

# Quarterly Tours – No. 19



**National Trust – Sri Lanka**

**27th August 2011**

**Compiled by Nilan Cooray**

## **National Trust – Sri Lanka**

***Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2011.***

### **Programme**

0700 hrs.	Leave PGIAR
0745 - 0815 hrs.	Visit National Basilica at Tewatte
1015 –1100 hrs.	Visit the Cathedral of the Anglican Church at Kurunegala
1145 – 1230 hrs.	Visit Ridi Vihara at Ridigama
1245 – 1315 hrs.	Visit Monaragala Vihara, Rambadagalle, Ridigama
1415 – 1530 hrs.	Lunch and visit Ena de Silva Workshop at Matale
1545 – 1630 hrs.	Visit Aluvihara at Matale
1700 – 1730 hrs.	Visit The Gedige, Nalanda
1800- 1830 hrs.	Visit Manikdena Archaeological Site (optional)
2130 hrs.	Arrive PGIAR

*Compiled by Nilan Cooray*

## **National Basilica at Tewatta, Ragama**



The origins of this shrine date back to the beginning of the 20th century, when a little shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes (little Chapel) was erected by a few Catholic laymen and Father A. Kieger OMI, in 1911, the area being then a part of the parish of Ragama. On 11 November 1917, Father A. Collore built a small Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes assisted by some Catholic workers from Colombo. The Chapel was later enlarged to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims.

When World War II was declared in 1939, this Shrine gained prominence because of a vow that the then Archbishop of Colombo, Mgr. Jean Marie Masson, made to Our Lady (26 May 1940), that if the Island was spared the horrors of the War, he would build a Votive Shrine in her honor under the

title of Our Lady of Lanka. The mantle of fulfilling this vow and building the votive Shrine fell on the shoulders of his successor, Archbishop Thomas Cooray, (the first Sri Lankan Archbishop as well as the first Cardinal of Sri Lanka). The construction of the edifice was completed in 1974. The Holy Father Pope Paul VI endowed the Church with the title of a Minor Basilica in 1973. The Basilica was consecrated on 6 February 1974 and Our Lady crowned as Our Lady of Lanka the same day.

When the architectural design for the National Basilica was considered, it was suggested that the architectural form of the edifice should represent a national and regional character while preserving the universal catholic identity. Designed by architect Valentine Gunasekera, the Basilica reflects a unique fusion of the architectural traditions of the Sri Lankan, Indian and the Oriental West.





The raised granite plinth of the Basilica resembles a typical base moulding of the Anuradhapura period and was the contribution of the faithful who donated Rs. 10 for each stone. The front view is that of an Indian temple and the twin towers, common to most churches symbolized the two great commandment of Christianity, the love of God and the love of one's neighbor. There are six pillars facing the front as one climbs the steps leading to the Basilica. These six pillars represent the six dioceses of Sri Lanka, at the time of the war viz. Colombo, Chilaw, Galle, Jaffna, Kandy and Trincomalee. These six dioceses were expected to contribute the cost of a pillar each. The Cross in front that has the figure of Christ in bronze sculptured by the renowned Sri Lankan artist Mrs. Leila Peiris, resembles the same facial expressions of the figure in the shroud of Turin. The central dome resembles that of Santa Sophia in Istanbul which was for long considered oriental architecture.

The tablets made of bronze and fixed to the external facades provides that additional lustre to the Basilica, which is not mere embellishment to the building, but a vital feature to catechize the pilgrims and especially the children, concerning Sri Lanka's catholic past, its Christian heritage and the spiritual contribution to the country's culture.

From the front steps of the right wing of the Basilica, one is able to view the soothing sight of Adam's peak through the early morning mist.



This Basilica is a popular pilgrim destination for the Catholics all over the country and there are arranged services specially meant for the sick and the children on an annual roster. The vast grounds surrounding the Basilica is shaded by the many canopies of tropical trees, and hence the whole ground transforms itself into a camping area for pilgrims during the festive seasons.

## **Cathedral of the Anglican Church at Kurunegala**



Located at the foot of the ‘Elephant Rock’, and facing the Kandy Road, the Cathedral is the Anglican Church of the Kurunegala Diocese which was constructed under the pioneering efforts of Bishop, the Most Reverend Lakdasa de Mel. The edifice was designed by Archt. Wilson Peiris, who was also the architect of the Department of Archaeology.

The Building, together with the adjacent chapels and the sanctuary was erected in stages. The chapel of the Blessed Virgin and St. Thomas the Apostle was consecrated in 1956. The Nave, the font, the pulpit and the lectern was consecrated in 1960.



The architecture of the cathedral is a fusion of the characteristics of the Polonnaruva brick vaulted image houses and of the Kandy Temple of the sacred Tooth-Relic, no doubt, using materials of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as cement and reinforced concrete to reflect an indigenous expression of a universal faith. Crowning the 33 meter tall central tower is a bronze cross.

The crucifix was specially designed to depict Christ in a state of victorious triumph over suffering and the head positioned firm and erect. The brass lamps and the communion rails depict art motifs and lacquer work of Kandyan tradition. The 'Nestorian Cross', discovered in Anuradhapura and attributed to the Persian Christians of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, is also replicated in brass to record the beginnings of Christianity in the Island long before the advent of the European missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup>





century. The Persian Christians introduced the faith to the west coast of India and later spread the message even to China. The 6th century AD account in the *Topographia Christiana XI* by the Greek writer Cosmas Indicopleustes, refers to the Persian community that lived in the city of Anuradhapura.

The flags of the ‘*Dissavannis*’ or of the traditional districts, which constituted the Diocese of Kurunegala, and reproduced by the famous artist Ena de Silva are also displayed on an interior wall of the cathedral. The modern painting that forms the backdrop to the Lady Chapel is the work of Miss N. Jayasuriya. Stone plaques are seen fixed on to the walls of the cathedral and these are from different parts of the world such as Ireland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand etc. symbolizing the union between the communities in a sense of common prayer.

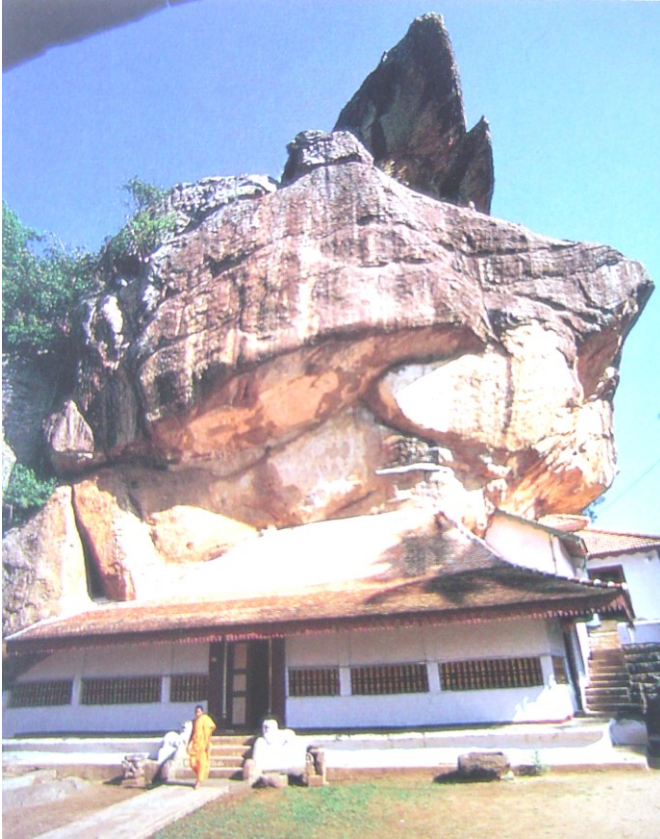
## Ridivihara

Ridivihara is situated in the village of Ridigama, which is about 14 km from Mawatagama on the Kandy-Kurunegala Road. It consists of several rock shelters and traditional buildings situated upon a picturesque hillock.

The history of the site goes back to at least the second century BC as is evidenced by the Brahmi inscriptions in the caves in the range. It is also said to be the site which had provided silver in connection with the building of the Mahathupa by king Dutthagamini in the second century BC, hence the name Ridigama. According to the Culavamsa, Dutthagamini founded a *vihara* and installed a golden image of the Buddha at the site. Apparently, it had remained a significant monastery until the Kandyan period, as is indicated by the ancient remains including a stone Bodhisattva image datable from the seventh-eighth century AD, and a stone Buddha figure of about the same period which has been renovated several times. In



addition, there is a fourteenth century stone shrine displaying architectural and decorative styles similar to those at Yapahuva, which are again stylistically related to the art of Vijayanagar in India.



During the time of Kirtisirajasimha, the temple came into prominence again. It became the residence of the first Mahanayake of the Malwatta Chapter, Tibbotuvave Sri Siddhartha Buddharakkhita thera appointed to that position under the patronage of Valivita Sangharaja.

The shrine complex consists of structures built on the summits of two hillocks. On the lower ridge are the ancient Bodhi tree, an old preaching hall, two rock caves with images as

mentioned in the Culavamsa, a *stupa*, a boulder converted to a stone shrine and two dwelling quarters of the monks.

The cave shrines, described in the chronicle are situated under an overhanging rock at the northern extremity of the lower ridge. The most important unit of the shrine-complex is the larger rock-shelter which has been turned into the main shrine, containing the Buddha images as mentioned in the Culavamsa. These consist of a colossal recumbent image, two seated figures and one standing statue placed against the different walls. Figures of Ananda, Maitri Bodhisatta, Nathadeva and king Dutthagamini are also mentioned in the text, and two of these are in a poor state, where these are possibly on displays as the stone core of a Bodhisattva image of the seventh-eighth century. The standing gilt image of the Buddha, occupying the centre of the shrine, is also referred to in the Culavamsa. A door decorated with beautiful ivory-carvings is also found associated with this cave shrine.



The cave shrine on the upper level has also been the work of Kirtisirirajasimha. The main image inside, is a seated Buddha figure of colossal size flanked by two more in upright posture. In addition, there are two attending figures of Uppalavanna and Maitri Bodhisattva.

### **Monaragala Vihara at Rambadagalle**



Situated on a splendid rock out crop, Monaragala Vihara at Rambadagalle is five kilometers from Ridigama. The popularity of the *vihara* is principally because it will be the location of Sri Lanka's tallest and largest rock cut image of the Samadhi Buddha, which is at present being sculptured on a living rock.

The total height of the image from the base of the lotus pedestal is 67.5 feet, while the lotus pedestal on which the image rests is 60 feet long. The project was started in 2002 and it is expected to be completed around 2012. Ven. Egodamulle Amaramoli Thero, the chief incumbent of the *vihara* is the



initiator of this gigantic undertaking. The total estimate of the project is Rs. 25 million. A team of eleven sculptors from South India, headed by a master sculptor named Muttiah Stapati, has been employed to carry out this project.

### **Ena de Silva Workshop**

Ena de Silva has established herself as a dominant figure in Sri Lanka's batik manufacturing industry since early 1960's due to her innovative designs based on traditional motifs. She started the Matale Heritage Center in 1964 as a batik workshop. The wall hangings of extraordinary compositions and other batik items are well appreciated nationally and internationally. Some of her work constitutes part of the interior décor of many leading hotels and commercial banks.

She also revitalized the local sewing tradition, producing magnificent wall-decorations and highly prized cushion covers and smaller artifacts such as spectacle cases etc.



The hallmark of Ena de Silva is her imaginative and creativity fused with tradition through immense dedication and commitment. Her art work and interior décor could be described as ‘celebratory feminine’, ‘spectacular in vibrancy’, strength and power. Another characteristic feature, throughout her carrier spanning almost half a century, was to take the traditional occupations of the rural women and glorify them with standards of excellence. Therefore, it was together with these rural women that she always initiated something new, while transmitting this knowledge to those who were around her as well.



A visit to Ena de Silva's Workshop at her ancestral house located at the village of Aluvihara will provide the opportunity to see the rural women at work under the guidance of the great lady – producing extraordinary batik work and hand embroidery, and to experience that it is women's work at its best, that is full of joy, beautiful and immensely hard work. It will also give the opportunity to taste the local meals produced according to traditional methods by the local ladies, another initiative of Ena de Silva, in a little cafeteria established within the premises, built in a stunning adaptation of a traditional kitchen, allowing wonderful views covering the central hills in a most peaceful setting.

## Aluvihara



The ancient rock temple of Aluvihara is located about 3 km from Matale on the road to Dambulla. This is the site where the Buddhist monks assembled during the reign of King Valagabahu in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, and the Buddhist texts comprising the *Tripitika*, were first transcribed to *ola* leaves after these were handed down orally for about four centuries, since the passing away of



the Master. It is said that about 500 scholar monks congregated at this site to perform the onerous task of first reciting the doctrine, and then agreeing on an acceptable version before writing these down.

Although the founding of this monastic establishment is traditionally ascribed to the reign of king Valagambahu, the numerous Brahmi inscriptions indicted below the drip-ledged caves records the history of the monastic establishment that goes back to at least the second century BC. Some of these rock-shelters have since been converted to cave shrines, wherein are, Buddhist sculptures and paintings of the Kandyan period. One cave has a 10 m long reclining Buddha image, together with seated and standing images, while the mythical cosmic lake of *Anotappta Vila*, features clearly in the wall paintings.



It is also said that the library at Aluvihara, which had safely housed the volumes of the *Tripitaka* associated with the Buddhist doctrine for so many centuries, was totally destroyed by the British during the Matale Rebellion of 1848. Along with this many edifices of the temple complex were also destroyed.

A visit to the temple museum will provide the members of the National Trust an opportunity to witness the technique of writing on *ola* leaves as carried out through the ages and still being continued by the monks of this historic monastery.

### **Nalanda Gedige**



This is situated half-way between Matale and Dambulla and approached by turning on to a narrow road near the 48<sup>th</sup> km post opposite the Nalanda Rest House on the Matale-Dambulla Road. The Nalanda Gedige is the only extinct Buddha image house in Sri Lanka built in the Pallava architectural tradition of Mahabalipuram of South India. Although the ancient name of the site is still unknown, at present it is known as the ‘*Gedige*’ because the whole structure from the foundation up to the roof has been constructed out of a single material, and in this case, crystalline limestone, which is commonly found in the area.

Although the ground plan of the shrine follows the typical ancient Sri Lankan Buddhist image houses and laid out in the sequence of the entrance porch, the vestibule and the inner chamber, arranged in a single axis, its superstructure assumes the design of a Hindu shrine with an elongated barrel-vault over the inner chamber. The exterior ornamentations also follow the typical South Indian detailing. The north and south sides of the barrel-vault assumes a tympanum arch in the shape of a large ‘*caitya-kavata*’ that is surmounted by a decorated ‘*kitimurka*’ triangular key stone.



The inner shrine houses a Buddha image and Bodhisattva figures, all carved of crystalline limestone. One of the unusual features of this monument is the erotic sculpture on its plinth representing three figures engaged in an unusual sex act. Such sculptural representations are not unusual in Hindu monuments like those at Khajuraho and Konark, it seems that later Tantric Buddhism seems to have influenced the sculpture to portray such representations in Buddhist monuments as well. Therefore, Nalanda Gedige reflects not only a synthesis between Buddhism and Hinduism, but also a Theravada and a Mahayana form of worship as well.

The image house facing the east is positioned within a spacious courtyard defined by a brick parapet with the entrance positioned to the east. A *stupa* of modest proportions, now in

ruins, is located to the north of the image house within this courtyard. The archaeological evidence at the site suggests that the Gedige and other remains date from a period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

The site was originally located on the bed of the present reservoir, and this unique monument was about to be submerged due to the inundation of the whole area due to a massive hydro-power project under the Mahaweli Scheme in the 1970's. In order to rescue it from total extinction, the whole monument together with the other remains were dismantled and re-erected at an elevation of about 8 meters above the original location, without changing its horizontal geographic orientation. This modest archaeological intervention compares in some way to the world famous Abu Simbel rescue work carried out in Egypt, and hence, stands testimony to one of the bench marks in the annals of heritage preservation in this country.

## **Manikdena**

Menikdena Archeological reserve lies about 2 km from Pannampitiya on the Matale - Dambulla road and connects the Kurunegala – Dambulla road. The site is situated between the beautiful Menikdena tank and the Nikula or Menikdena Hill range which reaches a height of 875 m. Menikdena archaeological reserve covers an area of 2 hectares.

This was a *Pancavasa* Monastery dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. The *Pancavasa* was a monastic establishment with a highly formal layout where a series of concentric squares of monks'



cells are so ordered as to circumscribe an elevated, central ritual quadrangle. The five sacred ritual buildings, i.e., the stupa, bodhi-tree, image house, chapter house and the

sabha are positioned within the central quadrangle. These monasteries are usually enclosed by a moat with axial avenues oriented to the cardinal directions leading up to the central quadrangle. *Manjusri Vastuvidyasastra*, a unique manuscript of a *Silpa* Text dealing with Buddhist architecture and scholars attribute these to the 5<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century period, which prescribe rules governing the selection of sites, location of buildings according to a *mandala* concept that provides great insights into the planning aspects of such monasteries. It is only at Manikdena and at two other sites that the *sabha* edifice in the central *Brahmapada* in the elevated quadrangle has been discovered so far. However, here the *bodighara* (roofed structure around the sacred tree) has been wrongly conserved by the early archaeologists as a *vatadage* (circular *stupa* house), which needs to be corrected.

The Trinity College in Kandy has volunteered their services for the maintenance and up-keep of this archaeological reserve as one of their social responsibilities. The Arboretum attached to the site covers about 14 hectares of forest land.