around to the room on the opposite side of the inner sanctum. In the side room, 12, is a depiction of the Kalinga princess arriving in Sri Lanka with the Tooth concealed in her hair. The upper parts of the walls show, 13, the Bodhisattva in the heaven realm deciding where he will be reborn, 14, the brahmin Sutiya giving Prince Siddhattha the grass which served as his seat as he sat under the Bodhi Tree, 15, Khantaka, the horse Siddhattha rode on the night he fled from his palace and, 16, Sujātā offering Siddhattha the milk rice that strengthened the Bodhisattva before his final struggle under the Bodhi Tree.

Now enter the inner sanctum. The image, perhaps the finest modern one in Sri Lanka, sits on a high throne while lofty snow peaks rise up behind it. This is a good place to do some meditation or perhaps just sit quietly and watch the Sinhalese do their devotions.

• *The Inscriptions*

To the left of the temple is a huge and very ancient Bodhi tree and beyond this is the chapter house with the characteristic boundary stones at its four corners. Just next to this is a building and set into its walls are four important inscriptions. The first and oldest of these is dated 1527 and records repairs to the temple and grants made to it by King Parakkamabāhu IX. This inscription was broken into seven pieces when the temple was demolished by the Portuguese. Another inscription dated 1767 mentions that a novice from Mapitigama made some repairs to the temple and set up several Buddha images. The other inscription dates from 1779. Around the chapter house are several ancient and fragmentary images, urinal stone and other antiquities.

HOW TO GET THERE

Take bus No 235 from Colombo's main bus station. The Kelaniya Temple is just 7 kilometers from the centre of Colombo.

MAGUL MAHĀVIHĀRA

On the northern edge of the Lāhugala National Park, known for its elephants, are the ruins of a substantial ancient temple now called Magul Mahāvihāra. This temple is worth a visit, not only because it is in a particularly attractive forest setting, but also because the image shrine, the Bodhi tree and the stupa are all in a good state of preservation.

Magul Mahāvihāra is approached by a causeway across a lotus-filled reservoir. This reservoir is connected to a moat that surrounds the whole temple complex. At the far end of the causeway is a stone retaining wall with stairs leading down to the water where the monks used to bathe. From there a path leads over the rocks to the entrance of the square and walled compound with gates on each side in which the temple is situated. Entering the gate and proceeding in a clockwise direction the pilgrim will come to the ruins of a small building, perhaps the abbot's quarters, of which only the entrance has been excavated. The moonstone at the foot of the stairs is unusual in that some of the elephants depicted on it are

shown with riders clinging to their backs. Note also that the balustrades are more angular than those found in Anuradhapura and do not have *makaras* on them, a characteristic of balustrades found in the southeast of Sri Lanka.

Further along is the temple's stupa. The stupa sits on a square terrace with three staircases leading up to it. The moonstones at the foot of the stairs are plain, as are the guardstones and the balustrades that again are plain and elongated. At the top of the stairs are pedestals with lions on them, a unique feature in Sri Lankan stupas. Continuing to the opposite corner of the compound, past the still to be excavated southern gate, the pilgrim will come to the polygonal terrace where a Bodhi tree once grew. At the foot of the stairs on the southern side is a moonstone with a lotus petal and foliage pattern on it. The sides of this terrace are decorated with an unusual although rather crude lion and urn design. Note also that stones in the centre of the terrace where the Bodhi tree once stood are placed in such a way as they could expand when the tree grew bigger.

Further along are the ruins of the image shrine. The guardstones on either side of the entrance portray the helpers of Kuvera rather than the more common dragon king. To the left of the entrance is a slab of stone with not one by, but two inscriptions on it—the last thirteen lines of the earlier one clearly visible at the bottom of the later one. The later inscription says that Lāhugala's temple was originally founded by King Dhātusena in the 5th century and was named Rohana Mahāvihāra. Later it fell into ruin and was repaired and reestablished by queen Vihāra Mahādevī, the consort of two brother kings of Rohana, Parakumbā and Parakkamabāhu I. From this, we learn something of the temple's history and also that polyandry was practiced in Rohana in medieval times, at least within the royal family. This inscription dates from the 14th century, while the one beneath it is about four hundred years earlier and is difficult to read. In the forested area between the moat and the walled compound are numerous monastic buildings, but these have not yet been excavated. It can be very pleasant to amble through this area.

HOW TO GET THERE

Magul Mahāvihāra is 2 kilometers off the main Monarāgala–Potuvil road some 15 kilometers from Potuvil. Regular buses from both towns ply the main road.

MEDIRIGIRIYA

North of Hingurakgoda is a low hill formed by exposed rocks with an exceptional temple on it. It is just in the last thirty years that the thick jungle in the area has begun to be cleared and the temple has become accessible.

In ancient times this place was called Mandalagiri, the “Circular Mountain,” from which the modern name is derived. Judging by its imposing *vatadāge* or stupa temple, Medirigiriya must have been considered particularly sacred in ancient times, but exactly why is no longer known. The place is first mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa*, which says that King Kanitthatissa built a chapter house there in the 2nd century CE. We know from an inscription found on the site that a hospital was established there in the 9th century and the medicine bath, which can still be seen near the shrine, is evidence of this. The inscription says that patients from the hospital were not allowed to wander about in the village and that a certain number of goats and chickens were allotted to the hospital, probably to provide milk and eggs. Another inscription, found in Anuradhapura, mentions that the income from some land right outside the city’s east gate went to Medirigiriya’s hospital. The rent paid by the flower shops and refreshment stalls located at such a choice location would have generated a good sum for the hospital.

It seems that during the 12th century two leading monks including the abbot of Medirigiriya had a crucial part to play in solving a major political crisis then afflicting Sri Lanka. King Gajabāhu II and the headstrong royal rebel Parakkamabāhu were locked in a bitter struggle for the throne. Both sides were equally matched and the conflict dragged on causing great loss of life on both sides and weakening the whole country. Finally, the monks decided that something had to be done. Using their moral authority they got both sides to cease hostilities and then worked out a delicate and fruitful compromise between the two adversaries.

Gajabāhu who was old and had no heir agreed to designate Parakkamabāhu who was still young as his successor if he ceased his rebellion. This meant that the former could live out the rest of his days as king while the latter would not have to wait too long before becoming king himself.

The agreement held and peace was restored. To make sure neither side would go back on their promise the agreement was inscribed on two stone pillars, one copy being kept at Medirigiriya and the other at Samgamuva. Gajabāhu went in person to Medirigiriya to make sure the inscription was written properly and presumably, Parakkamabāhu went to Samgamuva for the same reason. The agreement reads: “We are two brothers-in-law, Gajabāhu and Parakkamabāhu, who have come down in unbroken succession from the lineage of the illustrious Mahāsamana and to whom truth is a treasure. According to the treaty we have agreed upon, we shall not wage war against each other until the end of our lives. If there be any kings who are the enemy of one, they shall become the enemy of the other. If we do anything contrary to this treaty, it shall be as if we have transgressed the Triple Gem and we shall never be delivered from hell. May these words protect the world for as long as the moon and the stars endure and may the union of us two, whose concern is the welfare of others, be suffused with love.” The Medirigiriya copy of this agreement has disappeared, but the other one still exists. Vijayabāhu I repaired the temple in the 11th century, Nissankamalla visited it at the end of the 12th century. After that, we hear no more of the place until its rediscovery at the end of the last century.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Cave*

A stonewall surrounds the whole complex at Medirigiriya with an entrance on the east side. To the right of the gate is a small cave with a Banyan tree at its entrance, its roots draped over the rock. The floor of the cave is lined with brick and it once had a gate and a flight of stairs in front of it. All this suggests that this cave was once considered to be of particular significance. Perhaps some now forgotten saint once inhabited the cave and his presence might have given Medirigiriya its sanctity.

• *The Stupa Temple*

Climbing the stairs and passing through the gate, the pilgrim will come to Medirigiriya's magnificent stupa temple. The temple stands on a circular terrace 28 meters in diameter. It is entered on the northern side where a gateway and a flight of stairs lead up to a lofty porch. On each side of the entrance are prosperity pots on pedestals. The stupa in the middle of the temple is 8 meters in diameter at the base and archaeological investigation showed that it is very old, perhaps dating from about the 1st century BCE. At the four cardinal directions around the stupa are four images on pedestals. Note also the broken, but still graceful bodhisattva image.

Three concentric circles of slim, beautifully carved pillars that once supported the roof surround the stupa. When archeologists removed one of these pillars, so it could be straightened, a sheet of beaten gold was found under it that had the famous "*Iti pi so*" eulogy on it, dating from about the 8th cent. Between the outermost circles of pillars are stone screens with a railing design carved on them. This beautifully conceived and skillfully executed temple was built in the 7th century.

• *Other Temples*

On the top of the rock directly opposite the entrance to the stupa temple is a small ruined stupa. Turning left from the entrance and proceeding west, the pilgrim will pass some of the inscriptions found at Medirigiriya. The path leads to a large terrace on the left with three temples on it. The largest of these temples once housed a reclining image of the Buddha made of brick. In front of this temple is a stone medical bath that once must have been in the hospital. The two other temples have images in them, but these are now all broken.

Leaving the terrace and proceeding a little further westwards, the pilgrim comes to another temple situated within a walled compound. There are three fine Buddha images in this temple standing on lotus pedestals and dating from about 650 CE. These images represent the three bodies of the Buddha according to Mahayana—the *dhammakāya*, the *sambhogakāya* and the *nirmānakāya*. Modern Theravādins on the other hand say the three images represent the previous Buddhas—Kassapa, Gotama and the future

Buddha Maitreya. When excavated in 1946, the *yantragalas* under these images yielded various figurines and ritual objects. In the central *yantragala* was an image of Kuvera and in one of the others was a fine image of Vajrapāni that is now displayed in the Polonnaruwa Museum.

HOW TO GET THERE

To get to Medirigiriya take a bus from Minneriya to Hingurakgoda from where buses goes directly to Medirigiriya. From Minneriya it is a total distance of 19 kilometers.

NĀLANDA

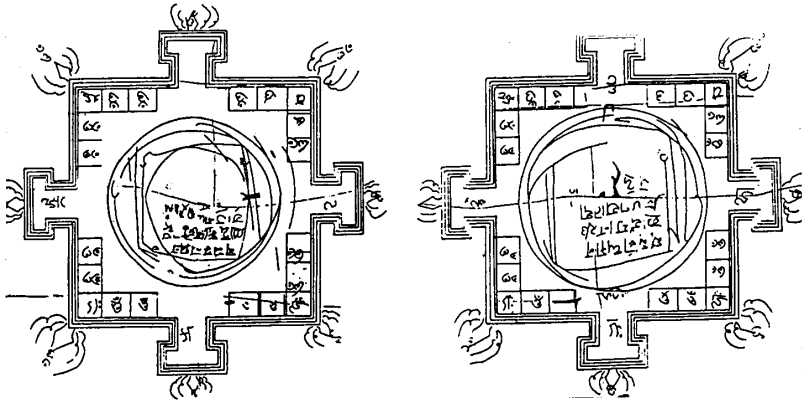
Vajrayāna, also sometimes called Tantrayāna, is the third great vehicle of Buddhism after Srāvakayāna and Mahayana and probably arrived in Sri Lanka soon after it appeared in India in about the 7th century.

The earliest evidence of its presence in the Island is to be found in the biography of the great Indian master Vajirabodhi who introduced Tantra into China. When Vajirabodhi was ailing just before his death in 733, he instructed his disciple Amoghavajira who was a Sri Lankan, to return to India via Sri Lanka to collect Tantric texts unavailable in China. Amoghavajira arrived back in his homeland and was welcomed by the king who accommodated him in his palace for seven days. He met the famous Gabbhadhātu Ācariya and received both the Vajiradhātu and the Gabbhadhātu initiations from him as well as several other empowerments. Later he collected five hundred Tantric texts and detailed information on *mudrās*, images and the deities needed for making *mandalas*. He then left for India, returning to China in 746 when he presented the emperor with a letter and gifts from the Sri Lankan king.

Vajrayāna finally gained official recognition and patronage during the reign of Sena I, who had taken the Bodhisattva vow. This monarch was interested in enough in new trends in Buddhism to establish an ecumenical institute at Anuradhapura called Virāṅkurārāma where twenty-five monks from each of the four major sects in Sri Lanka could study the new ideas coming from India. Special rules were drawn up to prevent sectarian rivalries

being promoted. If the monks representing a particular sect fell below the prescribed number, monks could only fill the shortfall from other sects with permission from the sect concerned.

Some time during Sena's reign, an Indian Vajrayāna *siddha*, a meditation adept with supernormal powers, arrived in the island and won the king's favor. Although the facts are unclear, it is possible that this *siddha* was invited to the Island to join Virāṅkurārāma or it may be possible that the institute was established after his arrival to examine his teachings. However, as in Burma, China, Japan and elsewhere, accusations of sexual license persistently dogged Vajrayāna practitioners and eventually they disappeared from Sri Lanka. Despite this, archeological and literary evidence shows that Tantra continued to have a presence until the 12th century and small groups of people continued to practice it, probably in secret, as late as the 15th century.



Tantric diagrams from Anuradhapura, 8th Century CE

Tibetan sources occasionally mention famous Sri Lankan Vajrayāna teachers and *siddhas*. One of the most revered of these was Lankājayabhadra, who taught the *Guyhasamāja Tantra* at Vikramasila in India. Another was the yogi Chandramala, who was in Tibet translating text with the help of Sākya Yeshe Brog-mi towards the end of the 13th century. Several works composed by Sri Lankan Vajrayāna masters are included in the Tibetan Tipitaka. Amongst these are the commentary on the *Sadharmapundarika Sūtra* by Prthibandhu and Jayabandhu's *Cakrasamvara Tantra*. The most important of these works, Mañjuśrīmitra's *Bodhicittabhāvana*, is one

of the seminal texts on *Dzog-chen*. This work lacks much of the characteristic *Dzog-chen* terminology and thus may represent a branch of that school which evolved in Sri Lanka independently of India and Tibet.

The Indian Vajrayāna *siddha* Vanaratana went to Sri Lanka in about 1404 and studied meditation for six years under Dharmakirti. As India was no longer a congenial place for a Buddhist by the time he left Sri Lanka, he went to Nepal and from there made several trips to Tibet where he taught what he had learned from Dharmakirti.

The two main Tantric monuments still to be seen in Sri Lanka are the Vijayārāma in Anuradhapura of which little remains and the temple at Nālanda.

WHAT TO SEE

- *Nālanda Gedige*

The small village of Nālanda is surrounded by several impressive mountains and is situated in the geographical centre of Sri Lanka.

The Sinhalese word *gedige* is almost certainly derived from the Sanskrit *ghatika* meaning a college, in particular a religious college. It is tempting to think that Nālanda was a place of learning and was named after the great centre of Mahayana and Vajrayana learning of the same name in India. In the early 1970s, the government announced that they would construct a reservoir that would eventually inundate Nālanda's unique temple. Consequently, it was dismantled, an artificial island with a causeway was created and it was reassembled in exactly the same place. The Nālanda temple was constructed in the 8th century and is the earliest structure made entirely of stone in Sri Lanka. Built of crystalline sandstone, which would have originally been dazzling white, the Nālanda Gedige consists of a low walled terrace inclosing a shrine and a pillared hall. Above the main entrance is an image of Lakshmī with two elephants pouring water over her. Climbing the stairs and passing through the gateway, one enters a hall with its richly decorated pillars that once supported a wooden roof. The hall leads directly to the shrine, which is a tall barrel-vaulted structure very much in the South Indian Pallava style. There were once three standing Buddha images in the sanctum, but only one of

these remains. It is accompanied by a statue of Ganesh, the Hindu god of prosperity.

Leaving the Gedige and proceeding around it in a clockwise direction, the pilgrim will notice an erotic sculpture on the southern wall; three figures in coitus. When the archaeologist H. C. P. Bell explored Nālanda in the early 20th century, he found another erotic sculpture carved on a pillar, but because he thought this sculpture was “best left undescribed,” and because it has since disappeared, we do not know what it depicted. From here, the pilgrim can also see the semicircular niche at the end of the arched roof of the shrine. Within it is a figure of Kuvera with his left foot crossed in front of him and his right one on the cornice. His left hand is holding a purse and his right one, palm open, is held in front of his stomach. Above him on the left and right are flying gods. Note also the richly carved finial on the end of the roof.

The ruined stupa next to the temple and the numerous blocks of carved stone in the area show that there were once several other buildings at Nālanda.

HOW TO GET THERE

Nālanda is a small town on the main Kandy–Anuradhapura road, 25 kilometers north of Mātale and 20 kilometers south of Dambulla. Nālanda Gedige is about half a kilometer from the turnoff, which is marked by a small sign.

THE TEMPLE OF THE TOOTH

The worship of relics, the corporeal remains of holy people or objects used by them, has as long a history in Buddhism as it does in other religions. Such a practice may not be as strange to the modern mind as we might at first think. Even today, the desire to own things once used by celebrities means that such objects often fetch very high prices at auctions.

Just before his final Nirvana, the Buddha said that those with a deep understanding of his Dhamma (at that time that meant mainly monks and nuns) should not bother about either keeping or worshipping his ashes. Others, he said, may wish to do so and he was by no means critical or dismissive of this. No doubt, the

Buddha understood that such worship may grow out of and at the same time reinforce faith, gratitude and joy.

According to the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, after the Buddha's funeral a disagreement arose about how his ashes should be shared out. Finally, the Brahmin Dona was asked to mediate. He placed the ashes in a jar and divided them equally into eight portions. As a reward for his service, he was given the jar in which the ashes had been kept. However, there are several legends that claim that other people managed to get some of the relics for themselves. For example, one story says that Dona smeared the inside of the jar holding the relics with honey and kept for himself the ashes which adhered to it. Another such story, recorded in the *Dāthavamsa*, says that a monk named Khema snatched the Buddha's left upper canine tooth from the funeral pyre when no one was looking. This tooth is believed to be the one enshrined in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy.

The history of the Tooth Relic prior to its arrival in Sri Lanka in the 9th year of the reign of King Sṛī Meghavanna is scant, fragmentary and full of fantastic details. It was passed from one person to another until it ended up in the country of Kalinga in a town that later came to be named after it, Dantapura, "Tooth Town." This place is now identified with Dantavuram on the southern bank of the Vamsadhara River, about 110 kilometers southwest of Pūri in Orissa. There are extensive ruins as well as Buddhist antiquities here. For six hundred years, the Tooth was kept at Dantapura. Orissa and Sri Lanka had close political and cultural ties with each other and members of the Orissian royal family were sometimes invited to become kings of the Island when a monarch died without an heir. In the 4th century, during a time of political crisis, King Guhāsīmha of Orissa sent his daughter to Sri Lanka with the Tooth hidden in her hair. This was in the year 310 CE and since then the vicissitudes of the Tooth have been meticulously recorded.

The *Dāthavamsa*, written in the 13th century, traces its history up to that time; it was probably based on the much earlier *Daladāvamsa* which is now lost. Two other works, the *Daladāsirita* and the *Daladāpūjāvaliya* both written in about the 14th century give additional details as well as describing the various ceremonies and rituals surrounding the Tooth's worship. Various incidents

connected with the Tooth are also to be found in the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Cūlavamsa*. From the time of its arrival right through to 1815, when the British abolished the monarchy, the Tooth has been the property of Sri Lanka's kings and consequently the temple where the Tooth was enshrined was always right next to the royal palace and the king usually kept the key to the casket that held it. In Sinhalese, the Temple of the Tooth is called Sri Daladā Māligāva, literally meaning "the Glorious Tooth Palace."

In 1560, the Portuguese, who were constantly fighting with the Sinhalese for control of the Island, triumphantly announced that they had captured the Tooth. They took it to Goa in India where a huge public gathering was held, during which Archbishop Don Gaspar, with spiteful glee, desecrated it, burned it then and then had the ashes thrown into the sea. However, the Sinhalese had the last laugh. Just as some leaders will sometimes have doubles acting in their place to protect them from assassination, Sri Lankan kings sometimes had replicas of the Tooth made to confuse those who might want to seize it during times of uncertainty. The Portuguese had in fact captured one of these replicas.

The frequency of the Pali word *dātha* meaning "tooth" in the names of various ancient dignitaries including kings is an indication of the enormous reverence for the Tooth. Of course, with this reverence came along wealth and the various temples where the Tooth was kept over the centuries were always able to command vast resources. King Parakkamabāhu IV ordered that a quarter percent of the duty of merchandise passing through all Sri Lanka's seaports be given to the Tooth. In 1474, King Thihathura of Burma and his queen had their hair made into tiny brooms with gold and jeweled handles and sent these to be used to sweep the floor of the temple.

Ownership of the relic was believed to confer the right of sovereignty over Sri Lanka and the movement of the Tooth reflected the degree of stability within the country. For eight hundred years, it was kept in Anuradhapura. After the fall of Polonnaruwa it was moved in quick succession to Beligala, Yāpahuwa, Kurunegala, Gampola, Kotte and finally to Kandy in 1566, where it has remained ever since. Even today, the first thing a president or prime minister of Sri Lanka does on assuming office is to come to Kandy and pay respects to the Tooth.

WHAT TO SEE**• *The Temple Square***

The Temple of the Tooth is approached through a large rectangular square stretching from the centre of the Kandy right up to the Temple itself. At the entrance to the square are numerous stalls selling flowers offerings.

As you pass through the gate, you will see a statue of D. S. Senanayake, the first prime minister of independent Sri Lanka. A little further along on the right is a statue of a small child in a gesture of defiance. The last king of Kandy, Vikramarājasingha, accused one of his ministers of treachery and ordered him and his whole family to be executed in a most cruel way. As his brothers and sisters were being led to execution, Maduma Bandar gave them courage by showing no fear and saying, "I will show you how to die." The statue is of this brave little boy. A little further along on the left is a stone pillar on a platform marking the burial place of Keppitipola's head. This Kandyan chief led a revolt against the British in 1818 and was executed. His head was taken to England, where it was displayed in a museum. In 1948 it was brought back to Sri Lanka and interned here. Parallel to the path and on the left is the outer wall of the Nātha Devāla, the main temple for the worship of Avalokitesvara in Sri Lanka.

Further along is a statue of the Buddhist monk Variyapola Sumangala. After the Kandyan chiefs betrayed their king and signed the treaty handing their country over to the British, a ceremony was held in front of the Temple in which the Union Jack was raised. Sumangala came out of the assembled crowd and pulled the flag down. His act of defiance and patriotism is commemorated with this statue. On the pilgrim's immediate right, towards the road, are statues of the Kalinga Princess Hemamālā, who brought the Tooth to Sri Lanka hidden in her hair, and her husband Prince Danta.

• *The Temple of the Tooth*

As the pilgrim proceeds along the path, he or she will see the white fortifications and red roofs of the great Temple of the Tooth.

Of the original temple and palace little remains—only the octagonal tower, the moat, the gate house, parts of the fortifications

and the main shrine housing the Tooth—nearly everything else is recent. At the entrance, which consists of a bridge over the moat, is a large Kandyan style moonstone and on either side of the stairs are two stone carvings of elephants with their mahouts. All this is recent; the originals have been destroyed in the terrorist bomb attack of 1998. Crossing the bridge, the pilgrim now comes to the massive gatehouse. Note the stone slabs with carvings of acrobats on the front of the gatehouse and the hinges on which the huge doors once moved.

Passing through the gatehouse, turning right and ascending the stairs, the pilgrim will come to the Temple's main entrance. The elaborately carved stone doorframe has guardians on either side with their swords raised or a dragon arch (*makara torana*) above it. From the entrance, a tunnel leads to the long Drumming Hall with its sixteen stone pillars. Every morning at 5.30, and again each evening at 6.30, drums and oboes are played here as special offerings are made to the Tooth. The Drumming Hall forms one side of the courtyard in which stands the shrine where the Tooth itself is kept. This shrine was probably built in the 17th century by King Rājasimha II on the very spot where the earlier one, destroyed by the Portuguese, had stood. It was extensively renovated by King Narindasiha in the 18th century and has been repainted and altered several times since. The shrine consists of a two storied rectangular building on an oblong platform faced with stone. There are three entrances, the main one facing the Drumming Hall and one each on its north and south sides. A moonstone and stairs lead to the porch at the main entrance.

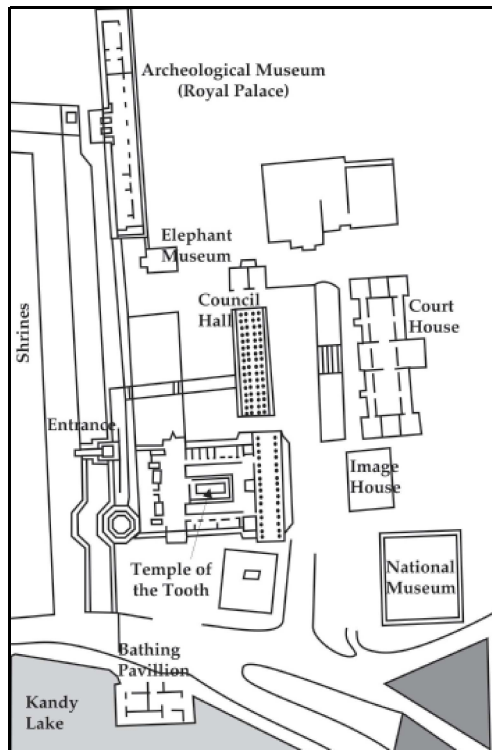
On either side of the stairs are two stone lions, donated by Chinese pilgrims in the late 19th century and four huge elephants' tusks. The doorframe and dragon arch above it are similar to those at the entrance to the tunnel, only brightly painted. Now the pilgrim should turn left and walk around the shrine. Twenty-six pillars with wooden capitals supporting triple corbels, all painted with lions, birds, fantastic beasts and flowers support the lower roof around the shrine. At the far end of the shrine is the entrance to a museum housing Buddha images and other gifts offered to the Temple over the years. Around the walls are recent paintings depicting important events in the history of the Tooth. Upstairs is the new Sri Daladā Museum, which has an excellent collection of

documents, photos and paraphernalia relating to the history of the Tooth.

Retrace your steps down to the inner shrine again, finish walking around it, return to the Drumming Hall, turn left and climb the stairs that lead to the octagon. The room in unusual structure contains about 700 palm-leaf books with the famous Satipatthānasutta and Dhammacakkapavattanasutta discourses of the Buddha. Its verandah offers a good view over the Kandy lake and the square in front of the temple. After leaving the octagon, climb the stairs that lead to upper entrance to the shrine.

It is here that devotees assemble every evening to file past the Tooth. Facing the shrine is a large table always piled high with beautiful flower offerings and the air is usually thick with their perfume. If you wish to worship the Tooth or see its casket, it will be necessary to come here early, especially on holidays. On any evening one can join the queue.

When the doors of the shrine open, the pilgrims will pass quickly through two small rooms to the third one where the Tooth is kept. It is usually not possible to notice much as the crowds are large and the attendants keep everyone moving. In a minute, you will be standing before the large golden stupa covered with jewelry and a minute later, you will be out by the side door. The Tooth itself is rarely displayed; the last time was in April 2004. On leaving the shrine, turn right and take the stairs to the ground floor. At the bottom of the stairs is a door that leads outside.



• *The Temple Grounds*

Outside the door is a large grassy area where archeological investigation has recently revealed the foundations of parts of the old royal palace. On the left, the pilgrim will see a large bronze bell gifted to the temple by the Buddhists of Japan. A little beyond this are the huge fortifications of the old palace rising above the moat. Walk along the walls and you will come to a building containing the preserved body of Raja, the elephant who carried the Tooth during the annual Esala Perahera for over thirty years. This noble creature died in 1988. Further along is a long building, part of the original palace, containing a small, dusty collection of Kandyan period artifacts.

On the eastern side of the grassy area is a Kandyan style audience hall. This fine building was commenced in 1794 as the audience hall of the king and was completed just before the British takeover. It was designed by Devendra Mulachariya who also designed the octagon. The Kandyan Convention, which ceded Kandy to the British, was signed here in 15th of March 1815. The hall was used as a court for many years and was the scene of the first jury trial in Sri Lanka in 1835. The whole hall was substantially modified in 1885 for the visit of the Prince of Wales. The elaborately carved pillars and their capitals represent some of the best examples of Kandyan period woodwork.

HOW TO GET THERE

Kandy is the second largest town in Sri Lanka and is easily reached from Colombo by regular buses and trains. The Temple of the Tooth is in the centre of the town.

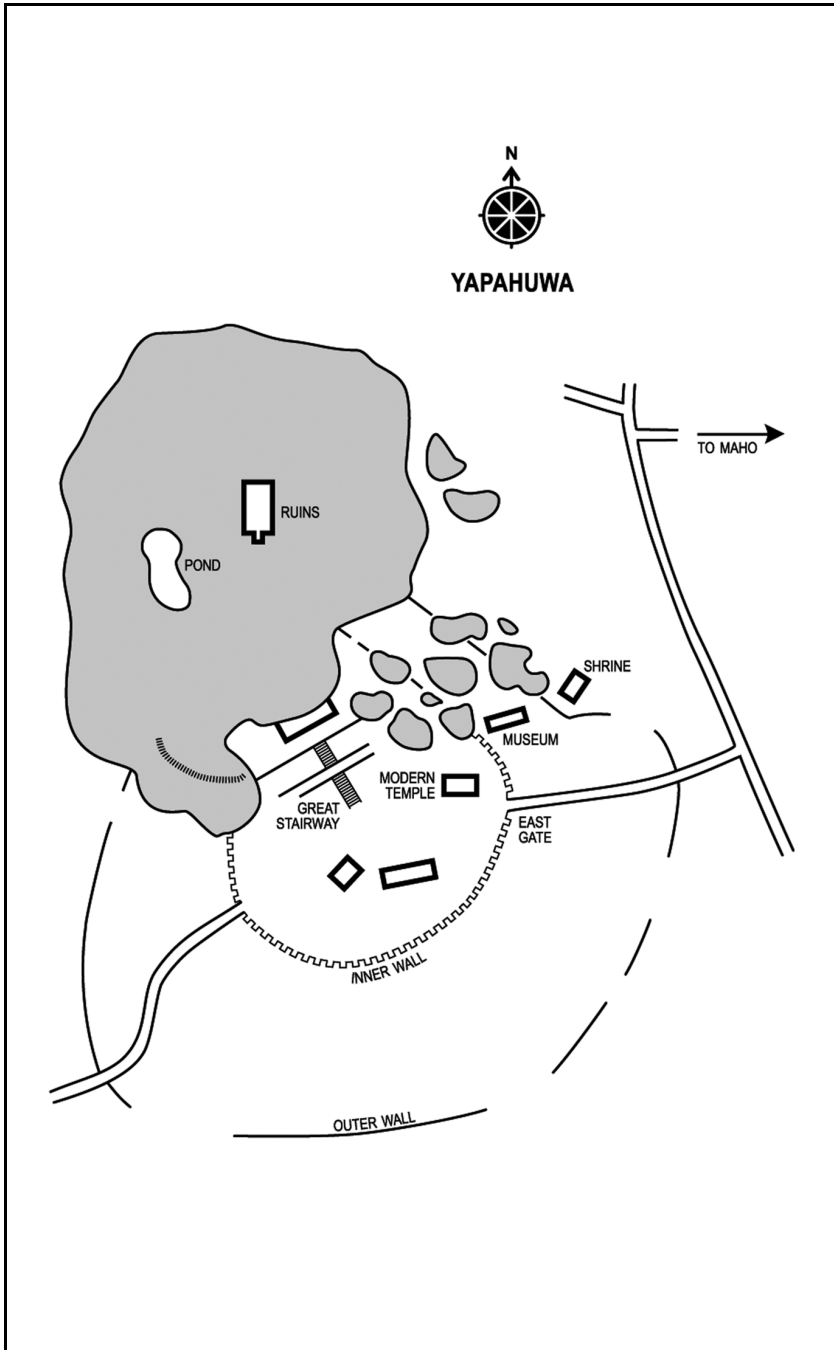
YĀPAHUWA

The prominent gneiss rock at Yāpahuwa and its accompanying ruins are of interest because of the brief part they played in the long drama of the sacred Tooth Relic. After the death of Parakkamabāhu II in 1270, Sri Lanka fell into chaos again with various factions vying with each other for power. Two years later Bhuvanekabāhu I managed to make himself king and immediately moved his capital from Polonnaruwa to Yāpahuwa taking the Tooth Relic with him.

Yāpahuwa had been the stronghold of a general called Subha. Bhuvanekabāhu set about strengthening it and making it suitable as a royal residence called Subhacālapura. However, the king had been reduced to little more than a regional lord and Yāpahuwa is a very modest place by any standards. However, the king was in possession of the Tooth and for as long as he had it, the people would look to him as their ruler. Further, there is evidence that he was able to maintain at least some repute even beyond the shores of Sri Lanka. During excavations at Yāpahuwa, a Chinese glazed pot was unearthed that contained over 1300 Chinese coins dating from the 7th to the 12th century. It is also known that Bhuvanekabāhu sent an ambassador to the court of the Caliph of Egypt.

The Tooth Relic's brief period of respite in Yāpahuwa ended soon after Bhuvanekabāhu's death in 1284. The Pāndyas of South India invaded the Island yet again and this time actually succeeded in capturing the sacred relic. News of this catastrophe threw the Sinhalese into despair and quickly spread throughout the Buddhist world. When the emperor of China, Kublai Khan, heard of this, he immediately sent an envoy to India with an offer to exchange the Tooth for a fabulous treasure. Before he could arrive though, Parakkamabāhu III became king and, aware that his legitimacy to rule would be in doubt as long as he was not in possession of the relic, actually went in person to the Pāndyan court, hat in hand, to negotiate for its return. Exactly what concessions or payment the Pāndyas demanded for the Tooth we do not know, but Parakkamabāhu returned to Sri Lanka with it to widespread relief and rejoicing. It was enshrined in a specially built temple in the new capital at Kurunegala and Yāpahuwa gradually fell into obscurity and ruin.

TEMPLES



WHAT TO SEE**• *The Walls***

The walls of Yāpahuwa form a rough semicircle, the ends of which join the foot of the high steep-sided rock. The outer fortification consists of an earthen rampart about 6 meters high and a kilometer long on which a brick wall once stood. Beyond this rampart was a moat with three causeways across it to the three gates. When clearing the moat, archeologists found numerous rounded stones probably meant to be used as missiles in times of siege. The inner fortification consists of a stonewall averaging 4 meters in height and about 557 meters long with a moat outside it and with two gates. The homes of the ordinary people would have been between the outer and inner walls, while the king's palace, administrative buildings and, of course, the Temple of the Tooth were within the inner wall.

• *The Great Stairway*

Crossing the moat and entering the south gate of the inner wall, the pilgrim will see the various buildings of the modern monastery and a little beyond them the great stairway. This magnificent structure climbs the lower southern slopes of the rock to a natural terrace where the Temple of the Tooth and probably the king's palace once stood.

The stairway originally comprised of three flights of stairs, one above the other, however the lower one has disappeared and been replaced by cement ones. As you climb, you will notice that the walls on either side of the stairs form pavilions in each of which is a graceful female figure. Above these are two wide-eyed crouching lions, while the balustrades above these take the form of elephants with their trunks extended. Finally, at the top of the stairway the pilgrim will reach the impressive and harmoniously conceived doorway that once led into the Temple of the Tooth. Passing through the door the pilgrim will see directly in front of him or her foundations of the temple. The rough path to the top of the rock is to the left. It is a steep climb, but worth the effort. The cave on the top shows that Yāpahuwa was inhabited by ascetic monks for centuries before it became a capital. Further on, there are also the ruins of a stupa, a pond, and a Bodhi Tree shrine. The view from up here is magnificent.

On your way down, if you climb on the retaining wall on either side of the stairway and look back at it, you will see niches with

numerous figures in them. Concerning these, the 19th century traveler J. Bailey wrote: "The figures are excellent and in a great variety of attitudes. They represent nautch girls, not oppressed by clothing, who are dancing with great spirit to the energetic music of tom-tom beaters and flageolet players, whose souls are in their work. The intense gravity of the faces is admirable, while the whole scene is so well 'told' that you could fancy you can see their heads nodding in time to their music, and hear the castanets in the girls' hands."

• *Temple*

Having seen the great stairway, go back down to the monastery and ask for the key to the small temple built in the 18th century in one of the caves besides the monastery. Inside is a rather impressive Buddha image and wall paintings depicting the Buddha's seven weeks at Bodh Gaya, the main events in his life. It also depicts the Vessantara Jātaka. An inscription on the drip ledge of the cave shows that it was first used in about the 1st or 2nd century CE, probably as a monk's residence. Another inscription says that in the 12th century a monk from Dambulla prepared the cave, this time as a temple.

• *The Shrine*

A little beyond the temple and outside the walls is an unusual and interesting Buddhist shrine. The shrine consists of a vestibule and an inner sanctum with a window in its back wall. Note the ornately carved doorframes. Above the main entrance is a sculpture depicting the Buddha sitting beneath a dragon archway. Local people often refer to this shrine as the Temple of the Tooth, but we cannot imagine that any king would house the relic in such a modest building and especially one situated outside the walls of his palace.

• *The Museum*

The museum contains a modest collection of antiquities found in and around Yāpahuwa.

HOW TO GET THERE

Yāpahuwa is some 46 kilometers north of Kurunegala off the main Kurunegala–Anuradhapura road. Regular buses go from the turnoff or one can take a Māho bus from Kurunegala and from there another bus to Yāpahuwa.



CAVE MONASTERIES AND HERMITAGES

Those attracted to the life of meditation have always favored the cave as the most suitable place to do their practice. This is probably because caves are usually in secluded places such as mountainsides and gorges, because they tend to muffle noise and because their dark cool interiors help to calm the senses. In the Satipatthāna Sutta, the Buddha specifically says that caves, along with the roots of forest trees, empty houses or haystacks are all good places to meditate.

When Mahinda and his fellow monks first arrived in Sri Lanka, they stayed in some caves at Mihintale and when the first Sri Lankan men were accepted into the Sangha, they were accommodated in caves at Mihintale. The north, northeast and southeast of Sri Lanka, where the country's civilization developed, is relatively flat, but scattered here and there are steep rocky outcrops, clusters of boulders and in some places hills and mountains, many of which have caves or rock ledges in them.

Deciding where to settle for a life of austerity and meditation was not as simple as finding a cave and moving in. Certain factors had to be taken into consideration. Firstly, proximity to water supply and a village for collecting alms had to be taken into account. In addition, the ancient Sinhalese were very sensitive to the effect that a location has on the mind and always selected the site of their monasteries accordingly.

Buddhaghosa says that different psychological types can meditate better in one kind of place than in another. One prone to negative passions, he suggests, does better in an "abode provided with shade and water, with well-proportioned walls, pillars and steps, with attractive frieze and lattice-work and brightened with various types of paintings." He says further that the speculative type should seek out an enclosed place in which to live such as the Cave of the Overhanging Rock at Hatthikucchi or Mahinda's Cave at Mihintale. Visiting places such as Sītulpahuwa today one definitely feels that they were meant for those doing strenuous meditation. The environment is harsh, hostile even, and little effort was made to beautify the caves or make them comfortable.

On the other hand, places like Hatthikucchi, Arankele and Nāgalakanda near Minneriya are sylvan, pleasant, almost of Arcadian beauty. The caves are airy and bright and one can imagine meditation being easy in such places. The top cave at Nāgalakanda has, in Buddhaghosa's words, "a view where gardens, groves and ponds, pleasant prospects, panoramas of villages, towns and landscapes and the blue gleam of mountains can be seen." Like the caves at Yāpahuwa, Dimbulāgala and Rājagiri Lena, it offers a view that could be used as a great natural space *kasina*, (meditation object). Some caves were believed to be so ideally situated and sanctified by their former saintly occupants, that anyone who practiced in them could progress. The most famous of these was Cūla Nāga Lena, which Buddhaghosa says, was the best meditation cave in Sri Lanka. This cave is at Mahācachakodia near Vavuniyā.

After a suitable cave had been found, the first step in making it habitable was to cut a drip ledge. A drip ledge (*mariyada*) is a ledge etched at strategic places near the opening of the cave so that rainwater dripped off rather than run into it. Even today, walking through the thickest jungle, one can still see which caves were once occupied because of the distinct line separating the dark lichen-covered rock above the drip ledge and the light-colored unweathered rock below it. Those who paid the masons to cut these drip ledges usually had their names inscribed below them also. These donatory inscriptions are the oldest written records in Sri Lanka and provide much important information about the country's early history.

After the drip ledge had been cut, the cave might have needed deepening or might have had inconvenient projections removed. There is a widespread belief in Sri Lanka that the ancients had a chemical concoction that was applied to rock to make it soft so that it could be easily cut or molded. The more usual way a cave was modified was by stacking firewood in the back and letting it burn until the rock became red hot. Then four people would hold loosely the corners of an ox-hide while a fifth would tip a bucket of water on to it. The hide would be pulled tight, thrusting the water on to the hot rock, suddenly cooling it so that it cracked, after which flacks of rock could be peeled off. This process was repeated until the required depth was obtained. The fire also removed damp and odors.

During the earliest period of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, it seems that monks and nuns were content with as little as a roof or a rock over their heads. However, a cave could be subject to monsoon gusts or intrusion by wild animals and so within a short time, walls, doors and windows were added. The walls, usually made of mud bricks with a plaster coating, have all disappeared, although some of the stone door and window frames they once held have survived. At Vessagiri, a stone doorframe with holes for hinges still stands in its original place; on the doorstep are semi-circular scratches made by sand caught under the door as it was opened and closed. A cave would have probably had simple furniture, but again only fittings made of stone have survived. When a cave floor was of rock, as it usually was, it could have steps, beds or seats cut out of it.

Another essential fitting in a cave was the toilet. If a monk lived alone, answering the call of nature was just a matter of walking into the jungle, but when many monks lived together, proper arrangements had to be made. The ancient Sri Lankan toilet consisted of a stone slab with a hole in it placed over a pit. Such toilets can be found in many ancient monastic sites and some of them are still in use. Nearly all the great cave monasteries in India had facilities for collecting and storing water near the caves, but strangely, such things are rarely found in Sri Lankan cave monasteries. This absence is hard to explain as most cave monasteries are in the country's dry zone and the Sinhalese have traditionally maintained a high level of personal hygiene. Cisterns cut out of rock or even stone troughs are sometimes found near ancient caves, but more often, there is no sign of a water supply in the direct vicinity.

After a cave had been prepared, it was sometimes given a name. These names are usually mentioned in the inscriptions on drip ledges and suggest that monks and nuns looked upon their simple abodes with a degree of affection. Some of these names include "Good in All Ways", "Delighting the Mind", and the "Beauteous Grotto". Other names suggest the caves' locations or shapes: "Half Moon Cave", "Pleasant View" and the "Cool Cave". Once a cave had been made comfortable, a monk or nun had to think about where to meditate. The cool and quiet of the cave itself was the logical choice, but some meditation is best done in the open or while walking. Not surprisingly, special stone seats and prome-

nades can be seen around some caves. Other aids to meditation were beautification through painting and landscape gardening. Some paintings served only to decorate and brighten a cave's interior while others were clearly meant to enhance meditation. Such paintings, now faded and fragmentary, can still be seen in the caves at Sītulpahuwa, Karambagala and Vessagiri.

However comfortable and suitable caves were for meditation, they might still have presented problems for their inhabitants. The most serious of these was damp; even today monks who have lived in caves for long periods often suffer from arthritis or sciatica. Not a problem as such, but certainly a nuisance, are the small creatures that live in caves. Bats will move into dark crevices and although they are harmless, their droppings give off a particularly offensive smell. Like the monks of old, modern monks are reluctant to disturb the creatures who share their homes. Today wire screens usually keep bats out but in ancient times, they just had to be tolerated.

Geckos are another irritation that still has to be lived with. These small nocturnal lizards hunt insects that live in caves or are attracted to burning lamps at night. While their chirping calls are a delight to the ear, their foul smelling droppings raining down from above are another matter. Buddhaghosa wrote that one of the disagreeable aspects of the monk's life is getting up in the morning and putting your feet on the mat only to have them stick to the gecko's droppings.

Nevertheless, the meeting of man and beast in the ancient cave monasteries was more likely to produce positive than negative results. Sri Lankan literature contains many stories of saintly ascetics who lived in harmony with wild animals. One of the most charming of these stories, from a 13th century Abhidhamma work, tells of a monk who would spend the whole day chanting the Tipitaka. The bats who shared his cave heard so much Dhamma this way that when they died, they were reborn as human beings.

There are over two thousand cave sites in Sri Lanka, some with only one or two caves while others have up to seventy or more. We will describe several of the most accessible and interesting of these ancient cave monasteries and hermitages.

ALUVIHĀRA

The monastery where the Pali Tipitaka was first committed to writing was called Ālokalena or Alulena and is now called Aluvihāre, *alu* being derived from the Pali *āloka*, meaning “light.” Several caves on the site have inscriptions dating from the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE.

Writing existed at the time of the Buddha, but it was used mainly for commerce. All literature, religious and secular, was handed down by word of mouth. This was not as unreliable as it might seem at first.

Long before the Buddha, the Brahmins had perfected techniques that were extraordinarily effective for committing information to memory and passing it down. Many of the Buddha’s leading disciples were Brahmins and they used the techniques they had been trained in to remember the words of the Buddha. It should be understood also that the task of remembering the Buddha’s discourses was not an individual, but a group effort. Monks and nuns would meet regularly and recite parts or all of the Buddha’s words. If one person mispronounced a word or got the order of the words wrong, the sheer number of voices reciting it properly would correct the mistake. This also meant that once a discourse had been remembered, it would be quite difficult to leave out or add anything to it.

When Mahinda came to Sri Lanka, he trained the Sinhalese monks and nuns in how to recite, retain and pass on the Buddha’s discourses. As in India, probably a few monks or nuns knew most or even all of the Tipitaka. Different monasteries specialized in reciting and studying different parts of it. Thus in the ancient records we have monks being described as *dīghabhānakas*, reciters of the Long Discourses, *majjhimbhānakas*, reciters of the Discourses of Middle Length, and so on. If a monk or nun wanted to know more, he or she might spend a few years in a monastery specializing in another part of the scriptures. As long as there were enough people who knew different parts of the Tipitaka, its preservation was assured.

During the 1st century BCE, an adventurer named Tissa started a rebellion against King Vattagāmini and the Tamils of South India took advantage of the situation to launch an invasion. The whole island was plunged into chaos. As the fighting dragged on, a

famine and plague broke out and eventually thousands of people died. The cities were deserted, monasteries were looted, and a good number of the monks and nuns who did not die fled to India.

It was against the background of these terrible events that the Sangha decided on a move that was to change the whole future of Theravada Buddhism. It was decided to commit the whole of the Tipitaka to writing “in order that the true Dhamma might last long.” Just why this huge undertaking was done at this obscure monastery in the provinces is not completely clear. It appears to have been a refuge for monks from Anuradhapura.

The material selected to write the Tipitaka on was the leaves of the Talipat Palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*). Writing on palm leaves is still done today and the procedure has changed very little since the 1st century BCE. Young palm leaves are boiled, scraped, pressed flat and then cut to the required size. Each leaf is then polished with a smooth round stone. The letters are inscribed on the leaf with an iron stylus. Not surprisingly, the Sinhalese word for writing is *liyanava*, which is derived from the Pali verbal root *likh*, “one inscribes.” The scribe has to press hard enough to make a mark, but not so hard that the mark shows on the other side of the leaf that has to be written on also. It is a job that requires a good deal of patience and finesse, especially because the letters are not clearly visible at the time of writing because no ink is used. When the writing is finished, lampblack is rubbed over the surface to highlight the letters and finally a type of aromatic oil is rubbed on the leaves to keep them supple and to act as an insect repellent. When the pages are ready, a hole is made at either end, a string is passed through them to act as binding and then they are put between two wooden covers.

If properly maintained, a palmleaf book will last for several hundreds of years. The oldest such book known in Sri Lanka is a copy of the *Cūlavagga* dating from the 13th century. It is now on display in the Colombo Museum.

WHAT TO SEE

Aluvihāra is on the main northbound road from Mātale to Anuradhapura and from the road the pilgrim will see a large modern stairway leading up to a cluster of large and picturesque boulders. At

the top of the stairs and to the right is a line of triangular holes cut into the cliff. These are used to hold offering lamps and were probably cut during the Kandyan period. Under the boulders are a number of caves sheltering several temples dating from the early 19th century. One of the temples has a diorama depicting the various punishments inflicted in hell. The monks at Aluvihāra sometimes demonstrate how palmleaf books are prepared.

HOW TO GET THERE

Aluvihāra is 32 kilometers north of Kandy and 4 kilometers north of Mātale on the Anuradhapura road. One can easily get there from Kandy or Mātale by getting on a bus to Dambulla or Anuradhapura.

ARANKELE

Nothing is known about the history of Arankele (Sinhala: Arankele) and it is not known what its ancient name was. However, it has all of the features found at Pamsukūlika monasteries; the double platforms, the long path, and, like them, it is similarly situated at the foot of a mountain. The *Aran* in the name Arankele is probably derived from the Pali word *arahat*, meaning “saint,” and the Sinhalese word *kele*, meaning “forest”.

The ruins are nestled in thick jungle at the foot of the rather forbidding looking Dolukanda Mountain. This mountain is mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa* as having once been the base of Silāmeghavanna just before he was defeated by King Moggallāna III. Records also speak of King Kirti Srī Rājasimgha having attended a ceremony at a temple near Dolukanda, but this could not have been Arankele as this place was totally covered in jungle at that time.

The plateau on top of Dolukanda can be reached by a narrow path up a steep slope from another cave-monastery called Dolukanda Āranya, located on the other side of the mountain near the village of Hunupola. Some years ago, a golden stupa pinnacle was found in one of these caves. On the plateau itself, there are the remains of Silāmeghavanna’s fortress, some pillars and a bathing pond. The view over the surrounding landscape is spectacular.

WHAT TO SEE

• *Maliyadeva's Cave*

The pilgrim gets to the ruins by passing through a modern meditation monastery. Ask one of the monks and he will show the path. Soon the pilgrim will come to a large moss-covered rock with a small temple under it. This temple is built of well cut blocks of stone. The door leads to a small hall and two separate rooms, both of which have narrow windows. Nearby is the carved slab of stone that once formed the veranda in front of the temple.

This unusual building is the only one of its type in Sri Lanka. Notice that there are several drip ledges and numerous lines of mortise holes on the rock above the temple. Obviously many structures were built under this rock over the centuries, suggesting that it must have been a particularly significant place in ancient times. Local legend says that this is where the legendary arahat Maliyadeva used to live. Maliyadeva is popularly believed to have been the last arahat in Sri Lanka.

• *The Path*

To the right of the cave a rough track through the jungle leads to the ancient monastery's main path. This is the longest and most impressive such path found in any of the Pamsukūlika monasteries. It runs for about 300 meters and is raised as much as two meters from the ground for much of its course. What could this very substantial elevated path have been used for?

About a third of the way along is a roundabout and further still is a side path with stairs leading to some double platforms on the lower slopes of the mountain. All Arankele's caves and double platforms, about twenty altogether, are on the hillside to the left of the path, which eventually ends in a T-junction. The stairs to the left lead to a series of double platforms, several of them built on natural rock foundations. Return to the intersection and continue walking towards the monastery's main buildings.

• *The Ruins*

On the right of the path is a small building that may have served as an image house although no image is found here. Beyond this is the monastery's main bathing place, a large rectangular reservoir with steps leading down to the water on all its sides. Locals still bathe

here and it can be a good place to have a cooling bath. Directly facing the end of the path is probably where the *sīmā* was. It was built in the centre of a large square depression with the natural rock forming its bottom. Was this depression originally meant to be filled with water like the moats around some modern *sīmās*?

To the left of the *sīmā* is another interesting structure with a gently curving path leading to it. This building is a promenade (*cankamana*) for walking meditation and probably originally had a roof over it. Note the two toilets on the south side. A path behind the promenade leads to the refectory. The impressively solid walls of this building would almost make one think it was a prison rather than a place where monks were fed. Note the sunken and paved courtyard and the several grindstones.

HOW TO GET THERE

Arankele is 25 kilometers from Kurunegala via the village of Ibbāgamuwa. Buses to Arankele leave Kurunegala's main bus stand regularly.

DAMBULLA

Just a few kilometers south of the market town of Dambulla is a huge granite hummock 152 meters wide, 300 long and 37 meters high dominating the surrounding countryside. This place has been inhabited by monks for at least two thousand years and was known in ancient times as Jambukola.

From about the 2nd century BCE, monks lived in the huge cave on the side of the hummock and the seventy other caves in the area. By perhaps the 5th or 6th century, enthusiasm for the ascetic cave dwelling lifestyle began to wane here and the monks moved out of the caves into a monastery at the foot of the hill. The large cave was given over to ceremonial use. It was artificially enlarged and five temples were built in it. In the 12th century, King Nissankamalla came on pilgrimage to Dambulla and "had the lying, sitting and standing Buddha images in the cave gilded, celebrated a great *pūjā* at the cost of seven hundred thousand gold pieces and renamed the cave 'The Golden Rock Cave.'"

Most of the numerous paintings at Dambulla were done in the 18th and early 19th century while a few others date from the early 20th century. The pretender Gongalegoda Banda began his rebellion against the British in 1848 by marching to Dambulla and having himself proclaimed king and then crowned by the abbot of Dambulla. The revolt was crushed, Banda and his lieutenants were executed and the abbot barely escaped with his life.

Today Dambulla's caves are most famous for their brightly painted images, walls and roofs. However, it should be remembered that all temples and all images used to be similarly painted, but only here, protected within the cave, have the colors survived. Most surfaces at Dambulla also have two or in some cases even three layers of painting on them having been repainted several times over the centuries. Some of the images are made of wood, others of wood covered with cloth and plaster, while the oldest ones, probably dating from the late Anuradhapura period, are made of stone. The large reclining images of the Buddha are made of brick covered with plaster.

The path to the caves leads from the road through a collection of garish and artless structures of the type that so often mar modern Sri Lankan monasteries. Numerous monkeys gather around the stairs hoping to get something to eat from pilgrims. If you do feed them, please be careful, the larger males can be very bold and aggressive, especially towards children.

WHAT TO SEE

• *Nissankamalla's Inscription*

On passing through the entrance gate, the first thing the pilgrim sees on the right is an inscription carved on the rock. The inscription is on a rectangular panel and was written after King Nissankamalla visited Dambulla on one of his numerous inspection tours. It describes some of the endowments he made to the monastery: "He had the standing, sitting and reclining Buddha images in the cave gilded, celebrated a great pūjā at a cost of seven hundred thousand and renamed the cave 'The Great Golden Cave.'"

The inscription also mentions some of the king's other good works. He gave the whole country a tax break for five years, reduced the land tax considerably and decreed that, "since those

who labor with sickles in clearing thorny jungle for cultivation earned their living with great hardship, they will be exempt from all taxation. ... He inspected the villages, towns and cities, the mountains and forests as well as the lakes and marches so much that he was able to see Lankā as if it were a ripe *nelli* fruit in his hand. He cleared the villages and forests of lawlessness so that a maiden might walk around with a precious gem in her hand and no one would ask her, 'What have you got there?' Thus did he keep Lankā at peace."

• *Devarāja Lena*

The first cave is a little beyond the inscription. At the entrance is an interestingly designed stone used for washing the feet with a water trough besides it. Inside the cave is a reclining image of the Buddha so large that it makes the interior rather cramped. At the Buddha's head is an image of Vishnu and at his feet one of Ānanda, his favorite disciple. The paintings on the walls are faded and obscured by centuries of smoke from oil lamps and incense. Next to the Devarāja Cave is a small Vishnu temple. The image inside was brought from Devundara (Dondra) in the 16th century, when its original temple was sacked by the Portuguese.

• *Mahārāja Lena*

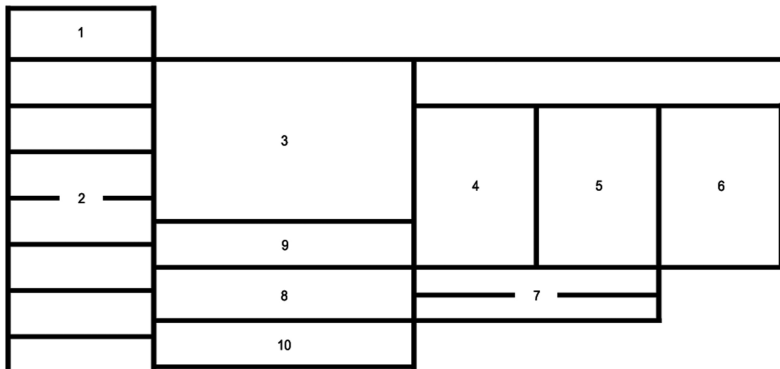
This, the Great King's Cave, is the largest and most important temple at Dambulla and so we will describe it in detail. Altogether, there are sixty painted images in this cave. Entering the temple by the second of its two doors the pilgrim will find his or herself in a large cave with its roof sloping towards the back. The cave is 37 meters long, 23 wide and 27 meters high at its highest point. On the left as you enter is a fine statue which popular tradition says is of King Vattagāmini, the original founder of the monastery, but which is more likely of a bodhisattva. This statue was made in the early Polonnaruwa period and was repainted in the Kandyan period. Unusually, the image is bare-chested.

Directly in front of you across the floor as you enter is the temple's main image, a life-sized Buddha standing under a dragon arch. Where the paint has peeled off one can see the gold leaf below, probably the gilding done by Nissankamalla in the 12th century. Flanking this image is Maitreya, the next Buddha, on the left and Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Along the

wall to the left of these images is a row of five large Buddhas. Directly behind the main image are two statues, one of the golden colored Samanta, the god of Sri Pāda, and another of Uppalavanna who is always depicted blue. Often identified with Vishnu, this god's name means "Colored like a Water Lily."

Now walk down the line of standing and sitting Buddha images against the back wall of the cave. In the middle of the floor towards the far end of the cave is a large clay pot enclosed by a low wall. The pot is perpetually filled by drops of very pure water dripping from the roof. This water is believed to have healing powers and is eagerly sought by pilgrims.

Turn the corner, walk past the Buddha images along the east wall and when you get to the last, large yellow one, go behind it. This area is now sealed off and permission to enter needs to be



Painted panels on roof of Maharaja Lena

asked from one of the temple guards. Against the back wall is a fine statue of a blue skinned god or king. According to tradition it is King Nissankamalla, that most pious, hyperactive, insecure and egotistical of all Sri Lanka's monarchs. Behind the head of the statue there is a painting of two unusual bearded figures, perhaps ascetics, wearing earrings, large hairdresses and leopard skins. On the ceiling above this statue is a depiction of the sixteen sacred places. Note Sri Pāda with the sacred footprint on its top, the Buddha coming through the sky from India, the Buddha resting in the Divaguha Cave, and the Mahaveli river flowing down to the sacred places. The paintings on the left corner, on the back of the large Buddha image, depict the

events surrounding the introduction of Buddhism into Sri Lanka. On the top we see Devānampiyatissa's encounter with Mahinda. Other paintings show King Devanampiyatissa using a plough to mark out the boundary of the Mahavihara and the arrival of the Bodhi Tree and the relics of the Buddha.

Further on in the inner gallery, on the northern wall, there is a painting of the duel between King Dutthagāmani and King Elāra. Nearby, part of one of the paintings with arahants offering flowers has flaked off at the bottom, revealing a much older mural with two deities or kings looking up with their hands in *añjali* gesture. This shows that earlier murals are preserved below the ones seen now in the caves. It is likely that these earlier murals inspired the painters in the Kandyan period. Further on, towards the western side, there are paintings of Ganesh and other gods.

Having seen the paintings, turn back and leave the inner gallery. Continuing along the south wall, the pilgrim will see a large reclining Buddha image. Just before the temple's first door is a large standing Buddha image. A little beyond the door is a painted stupa with eight Buddha images sitting around it. Two of the images have three headed cobras above the head, and depict Mucalinda, the Nāga King, wrapping himself around the Buddha to protect him against the cold.

We will now describe the paintings on the roof. To understand the following description the pilgrim should return to the main door and look up.

1. The Bodhisattva in the Tusita Heaven waiting to reborn on earth.
2. This oblong panel with six bands depicts Prince Siddhattha's life before his enlightenment. In the first band, we see Mahā Māyā leaving Kapilavatthu in procession for Lumbini. The second band shows Mahā Māyā giving birth under the Sal trees, the baby prince standing on what looks like a pedestal, but which is meant to be the seven lotuses, and the procession leaving to return to Kapilavatthu. The last band shows Prince Siddhattha leaping over the Anomā River on his horse, him cutting off his hair and on the far left, him meditating in a cave.
3. At nearly 300 square meters, this is the largest panel in the cave. It shows Māra trying to break the Buddha's resolve. All around the Buddha, we see demons with hideous faces and

- draped in serpents. On the left is Māra on his elephant.
4. This panel shows the Buddha's seven weeks at Bodh Gaya.
 5. Māra's daughters—Tanhā, Aratī and Rāgā—are trying to tempt the Buddha in this panel. These deities wear the finely pleated dresses typical of the Kandyan period.
 6. This panel shows the Buddha's First Sermon at Isipatana. Above the Buddha is the sun and moon and around his body is his multi-colored aura. On both sides of the Buddha is an audience of gods and on the left are his first five companions.
 7. Two lines of Buddha images.
 8. This panel depicts the Buddha's final Nirvana.
 9. The eight stupas built to enshrine the Buddha's ashes.
 10. The First Council at Rājagaha. We see Mahā Kassapa on a pedestal and Ānanda a little lower than him in a three-storied pavilion. The rest of the roof is covered with hundreds of images of the Buddha and geometrical and floral designs.

• *Mahā Atula Lena*

This, the second largest temple at Dambulla, is 27 meters long, 24 wide and 11 meters high at the highest point. Its name means "Great New Cave" because it was renovated and repainted by Kīrti Srī Rājasimgha in the late 18th century.

Directly in front of you as you enter is a large seated Buddha image flanked by two standing images. Taking up nearly the whole of the east side of the temple is a large reclining Buddha. Walk around the main image, along the line of images behind it and pass the line to its right. The large sitting image in the corner is a particularly fine example of Kandyan period Buddha images. Turning the corner the pilgrim will come to a statue of Kīrti Srī Rājasimgha. The monarch is depicted bearded and wearing a crown and pants embroidered with flowers. Golden chains around his neck and waist hold a jeweled brooch to his chest. The paintings on the wall behind this statue depict courtiers holding trays of blossoms and lotuses. Note the lovely floral patterns also.

On the wall to the right of the statue of the king is a charming and unusual painting depicting the mythical Lake Anotatta at the foot of Mt Meru in the Himalayas. The *Vinaya* says that the Buddha once flew to this lake and sat in meditation here for a while. According to legend, the four sacred rivers of India flow out of this

lake through spouts in the form of a lion, a horse, an elephant and a bull, they circle the lake twenty times and then flow down to the plains. Around the lake is an Arcadian landscape with a lotus pond, flowering trees, gods, dragons, lions, elephants and birds. Along the bottom of this painting is a line of fruit trees and along the top a line of billowing clouds.

• *Pacchima Lena and Devanātula Lena*

The word *pacchima* means western although this is not really the western-most temple. The cave contains several images and most of the paintings on its walls and roof are either faded or recently executed and of little merit. Popular legend says that the small stupa in the cave enshrined the jewelry of Somavatī, the consort of King Vattagāmini. Tempted by this story, thieves recently broke into the stupa, doing much damage to it. The last temple is called the Second New Cave and contains a large reclining Buddha image.

HOW TO GET THERE

Dambulla is 72 kilometers north of Kandy and 64 kilometers southeast of Anuradhapura. It is situated just along the main road between the two towns. It is a good 300 meters walk up the rock slope and stairs to the temple from the road. By midday, the rock gives off a tremendous heat and having an umbrella can make quite a difference.

DIMBULĀGALA

Dimbulāgala is a huge rocky ridge rising 500 meters above the surrounding countryside and is clearly visible from Polonnaruwa. In ancient times, the place was known as Udumbaragiri.

At the foot of the mountain and just near the modern shrine room is a large cave with a collection of stone umbrellas, stones with footprints on them, and a stone throne all dating from the 1st to the 3rd centuries CE, showing that Dimbulāgala was inhabited since at least that time. In the 5th century, King Mahānāma built a temple here at the request of his queen and, according to the *Mahāvamsa*, donated it to the Mahāvihāra. However, it was during the time of Parakkamabāhu I that Dimbulāgala came into its own.

In 1153, after years of fighting for the throne and impatient waiting, Parakkamabāhu rode into Polonnaruwa and proclaimed himself king. Much of the country was in ruins, but at least it was now united under one strong ruler. Parakkamabāhu immediately launched an ambitious program to be rebuilding the administration, the economy and to strengthen the still fragile unity of his realm.

During the years of fighting, the Sangha had become shamefully corrupt. Commenting on the situation, one observer said sarcastically, "Only one thing could be said in favor of the monks—at least they looked after their wives and children." One group of monks, however, had maintained their discipline through all the hardships and had kept the flame of the Dhamma alive, the monks of Dimbulāgala.

As a part of his program to rebuild his country, Parakkamabāhu decided to first purify and then to unite the Sangha. He had much of experience in warfare and diplomacy, but none at all in religion and so he was not sure how he should set about this daunting task. It was only natural therefore that he should turn to the most respected monk in the country, the austere and sagacious Mahā Kassapa, the abbot of Dimbulāgala. This monk and his disciples had looked on in impotent despair as Buddhism declined, but now their chance had come.

Mahā Kassapa was called before the king and asked to advise him about what had to be done to reform the Sangha. A great convocation was held and after being carefully examined thousands of monks were defrocked, some were returned to being novices, while others were warned to mend their ways. A good number of the most notorious monks were so powerful that even Parakkamabāhu, a very strong and resolute personality himself, was hesitant to defrock them forcibly. He had to offer them gold or lucrative positions in court before they would go quietly. After this purification, many new monks were ordained and a new course of study for monasteries was drawn up. Mahā Kassapa also drew up a code of conduct (*katikāvata*) for monks to supplement the traditional *Vinaya* and then this code was then carved in stone at the Gal Vihāra at Polonnaruwa for all to see. The code shows that Mahā Kassapa demanded high standards from his monks and that there was to be a return to solitude, simplicity and asceticism.

Mahā Kassapa's Code

The head elders of the monks should not permit any negligence on the part of those under them, but should set them the task of studying the scriptures. They should not be allowed to neglect learning at least the Khuddasikkhā, the Pātimokkha, the three Dasadhamma Suttas and the Anumāna Sutta. Since it is stated that those engaged in studying the scriptures should always cultivate concentration in seclusion throughout the three times of the day, they should mould their deportment perfectly and develop their character without blemish. Since it is said that one should straighten oneself first one should establish for oneself these qualities and promote one's own welfare and then that of others.

Those novices who are unable to master all the prescribed course of study should at least learn by heart the *Mūlasikkhā*, the *Sekhiyā* (rules) and the *Sikhaवलान्दविनिषा*. They should be capable of repeating any portion of the text from beginning to end on being examined every six months. Rising at dawn, they should do sitting or walking meditation or recite the text they have learned. Then they should put on their yellow robe properly, clean their teeth and attend to the duties such as worshiping the stupa, the Bodhi Tree, and their preceptors. They should attend to the needs of the sick and clean their living quarters. Only then should they go to the refectory to eat. After that, they should spend time in meditation except for those with specific duties such as consulting documents and texts, sewing or dying robes or distributing requisites. Time should spend without consorting with either monks or lay people.

Monks should refrain from uttering words either in anger or in fun. They should not speak in private to females, even their mother, or with a young person, even their brother or sister. They should not get angry with the servants, but make any complaints directly to the abbot. No personal articles shall be given away without permission of the abbot. If it rains while a monk is out walking he should continue at his normal pace towards shelter unless he is carrying things that might be damaged by the water, in which case he should walk briskly. If it is appropriate, a monk may show his happiness by smiling, but not laughing to the degree that it might show his teeth. He should not chatter while worshiping either the stupa or the Bodhi Tree, while making offerings of incense, while using a tooth stick or while putting his begging bowl into its case. He should not recite scriptures so that it disturbs those in the meditation hall.

(Condensed from the Gal Vihāra Inscription)

In the decades after the reforms, Mahā Kassapa and the monks of Dimbulāgala brought about the last flowering of Theravādin scholarship. Mahā Kassapa himself wrote a paraphrase on the

Samantapāsādikā in Sinhalese, a Sanskrit grammar and a commentary on Anuruddha's famous *Abhidhammatthasangaha*. Some of his disciples like Sāriputta, Medhankara and Moggallāna wrote numerous grammars, lexicons, commentaries and poetic works.

Monks from Dimbulāgala even had an international influence. One of them, Udumbara Mahāsāmi, went to lower Burma in the middle of the 14th century and was instrumental in having the Sri Lankan form of practice accepted not only there, but also in the Thai kingdom of Sukhodaya.

WHAT TO SEE

• *The Caves*

At the foot of the mountain at Dimbulāgala is a large and somewhat disorganized monastery. Ask one of the monks to show you to the path that leads up the mountain.

The caves are situated at the base of a cliff near the very top of the mountain and a strenuous climb is required to get to them. The path runs through thick jungle and eventually emerges at a steeply sloping area of exposed rock. A little beyond this is the first cave with a large building in it, probably dating from the Polonnaruwa period. Directly behind this building is a deep fissure that fills with water during the rainy season and provided the monks of old with some of their drinking water. Proceeding further, the pilgrim must now climb along a narrow ledge to the next cave. A rickety iron railing makes the going easier, but this is definitely not for the faint hearted. The remaining caves are joined to each other by a series of natural tunnels. There must have been individual cells for the monks in all of these caves, but not even the ruins of any of them remain. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were paintings on the roof of some of the caves; these have all disappeared too.

On the roof of the second to last cave is a raised panel carved out of the rock with an inscription in it by Sundara Mahādevī, the chief queen of King Vijayabāhu I. The inscription gives the queen's lineage and then says:

Seeing the hardship of people, such as the old, who hang on to chains treading the path between the Great Moon and the Great Sun Caves where five hundred of the Great Community of monks reside and where the relics of the Buddha are

enshrined, she caused the rock to be cut and the paths improved. She had images and stupas made, Bodhi trees established and gave them to the Kalinga Cave. Further, on Posen of the 27th year of the reign of Vijayabāhu, she caused sacred vessels to be constructed for the purpose of offering gruel and boiled rice and gave them to the monastery.

The last cave contains a natural cistern fed by water dripping from the roof. For several months a year the water in this cistern remains surprisingly clear and drinkable.

• *Pulligoda Cave*

About 2 kilometers from the modern monastery at Dimbulāgala is a cave or perhaps more correctly a rock ledge with a beautiful painting on it dating from the 7th or 8th century. The painting shows five gods sitting on lotuses with their hands in gestures of worship except for the last one on the right who is holding a lotus. Each god has a red halo behind his head. Four of the gods are wearing red and white striped sarongs. One of the gods is blue-green in color, perhaps representing Vishnu. It is difficult to understand why this rock ledge was painted. Perhaps there was a small shrine here once.

HOW TO GET THERE

Dimbulāgala is 15 kilometers southeast from Polonnaruwa and is easily reached by bus from there.

HATTHIKUCCHI

About fifteen kings of Sri Lanka were Hindu, the traitor Don Juan was a Christian and the rest, including the two queens, were Buddhists. Of course, many of these monarchs were Buddhist in name only. Some used religion when it was expedient to do so and did exactly what they wanted when it was not. Others spent much of their reign carousing, drinking or waging war, only to become conspicuously pious as they got older. In the long parade of the Island's rulers, there have been many villains, hypocrites, patricides and tyrants. However, there has also been a surprisingly

high number who took the Dhamma seriously and genuinely tried to practice the Ten Virtues of Kingship (*dasarājasilā*).

Vijayabāhu I was a fine poet who was proficient in Pali and is said to have begun each day by reading the *Dhammasaṅgani*. Another monarch, Buddhadāsa, earned the title “Physician King.” He built hospitals and refuges throughout the land for the handicapped and the aged, he arranged for every five villages to be served by a physician who was paid by the state. He is also known to have authored a treatise on medicine.

Parakkamabāhu the Great is reported as saying, “A life of enjoyment of what one possesses without having cared for the welfare of the people in no way befits one like me.” The records show that his rule was very much guided by this principle. One king, Aggabodhi IV, was considered so good that the crowds at his cremation fought over his ashes believing that they would have a miraculous curative effect. However, the most saintly and beloved of all Sri Lanka’s kings was Sirisanghabodhi.

Although he only ruled for two years, from 251 to 253 CE, Sirisanghabodhi is still known by all Sinhalese, even those who take little interest in their county’s past. He won no glory in battle, brought no distinction to the country by his statesmanship, built no great public works or monuments, and yet he is still considered Sri Lanka’s greatest king. After the untimely death by poisoning of King Sanghatissa I, the pious Sirisanghabodhi was elevated to the throne over his stronger and more ambitious brother, Gothābhaya, who was given the post of treasurer. No doubt, some in the court thought that the gentle Sirisanghabodhi would be easier to manipulate than his brother. Others shook their heads at his appointment, thinking that he could never make an effective ruler. Gothābhaya wanted to snatch the throne from his brother, but his supporters bid him be patient, telling him that his chance would come when his brother started to make a mess of things and became unpopular.

Sirisanghabodhi insisted on keeping the five Precepts just as he had done so previously. Believing that capital punishment had a deterrent effect, but knowing that killing was wrong, he had condemned criminals secretly exiled and the bodies of people who had died of natural causes beheaded at the execution ground in their place. He is said to have dispelled a terrible plague ravaging the country by offering his own flesh to the demon that was causing it.

When it became clear that the king's righteousness was not going to cause the administration to collapse, Gothābhaya decided he could wait no longer and he staged a coup. The rebels approached the capital, but Sirisanghabodhi was not prepared to defend his throne at the cost of human life and he disappeared into the forest, only too happy to be freed from the burden of governance.

Gothābhaya could hardly believe his luck. He made himself king and quickly consolidated his position by executing all his brother's ministers and supporters and putting his own men in their place. However, being scheming and ambitious himself, he could not conceive that his brother was not like that also. Soon he began to fear that Sirisanghabodhi might plot his return at some time in the future. Very clearly, he would never be safe until the former king was dead and so he offered a reward for his head.

Meanwhile, Sirisanghabodhi found himself a beautiful hermitage and settled down to doing what he enjoyed most—meditating, reading and befriending the forest creatures. He eventually heard about the reward on his head, but he was not overly concerned about this as the only people he had contact with were simple woodsmen and honey gatherers. However, one day a poor peasant happened to see Sirisanghabodhi and immediately recognized him. Although feeling sorry for his former liege, the peasant knew that the reward would make him and his family's hard life many times easier. Sirisanghabodhi knew what the man was thinking and understood why he was tempted by the reward. His bodhisattva-like heart knew exactly what he had to do. So that the poor man would not have to commit murder, he took out his sword, cut off his own head and handed it to the horrified man.

When Gothābhaya came to know of this, he was horrified too, not by the manner of his brother's death, but because it made him look even worse in the eyes of the people. In the end though, Sirisanghabodhi's sacrifice seems to have had a transforming effect on Gothābhaya. After such an unpromising start, he turned out to be a relatively good king. His thirteen-year rule was just and mild and he undertook several major public works for the general good. However, his cruelty was apparently just under the surface. Taking the Mahāvihāra's side in one of its squabbles with the Abhayagiri, he branded sixty monks who were promoting Mahayana and expelled them from the Island.

As for Sirisanghabodhi, he was never forgotten. His life was held up as an example to be followed and many pious legends about him developed. From the 7th century right up to the 16th century, a large number of kings took the name Sirisanghabodhi as their throne name.

The place where Sirisanghabodhi had his hermitage is now called Hatthikucchi, meaning "Elephant's Belly." The origins of this unusual name have never been explained. Buddhaghosa mentions Hatthikucchi as one of the most famous monasteries in Sri Lanka along with Mihintale, Situlpahuwa and Dakkhinagiri. Given its fame, it is strange that the place is so rarely mentioned in the records.

The ruins of Hatthikucchi are set amidst huge and strangely shaped rocks and are surrounded by thick forest, making it one of the most beautiful places in Sri Lanka. If one walks into the forests around Hatthikucchi, one will find more ruins and numerous caves used by monks in ancient times.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Ruins*

An ancient pathway runs besides a pond to the monastery's main entrance. On the left are the foundations of two buildings, possibly a library and a chapter house. A little to the left is a large rectangular building of uncertain purpose; this may be the hall which is said to have been built by Aggabodhi I in the 6th century. To the right, besides the big rock, is the hot water bath or steam bath (*jantaghara*) with grindstones for preparing medicines. Nearby, on the big rock, there are several inscriptions. From here a stairway leads up onto terraces, a cave under two boulders, and, to the right, another ancient stairway leading to the ruins of a small stupa on top of the big rock.

The three buildings used for worship are grouped together. The oldest is the pillared semicircular throne temple (*āsanaghara*) that once enshrined a stone throne. It must date from before the introduction of images, perhaps the 1st century BCE. Nearby is the Bodhi Tree Shrine. When this was built, stones with footprints on them from an earlier period were placed around the tree. Right next to this is the stupa that sits on a platform 14 meters square. It is surrounded by three rows of pillars that once supported the roof.

The platform was originally round but was redesigned square in about the 7th century, making it the only square stupa temple in Sri Lanka.

• *The Cave of the Overhanging Rock*

From the stupa, stairs lead up through several terraces. On the right is a cave with a mud brick cell containing a reclining Buddha image that is probably dating from the Kandyan period. From the top terrace, a rough path and stairs lead up to the famous “Cave of the Overhanging Rock.” In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa mentions this cave as an example of a place where the person with a speculative mind would be able to meditate well. There is a deep rock pool in the cave and it offers a fine view over the ruins and the mountains beyond. There are some twenty other caves around Hatthikucchi, prepared between the 2nd century BCE and the 3rd century CE.

HOW TO GET THERE

Hatthikucchi, usually called Rajangane on the maps, is 4 kilometers off the main Kurunegala–Anuradhapura road. Turn off at Mahagalkadawala, about 10 kilometers north of Galgamuwa.

RĀJAGALA

Rājagala, the “Monarch’s Rock” is a rugged and thickly forested mountain situated in the northern part of the district of Ampāra. In ancient times, this southeastern part of Sri Lanka was called Rohana and was often independent from Anuradhapura. Today the area is sparsely populated and rarely visited by outsiders.

All over the northern slopes of Rājagala are the numerous ruins and caves of what must have once been a forest monastery of great importance. Twenty of the caves have inscriptions in them dating from the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE and one of these, now much damaged, seems to state that the mountain’s original name was Dānatissa Pabbata. According to the *Dīpavamsa*, King Gothābhaya, the grandfather of King Saddhātissa and the ruler of Rohana, founded a monastery in his kingdom called Dāna Pabbata. This is possibly the original name of Rājagala. Other than this, we know

nothing about the lives or achievements of the ascetic monks who lived on this mountain for a thousand years.

The ruins of Rājagala are situated in very thick forest and are spread over a wide area. They have never been excavated and thus give an idea how many of Sri Lanka's ancient monuments must have looked just a hundred years ago.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Ruins*

From the northern end of the village of Bakkiella, an unpaved road turning into a path goes through the jungle to the foot of Rājagala. From there a stairway leads upwards past huge boulders and pristine jungle. The stairway has been much dislodged over the centuries by tree roots and it is a strenuous 45 minute climb to the top. From the summit, the pilgrim proceeds through the jungle before emerging onto an open rocky area that slopes gradually downwards. The view is magnificent—to the north is an unbroken carpet of jungle stretching away to the horizon and to the west is the spectacular and appropriately named peak called Friars Hood (Valimbehela), some 658 meters high.

Further down the slope are the ruins of about ten temples, their pillars leaning at various angles and their steps, balustrades and moonstones hidden in the grass. There are also two natural rock ponds with the ruins of a large stupa and another temple next to them. From there a stairway cut into the side of a boulder leads the pilgrim back into the jungle. In a small clearing is a most interesting and unusual object—a huge block of stone some 4 meters long lying on the ground with a Buddha statue carved out of it. The unique thing about this image is that it is half finished; it is the outline of a Buddha only. All the lines on the statue are straight and at right angles to each other and there are no details. It seems that apprentice sculptors did the work up to this stage and the master was supposed to round it off, fill in the details and do the finishing touches—in this case he never completed the job.

In the jungle beyond this image are more structures, in particular a large stupa, probably the main one in the complex. Treasure hunters have recently dug a huge hole in this stupa and stolen its relic casket. In a cave near the stupa is a long inscription

from the reign of King Mahinda II stating that certain lands were given to the Arittha Vehera and the income from them was to be used to provide milk, curd and ghee for the monks. A large stone throne lies near the stupa.

From here, a processional path curbed with large stones and with temples on either side leads to what appear to have been a large square. An area of exposed stone has another long inscription on it in letters from the 8th century and on the far side of this is yet another interesting object—a huge stone bowl.

Right up to the Kandyan period similar bowls, although usually made out of clay or bronze, were common in temples and were used to place the first rice of the harvest as an offering to the Buddha. This bowl is beautifully worked and is no more than 7 centimeters thick. Near it are the fragments of a second bowl of similar size. Nearby spring water trickles out of a stone spout carved as in the form of a *makara*.

There are numerous other ruins in the area and it can be worthwhile spending time just wandering around. However, be careful, the jungle is very thick and it is easy to get lost. Moreover, the whole of Rājagala is the haunt of elephants and bears.

HOW TO GET THERE

The nearest village to Rājagala is Bakkiella, which is on the main road Maha Oya–Ampāra road, some 25 kilometers north of Ampāra. The ruins are difficult to find and it will be necessary to take a guide from the village.

RITIGALA

Ritigala Mountain is almost 800 meters high, 6 kilometers long and lies roughly in a north-south direction. It is the highest mountain in central northern Sri Lanka and in the rainy season its summit is often shrouded in mist and cloud.

The modern name Ritigala is derived from the ancient name mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa*: Arittha Pabbata, *pabbata* meaning “a mountain” and *arittha* meaning “dreadful,” or alternatively “safety.” Both names would be applicable to the mountain, its dark forests and huge boulders inspiring fear in the superstitious while at the

same time providing a good hiding place for anyone fleeing danger. It could also be related to the Sanskrit word *arishtha* meaning “medicinal plant” as the mountain is well-known for rare medicinal herbs.

We are told that Pandukābhaya in the 3rd century BCE and Jetthatissa in the 7th century CE hid out at Ritigala while they were preparing to make their bids for the throne. Some authorities say that the mountain is named after Arittha, one of Devānampiyatissa’s chief ministers who went as envoy to King Asoka to arrange for Sanghamittā and the Bodhi Tree to come to Lankā.

In the great Hindu epic *Rāmāyana*, the Ritigala Mountain is described as “a lordly mountain ... covered with blue woods of tall trees and with the clouds lying around its peaks.” It was from here, says the epic, that Hanuman leapt back to India to tell Rāma that his kidnapped wife Sītā had been found.

There are at least seventy caves at Ritigala. They were prepared for monks between the 1st century BCE and the early centuries CE. An inscription in one of these caves mentions that King Lañjakatissa the brother of Dutthagāmani gifted it and the first monastery at Ritigala was probably founded by him. The *Cūlavamsa* tells us that King Sena I built a monastery here for the Pamsukūlika monks and provided it with numerous slaves and servants. It is the ruins of this monastery that one sees today.

Sometime during the 8th century a group of monks broke away from the Abhayagiri and called themselves the Pamsukūlikas, that is “Rag-robe Wearers.” Wearing robes made out of rags, usually shrouds picked up from cemeteries, is one of the thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutanga*) allowed by the Buddha. The fact that the Pamsukūlikas chose this name for themselves suggests that they were reformers, probably protesting against what they saw as the comfort and indolence of the city monks. However, the remains of the Pamsukūlika’s monasteries suggest that they were something more than just a “back to the forest movement.”

All of their monasteries have certain mysterious features unique in Sri Lankan monastic architecture: long paved paths often with roundabouts in them, large stone-lined and stepped reservoirs and strangest of all, the so-called double platforms. These platforms are made out of huge slabs of beautifully cut stone and always occur in pairs and are joined by a bridge. They are usually built on natural rock foundations and are always aligned in the same direction. Near

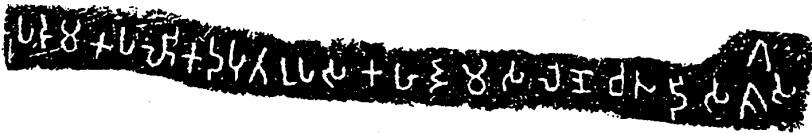
the platforms is often found a so-called urinal stone, some of which are elaborately decorated. In fact, these “urinal stones” are usually the only things in Pamsukūlika monasteries with any decorations on them at all. Further, no stupas, temples or images have ever been found at Pamsukūlika sites. These mysterious features have so far defied all attempts to explain them. They were probably related to some practices or rituals that the Pamsukūlikas did, but what these were no one knows.

For at least two centuries, the Pamsukūlikas commanded enormous respect from both kings and commoners. We read that one king offered them robes made out of his own cloth of gold royal vestments and the *Cūlavamsa* lists some of the rare and expensive delicacies they were fed. Sena Ilanga, general of king Kassapa IV, even distributed food and clothing to the mothers of Pamsukūlika monks.

All this attention had a mellowing affect on these ascetics and eventually corrupted them. Over the centuries, they accumulated vast estates and their asceticism gradually became more symbolic than real. In the 12th century, they split into two rival sects. During the reign of Vijayabāhu I, they left Polonnaruwa in a huff when their wealth was confiscated as a part of the king’s attempts to reform and unite the Sangha. After that, we hear no more of them.

Pamsukūlika monasteries have been found at Maradangkadawala, Budugala, Sivalukanda, Mullegala and Veherabandigala as well as at several places dealt with in this book: Kaludiya Pokuna, Arankele and the Western Monasteries at Anuradhapura.

The ruins at Ritigala comprise nearly fifty double platforms and other buildings and cover an area of about 50 hectares. It can be worthwhile just following any path one happens to find and see where it leads. However, be careful, the jungle is very thick and it is easy to get lost. Be careful also of elephants and snakes—particularly adders, which remain still when approached and thus are easy to walk on.



Inscription from a drip ledge at Ritigala

To the left of the parking area at Ritigala a rough path leads for about a kilometer through the jungle to a forest monastery several caves where some monks are living. This is a properly functioning meditation monastery so if you do decide to visit please maintain an attitude of quiet respect.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Banda Pokuna*

This huge man-made reservoir was created by building a bund across a valley down which two streams flow from the mountain. The reservoir has a circumference of 366 meters and its inside is lined with stones meant to protect it and to serve as steps for bathers. The top of the bund is also paved with large stones. Before being breached, this reservoir would have held about 2 million gallons of water. Ritigala's monks would have used this water for drinking and bathing, but they probably also earned an income from it by channeling it to farmers. The path to the ruins runs along the southern bank of the reservoir, crosses a bridge, passes a roundabout and then leads to the first buildings.

- *The Refectory*

Turning right, the pilgrim will come to the main refectory. This large rectangular building has a sunken and paved courtyard in its centre with pillars around it. Note the several types of grindstones and the stone trough. As there were no villages nearby, the monks could not go begging every day to get their food. Devotees probably donated raw rice that was cooked by the monastery staff and then offered to the monks. Recently, the archeologist Gamani Wijasuriya has suggested that this building and several like it at other sites is actually a bathhouse (*jantaghara*). If this is so, it is difficult to understand why the Pamsukūlikas bothered to construct such a large bathing reservoir just nearby.

- *The Ruins*

Just near the refectory is a large area enclosed by a wall made of huge finely cut and dressed slabs of stone. Within this area are two pairs of double platforms. Note how perfectly the stones fit together. These seem to have been the monastery's main reception buildings. On the northern end of the enclosure wall is a path that

leads down a ravine to a river where there is a stone bridge and a bathing place. Return to near the northwest corner of the enclosed area and you will see a path leading westward through very thick forest. This path runs for about 300 meters and has several flights of stairs to allow for the incline and, more difficult to explain, two roundabouts. The first of these roundabouts, roughly halfway along the path, is the largest, while the second smaller one is towards the end of the path. A little before the first roundabout a rough path leads off to the left to an unrestored double platform, giving some idea how the ruins looked before they were first discovered. Further along is a deep ravine spanned by a bridge leading to yet two more platforms perched on the top of a boulder.

- *The Summit*

If one is particularly enthusiastic and energetic, one might like to climb to the summit of Ritigala. From the last mentioned ruins, a rough path leads upward through thick jungle with many huge old trees. In places, there are alternative paths, but they all lead to the summit. Towards the top, the path becomes very steep and there are ancient steps cut into the rock to assist the final ascent. There are a few ruins on the summit and the view is breathtaking. The whole climb should take about 2 hours.

HOW TO GET THERE

The turnoff to Ritigala is 42 kilometers south of Anuradhapura and 14 kilometers from Habarana. The turnoff is between the 6 and 7 kilometer posts just after the village of Ganewalpola. From the turnoff, it is about 9 kilometers to the ruins over an unpaved road. No buses ply the road.

SĪTULPAHUWA

The southeastern corner of Sri Lanka is one of the driest, most desolate and remote regions in the country and much of it now forms the Yāla National Park. It was in this unpromising place that one of the Buddhist world's most famous and influential monastic communities once flourished.

The Buddha called his teaching the Middle Way (*majjhima patipada*) meaning that it avoided both self-mortification and self-indulgence. However, some monks and nuns had a leaning to asceticism, so the Buddha allowed them to practice quite rigorous austerities on the understanding that these were not compulsory and that they did not necessarily make a monk or nun better than those who were not practicing them.

The modern name Sītulpahuwa is derived from the ancient name Cittalapabbata, "Hill of the Quiet Mind." The first monastery here was founded by Kākavannatissa, the king of Rohana, in the 2nd century BCE. Unlike the great monasteries in Anuradhapura and other towns, life at Sītulpahuwa was hard and a monk or nun who lived there was mainly interested in solitude and simplicity. From a very early period, Sītulpahuwa earned the reputation of being the abode of saints and the commentaries are record many of their sayings and doings.

Once a monk named Tissa who was living together with his teacher at Tissamahārāma became disappointed with the monastic life and decided to disrobe. He told the teacher of his intention and the teacher agreed to let him go, but added, "First though, take me to Sīthulpahuva. There is not enough water here for either drinking or washing." The teacher was a skillful and perceptive old man and knew that if his pupil were only to stay a little longer and try a little harder he might become enlightened. So, without trying to convince his student to stay, he said to him, "I need somewhere to stay, but I'm getting too old to build anything for myself. So can you prepare a cave for me?" The student agreed and the teacher added, "Don't forget to do it mindfully." The young monk did as he was asked and then went to report to his teacher who said, "You must be tired after all that work. Lie down and rest for a while before you go. The student agreed to this and went to the hut to prepare his bedding, which he did mindfully and in the morning, having developed

mindfulness fully in his meditation, he became enlightened.

Another interesting story in the *Visuddhimagga* tells of Indian man named Visākha who came to Sri Lanka with the intention of becoming a monk. During his five years training in Anuradhapura, he developed into an exceptionally good monk with a reputation for gentleness and kindness. Having completed his training he decided to go wayfaring, staying in each monastery for four months and then moving on. Eventually Visākha heard about Sītulpahuwa and decided to make his way there. He stopped at a fork in the road hesitating over which turn to take when a god who lived in a nearby rock suddenly appeared and pointed out the right way.

After having been in Sītulpahuwa for four months, one night, as he lay in his bed, Visākha decided that he would continue his wayfaring the next morning. Suddenly he heard a sound like someone crying. "Who is that?" he called out. "It is I, the god Maniliyā," came the reply. "Why are you crying?" Visākha asked. "Because you are leaving," replied the god who was living in the tree at the end of the walking path. "Why should my leaving be of any interest to you?" "Because", said the god, "since you have been here even we gods have stopped quarreling with each other." Having heard this Visākha decided to stay for another four months. When the time was up and he was about to leave, the same thing happened and again he postponed his departure. This happened repeatedly and when Visākha eventually attained enlightenment, he was still at Sītulpahuwa.

We are told that at one time there were twelve thousand monks at Sītulpahuwa, which might sound like an exaggeration. However, as there are more than a hundred and sixty caves in the area, some of them quite large, there may well have been hundreds of monastics living here at any one time.

WHAT TO SEE

• *Mahā Sītulpahuwa Stupa*

The first thing the pilgrim will see on arriving at Sītulpahuwa is a long high hummock with a stupa on top. The stupa dates from the 3rd century CE and was renovated in the 1950s. Ancient stairs partly cut into the rock at each end of the hummock lead up to the stupa. Near the stairs on the southern end are two inscriptions, one

by King Ilanāga and the other by King Gajabāhu both recording gifts made to the monks of Sītulpahuwa. On the north end of the hummock are a series of terraces with the ruins of monastic buildings on them. On the west side of the hummock is a large pond full of lotuses. At the end of this pond, just below the modern monastery, is what must be the most ancient and most beautiful tamarind tree in Sri Lanka. The monks throw all their rubbish under the tree, but even this cannot diminish its majesty.

• *The Main Cave*

On the east side of the hummock is the largest of Sītulpahuwa's numerous caves. This was probably the monastery's chapter house or temple, now it has several modern images in it. A few fragments of paintings can still be seen on the roof of the cave near the drip ledge, the colors still remarkably bright. In front of the cave is a small modern pavilion housing two images, the one on the right being one of the most outstanding sculptures from ancient Sri Lanka.

The image is of Avalokitesvara and despite missing its arms and being very symmetrically conceived, it still conveys tremendous warmth, grace and dignity. Dating from the 7th century, it shows that there were at least some Mahāyanists at Sītulpahuwa at that time. The other image has both its head and arms missing, but has elaborate cloths and jewelry. If the two images were a pair, which seems likely, this second one was probably of Maitreya and the two of them may have been originally placed on either side of a Buddha image.

• *The Āsana*

Below the terrace in front of the cave are the ruins of two temples. The first is unusual in that it has a moonstone at the foot of the stairs and another one inside the doorstep. The second temple was a Bodhi tree shrine. It consists of a large rectangular courtyard paved with stones and surrounded with a wall. In front of where the Bodhi tree once grew, is an *āsana* on a low brick plinth.

There is a story in the *Visuddhimagga* about an *āsana* at Sītulpahuwa. Apparently, a monk named Cittagutta saw a yellow Pattanga flower being offered on a throne and this became a mental *kasina* for him, allowing him to attain an exalted state of concentration. As this *āsana* is very old and each monastery had only

one, this is almost certainly the one mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga*.

• *The Caves*

There are many caves around Sītulpahuwa, sixty-one of them with inscriptions dating from the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE. To find some of these caves, just follow the paths through the jungle. However, it is unwise to be in the jungle after dusk as there are elephants, leopards and bears in the area. It is also inadvisable to bath in the ponds in the area as they all have crocodiles in them.

• *The Ākāsa Cetiya*

There is a fine view from the Mahā Sītulpahuwa Stupa. To the southeast is the ocean. If the pilgrim comes up here early in the morning when the air is very still, he or she may actually be able to hear the waves crashing on the beach.

About 4 kilometers to the southeast, the pilgrim will also see a prominent rock rising out of the jungle. This is the Ākāśacetiya, the “Stupa in the Sky,” sometimes mentioned in the commentaries. For a thousand years, this rock and the stupa on its top were well-known to seafarers sailing past the southern end of Sri Lanka. The Ākāśacetiya is a high steep-sided rock with the ruins of a large stupa and several monastic buildings on its top. In ancient times ascetic monks lived on the top of this rock completely cut off from the world below. Notice that there is no stairs leading up the sides of the rock. I suggest that the monks used to lower a basket and hoist up visitors similar to the way still done in the monasteries on Mt Athos in Greece. There are several caves and the ruins of another stupa on the outcrop next to Ākāśacetiya. A rough path leads through the jungle from Sītulpahuwa to the Ākāśacetiya, but one must exercise great caution taking it because there are many dangerous animals in the area.

HOW TO GET THERE

Sītulpahuwa is inside the boundary of the Yāla National Park and is 12 kilometers from Kataragama and about 20 kilometers from Tissamahārāma. The road within the Park is unpaved, but in good condition in the dry season.



MISCELLANEOUS PLACES

DĪGHAVĀPI

According to the *Dīpavamsa*, Dīghavāpi was sanctified by the Buddha during his third visit to Sri Lanka. It is one of the sixteen sacred places. The name Dīghavāpi literally means “long reservoir,” although it is probably a derivative of Dīghāyu, the name of one of the ministers of King Panduvāsudeva.

Despite its significance, Dīghavāpi’s popularity seems to have faded after the 3rd or 4th centuries CE and today it only attracts a few pilgrims. In the past it was a major city. King Saddhātissa, the son of Devānampiyatissa, built the stupa here, which subsequently was repaired and enlarged several times.

The *Samyutta Nikāya* commentary mentions that once a young monk was repairing the plasterwork on the stupa when he slipped and fell. He immediately began to chant the Dhajagga Sutta, reknown for its protective qualities, and was miraculously saved as a result.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Stupa*

The Dīghavāpi stupa was in ruin for a thousand years. In the 1920s attempts were made to repair it, although these repairs were never finished. There are *vāhalkadas* at the four cardinal points around the stupa and also several small shrines with images in them, all ruined. There are also several very ancient *āsanas* and stones with footprints on them.

HOW TO GET THERE

Ampāra is the nearest main town to Dīghavāpi. From Ampāra take the road to Irakkāmam and then proceed for another 5 kilometers—a total distance of about 20 kilometers. Beyond Irakkāmam, the road is very poor and there are no buses. At the time of writing Dīghavāpi was an insecure area.

KANTARODAI

In the early 20th century there were still numerous Buddhist remains in the Jaffna Peninsula, but these have now nearly all disappeared due to neglect, pilfering or deliberate destruction for political reasons. For example, a large and very beautiful Buddha image from the north of the peninsula was given to the king of Thailand when he visited Sri Lanka towards the end of the 19th century and now sits in the Royal Palace in Bangkok.

One place where extensive Buddhist ruins can still be seen is at Kantarodai a little to the north of Jaffna. On the side of a grove of lovely palm trees, are a collection of stupas, mounds and the remains of ancient buildings. Kantarodai was probably a monastery for Tamil monks, although some have argued against this. However, Buddhism was once widespread in South India in ancient times and there is no reason to doubt that some Tamils living in Sri Lanka were Buddhists too. The stupas at Kantarodai are certainly different from those found in other parts of Sri Lanka. Further archaeological investigation may settle the issue one way or the other and perhaps the site's original name will be discovered.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Stupas*

There are now twenty complete stupas at Kantarodai, but judging by the numerous pinnacles in the Jaffna Museum that were picked up in the area there were probably once many more. The largest stupa is about 7 meters in diameter and the smallest is about 4 meters. The base of each stupa is made of coral stone molded into four bands and the domes are made of coral rubble coated with plaster fashioned to look like blocks of stone. The *hamakas* and spires are made of stone, sometimes a single piece, sometimes of two pieces, with the pinnacle fitting into a hole in the *hamaka*.

Archeological investigations done at Kantarodai in 1966–7 found that the site was inhabited from about the 2nd century BCE to about the 13th century CE. When P. E. Pieris came here in 1917, he found several Buddha images. He also noted that locals were regularly removing stones from the site to use for building purposes. Not far from Kantarodai at Chunnākam, there were the

extensive ruins of a stupa and monastery and several large Buddha images, but these have all disappeared now.

HOW TO GET THERE

Take the Chunnākam road which runs directly north from Jaffna and ask to be put off at the Kantarodai–Upathiyayor Road turnoff which is about 2 kilometers past Chunnākam. From there it is about a one kilometer walk to the ruins. The total distance from Jaffna is about 10 kilometers.

KIRIVEHERA

Today Kataragama is without any doubt the most visited religious site in Sri Lanka. Every year millions of Hindus, Buddhists and even Muslims converge on the town to worship at the shrine of Skanda, the Hindu god of war. However, it is also the site of one of the sixteen sacred places, the Kirivehera.

WHAT TO SEE

• *The Kirivehera Stupa*

Entering the Kataragama sacred area and passing the Skanda Kōvil (shrine), the pilgrim will come to a long processional road at the very end of which is the dazzling white Kirivehera Stupa. According to the *Dhātuvamsa*, during his third visit to Sri Lanka, the Buddha briefly stopped where the stupa now stands before proceeding to Tissamahārāma. In all the ancient sources, the Kirivehera is called Magul Mahā Seya and it is not clear how, when or why the present name, meaning “Milk Stupa”, came into use.

Legend says that the stupa enshrines the sword Prince Siddhartha used to cut off his hair with at the time of his renunciation and that King Dappula I built a monastery here. The Kirivehera stands on a terrace 40 meters square and 3 meters high. There is a large image popularly believed to be of King Mahāsena here, but it is probably of a bodhisattva dating from 8th century. We know from an inscription found on the site that Dāthika, one of the Tamil kings of Sri Lanka in the first century BCE, made gifts to Kirivehera. Another inscription, on one of the paving stones of the

terrace, mentions that in the 4th century a monk named Nanda renovated the stupa and built stairways on each side of the terrace. A short inscription on one of the pillars dated 924 from the reign of Dappula III records various gifts to monks. After being in ruins for a thousand years, the Kirivehera was renovated in 1912.

HOW TO GET THERE

Kataragama is 17 kilometers from Tissamahārāma and is easily reached from there by a good road to Buttala.

KUDUMBIGALA

This remote and ancient site is set amongst some of the most beautiful and dramatic scenery in Sri Lanka. It seems to have first become a hermitage in the 1st century BCE, although nothing is known about its subsequent history. Kudumbigala is still a functional monastery for monks wanting to live in solitude and practice meditation, so please respect the quiet atmosphere of the place and do not visit any of the inhabited areas and caves without being invited to do so.

If you intend to visit Kudumbigala, you will have to bring your own food as the monastery is not able to provide for visitors. The nearest habitation is the Kataragama shrine and the Yala East national park entrance on the coast at Okanda, about 4 km away. It is recommended to go to Kudumbigala with a local guide.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Hermitage and Ruins*

From the car park and kitchen, a path leads over the rocks and through the jungle to an open area with a cave temple at its far end. A rough path on the right leads to a vast area of sloping rock with stairs cut into it. After a very strenuous climb, the pilgrim will arrive at the highest point around Kudumbigala. There are three stupas on the summit, one of them recently partially renovated. The view is spectacular, especially towards the east, where one can see huge rocky peaks and stretches of lonely beach with the Indian Ocean beyond. From the summit you can also see the monastery

area where the monks live and meditate. In this area are numerous ruins, huge strangely shaped boulders, rock pools, caves and picturesque areas of forest. Please don't go to go here without permission. If you are really interested to visit this area, your guide could arrange it.

There are elephants, bears and leopards around Kudumbigala, so be careful while walking around, particularly at dusk. Also be careful when climbing on the steep boulders, especially when it is rainy, as they can be quite slippery and dangerous.

HOW TO GET THERE

Kudumbigala is about 30 kilometers south of Potuvil. Beyond Pānama, the road is bad and can only be traversed by a four-wheeled drive vehicle during the wet season.

MAHIYANGANA

According to legend, the Buddha visited Mahiyangana nine months after his enlightenment on the full moon of Phussa (Dec-Jan). Foreseeing that the Dhamma would become established in Lanka, he came to dispel the troublesome spirits and preach to the gods. As he was about to leave, Samanta who had become a Stream Enterer, begged him to give him and the other gods something to remember him by and so the Buddha gave him a few hairs from his head. Samanta placed these in a golden urn, which he then enshrined in a stupa of blue sapphire seven cubits high.

The *Mahāvamsa* says that after the Buddha's cremation a monk named Sarabhū took some ashes from the pyre and brought them to Sri Lanka, where he deposited them in the sapphire stupa and then encased it in brick and stone. This, according to the legend, is the stupa that we see at Mahiyangana today. Moving from legend to history, the *Mahāvamsa* says that at the time of Devānampiyatissa Prince Udaya Cūlābhaya enlarged the stupa making it thirty cubits high and Dutthagāmanī enlarged it further. The saintly Sirisanghabodhi was born in Mahiyangana, supposedly within sight of the stupa.

An inscription dating from the 10th century gives an example of the unexpected benefits of pilgrimage. When King Udaya IV visited Mahiyangana on pilgrimage, some of his subjects begged an

audience with him and then informed him of numerous malpractices in the local market. The king consequently ordered his officers to draw up new regulations for the better running of the market. On the orders of Vijayabāhu I, the stupa underwent major renovations in the 11th century. Several of the kings of Kandy made pilgrimages to Mahiyangana; King Narendrasingha went twice and King Viravikrama performed the whole pilgrimage on foot.

By the 19th century, the stupa and most of the shrines around it were in a very dilapidated state and in 1949 a society was formed to restore them. The Department of Archaeology was invited to do a thorough investigation of the stupa before it was repaired. The relic chamber was opened and its walls were found to be covered with paintings, their colors as fresh as if they had just been done. The paintings show the Buddha being tempted by Māra as he sits under the Bodhi Tree. Other paintings show Brahma, Siva, Vishnu and other gods. The relic chamber is thought to date from Vijayabāhu's renovations and has now been reassembled in the Anuradhapura Museum.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Stupa and Surroundings*

The Mahiyangana stupa has undergone major renovations over the centuries and nothing of historical interest is to be seen there today. However, the stupa is very beautifully situated on the banks of the Mahāveli River. It is surrounded by a pleasant park full of huge old trees and its white dome stands out dramatically against the blue mountains behind it. A little north of the stupa is an ancient Bodhi tree, its branches so long that they rest on the ground. Nearby are several temples, including one dedicated to the god Samanta.

HOW TO GET THERE

As the Kandy–Mahiyangana road leaves the mountains and descends to the plain, it drops several hundreds of meters in just a short distance. The road has seventeen hairpin bends on it and offers a wonderful view over the countryside below. By road, Mahiyangana is 68 kilometers from Kandy.

NĀGADĪPA

Nayinativu is one of the smallest inhabited islands in the Gulf of Mannar and is only about 50 kilometers from India. Merchants have long come here and the surrounding islands to buy the conch shells that are harvested in the warm shallow waters in the Gulf. The conch shell is essential for some Hindu and Buddhist rituals and a particularly perfect specimen or one spiraling to the right can fetch an enormous price.

Pilgrims have also been coming to Nayinativu since about the 1st century CE to worship at its famous stupa. In the *Mahāvamsa*, the island is one of the sixteen sacred places. The Tamil Buddhist epic *Manimekhalai* mentions a gem-studded throne and a stone with the Buddha's footprints on it at Nāgadīpa that pilgrims from India used to come and worship. The heroine of the epic is described as wandering amongst the island's "long sandy dunes and lagoons."

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Nāgapusaniaman Kōvil*

As the boat approaches the main jetty, the pilgrim will see the distinctive red and white-striped walls of the Hindu temple. Although there has been a temple here for many centuries, the present one is not old and is of no particular historical interest. However, on either side of the side entrance to the temple there are two very ancient objects.

On the left, as you enter, is a large stone with an inscription of Parakkamabāhu I on it. In the first part of this inscription, the king says that foreigners coming into the country should enter only at Uraturai (Kayts) and that they should be given any help they might be in need of. This undoubtedly refers to merchants and pilgrims from India. The second part details what measures should be taken if ships transporting elephants or horses or merchant ships are wrecked. On the right of the entrance is a large lifesaver shaped stone—an ancient anchor similar to the ones Arab ships used to carry.

• *Nāgadīpa Vihāra*

Less than half a kilometer down the road from the temple is Nāgadīpa Vihāra, marking the place where the Buddha is supposed to have stayed during his visit to the small island. On one side of the road is a Bodhi tree and on the other is the monastery with its silver painted stupa. There are two temples as well, one containing a bronze Buddha image donated by the Burmese government in 1956. Nothing at Nāgadīpa is of any aesthetic or historical interest, everything having been built in the 1950s.

HOW TO GET THERE

Half the enjoyment of a pilgrimage to Nāgadīpa is actually getting there. The road from Jaffna runs across a long causeway to the island of Kayts from where another causeway leads to Punkudutivu. The landscape is flat and sandy, dotted with numerous palm trees and completely different from everywhere else in Sri Lanka. On the far side of this second island, pilgrims must take a boat to Nayinativu where there are two jetties, one at the Hindu temple and another at Nāgadīpa Vihāra. If most of the passengers are Hindus, the boat stops at the former; and if most are Buddhists, it stops at the latter. Public and private buses run regularly from Jaffna to Punkudutivu and the boat is timed to leave just after the bus arrives. The total distance from Jaffna is 30 kilometers. At the time of writing, it was possible to get to Nāgadīpa, but this may change according to political developments.

SASSERUWA

Sasseruwa, sometimes also known as Rasseruva or Res Vehera, is situated at the foot of two large rugged and thickly forested hills, Mahākanda and Kudakanda. There are forty-two caves on the first hill and nineteen on the second, about half of them with inscriptions dating from the 1st century BCE onwards. Obviously, Sasseruwa must have been the site of a very substantial monastery in ancient times, although nothing at all is known about its history.

Sasseruwa is most well-known today for its huge Buddha image, which is somewhat reminiscent of the one at Avukana,

which is only 10 kilometers away over the mountains. Local legend says that the sculptor made the Sasseruwa image first and, having perfected his skills, then made the Avukana image. It is an interesting story, but no more than that.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Great Image*

The main point of interest at Sasseruwa is its huge Buddha image. This image stands at the top of a flight of stairs and is carved out of a shallow niche in an impressively high cliff. Unlike the Avukana image, this one is less well sculptured, almost completely joined to the rock behind it and less well preserved. It is also just a few inches shorter.

- *The Temples*

To the left of the path leading up to the great image is a boulder with a cave beneath it in which shelter two temples, one built at a higher level than the other. Kīrti Srī Rājasimgha built these temples in the late 18th century and they contain interesting paintings from that period. At the entrance of the upper temple is a moonstone dating from about the 7th century. It has four concentric bands on it, a flowering lotus in the first and animals in the outermost one—an elephant, a horse, a lion, a bull and what looks like a goat.

HOW TO GET THERE

Sasseruwa is about 18 kilometers off the main Kurunegala–Anuradhapura road. The turnoff is in Galgamuwa town. No buses go to Sasseruwa.

TISSAMAHĀRĀMA

In ancient times, the southeast region of Sri Lanka was known as Rohana and was often independent from Anuradhapura. The capital of the principality was Mahāgama, now known as Tissamahārāma, which was in some ways was a smaller version of Anuradhapura. At present, archaeologists are excavating the citadel and have located both its north and east gates, and also parts of a well-paved road that

ran through the city.

In the middle of Tissamahārāma is the picturesque Tissawewa, its clear blue waters stretching towards the mountains beyond it. On the eastern end of the reservoir is a small island where numerous birds congregate and on the other end are some of the largest and most majestic Māra trees one is likely to see anywhere.

WHAT TO SEE

- *The Yatāla Stupa and the Menik Stupa*

A short distance beyond the western end of the reservoir is the Yatāla Stupa, which has recently been renovated. Popular tradition says this stupa was built over the place where Yatthālayatissa, the son of King Mahānāga, was born, but this has not been verified by archaeologists.

Efforts to restore the stupa were begun in 1883, but were not completed until a hundred years later. During explorations inside the stupa, three small exquisite caskets were found, one of chrysoberyl, one of amethyst and another of purple crystal. The stupa is surrounded by a paved courtyard on which there are the ruins of seven shrines, one with a Buddha image in it and another with a very fine image of a bodhisattva. Surrounding the whole complex is what appears to be a moat, but it is actually a flooded area due to a rise in the water table.

Right next to the stupa is a museum, small, but well worth seeing. The most interesting exhibit is the torso of the Buddha with its arms crossed. There is also the head of a bodhisattva, several inscriptions and a very elaborate toilet.

In the grounds of the modern monastery across the road from the Yatāla Stupa is a most interesting *āsana*. Measuring 5.3 meters by 2.1, this is the largest *āsana* in Sri Lanka. One can only wonder how ancient stonemasons were able to cut such huge pieces of stone and then transport and dress them without breaking them. Further down the road is the smallest stupa at Tissamahārāma, the Menik Stupa. This stupa has been renovated in such a way as to destroy all ancient traces.

- *The Akaugoda Inscription*

Crossing the bund, turning left and then taking the small road on the right, the pilgrim will come to a fine stone pillar. The pillar is

nine meters high with octagonal sides gradually sloping inwards towards the top. On one side of the pillar is an inscription.

• *Tissamahārāma Stupa*

Returning to the bund and taking the lower road the pilgrim arrives at the great Tissamahārāma Stupa with its distinctive conical pinnacle. This stupa was built in the 2nd century BCE by Kākavannatissa, one of the early rulers of Rohana.

Popular tradition says that one of the Buddha's bones is enshrined in the stupa, but a very ancient inscription from nearby Kirinda says that the stupa enshrines a tooth from the Buddha's lower jaw. This shows that the Buddhists of Rohana had their own Tooth Relic even before the arrival of the more famous relic now in Kandy. The stupa underwent major renovations in 1900, obscuring everything from ancient times other than a few large paving stones.

• *Sandagiri Stupa*

Within sight of the Tissamahārāma Stupa is a much smaller one, now called Sandagiri. This stupa's original name was Chandagiri and some ancient records attribute its building to King Mahānāga and others to Kākavannatissa. Certainly, it was built before 1st century BCE. An inscription found on the site mentions that King Vasabha of Rohana (67–111 CE) erected a *sīmā* here and according to the *Cūlavamsa*, the stupa was repaired by Vijayabāhu in the 11th century.

The stupa, which is still ruined, sits on a raised terrace that is approached by four stairways. At each of the four cardinal points around the stupa are small shrines containing stone *āsanas*. The *āsana* on the east side is a masterpiece of the stonemason's art. It is 3.65 meters by 1.52 and has an almost mirror-like polish.

HOW TO GET THERE

Tissamahārāma is roughly half way between Hambantota and Kataragama and is easily reached by good roads from both places.

DATES OF MONARCHS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

Aggabodhi II	604–614
Aggabodhi IV	667–683
Bhātikābhaya	22 BCE–7 CE
Bhuvanekabāhu I	1272–1284
Bhuvanekabāhu VI	1470–1478
Bhuvanekabāhu VII	1521–1551
Buddhadāsa	337–365
Dappula I	659
Devānaṃpiyatissa	250–210 BCE
Dhātusena	455–473
Don Juan Dharmapāla	1551–1597
Duṭṭhagāmaṇi	161–137 BCE
Eāāra	205–161 BCE
Gajabāhu II	1132–1153
Goṭhābhaya	249–262
Jeṭṭhatissa I	263–273
Kaṇiṭṭhatissa	167–186
Kaṇirājanutissa	29–32
Kassapa I	473–491
Kassapa V	914–923
Kīrti Śrī Rājasīṅgha	1747–1782
Kuṭṭhakaṇṇatissa	44–22 BCE
Laṅkatissa	119–109 BCE
Lilāvati	1197–1200, 1209–1211
Mahānama	406–428
Mahāsena	274–301
Mahinda II	730–733
Mahinda IV	956–972

Mahinda V	982–1029
Narindasiha (Narendrasimha)	1707–1739
Nissaṅkamalla	1187–1196
Paṇḍuvāsudeva	4th cent BCE
Parakkamabāhu I	1153–1186
Parakkamabāhu II	1236–1270
Parakkamabāhu III	1287–1293
Parakkamabāhu IV	1302–1326
Parakkamabāhu IX	1498–1521
Rājasimgha (Rājasīha) I	1582–1591
Rājasimgha II	1635–1687
Saddhātissa	137–119 BCE
Saṅghatissa I	243–247
Sena I	833–853
Sena II	853–887
Sena III	938–945
Sena IV	954–956
Silāmeghavaṇṇa	617–626
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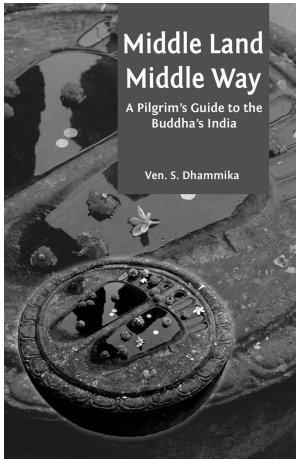
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