

Quarterly Tours



Jayatissa Herath

NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA

03 rd March 2018

FIRST QUARTERLY TOUR 2018

IBBANKATUWA MEGALITHIC BURIALS & DAMBULLA CAVE TEMPLES

Tour Leader

Prof. Nimal De Silva - The President of the National Trust Sri Lanka.

Route

By Bus: Colombo – Borella/ Kadawatha/ Nittambuwa/Warakapola/ Ambepussa/ Polgahawela/ Kurunegala/Galewela/Dambulla

Itinerary

5.30 am	Meet at PGIAR and leave at 6.00 am
8.00 – 8.30 am	Stop for a self-paid breakfast/Tea and comfort stop at “Keth Sisila” a wayside restaurant at Ratmalgoda (few minutes after Polgahawela)
10.00 – 10.30 am	Visit Megalithic burials at Ibbankatuwa
10.35 – 11.10 am	Visit Somawathie Stupa and Remains of Monastery Complex
11.15 – 1.00 pm	Visit Dambulla Cave Shrines
1.15 – 2.15 pm	Buffet Lunch at Hotel Lario at Kimbissa
2.30 – 3.30 pm	Visit the Painting Museum at Dambulla (to see the documented paintings)
3.45 pm	Leave Museum for back to PGIAR via same route
6.00 pm	Tea and Comfort stop at Ambepussa
9.30 pm	Arrive PGIAR

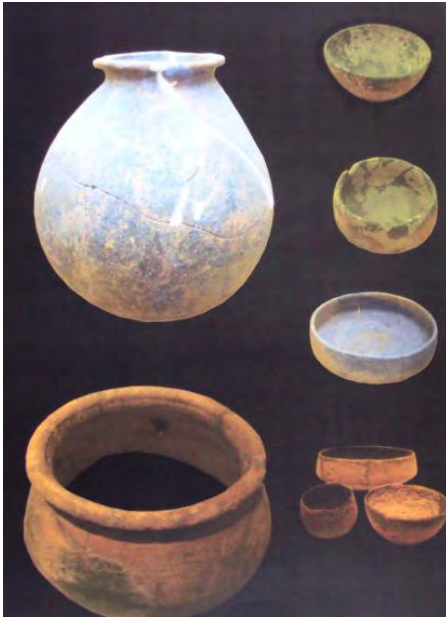
The itinerary planned may change depending on factors such as time and weather. Please refer last page for more instructions.



Megalithic Burials (Cemetery) at Ibbankatuva

Located about 2 km to the south-west of the Dambulla Rock at Ibbankatuva along the Kurunegala Dambulla Road, this megalithic Burial is one of the largest in the Island. It is associated with an early settlement site on the banks of the Dambulu Oya, which is located on the eastern side of the main road within the present coconut plantation. Dated to the first millennium BC (*circa 1000-300 BC*), the iron-age agrarian village settlement associated with this Burial or cemetery belongs to the settlers and farmers of the proto and early historic period who previously were the Island's itinerant food gathering and hunting prehistoric people.

The cemetery which covers an extent of about one square kilometer has 42 clusters of cist tombs, each made of a floor slab, four upright stone units and a capstone forming a rectangular chamber. The stone slabs used for the cist tombs are broadly regular in shape with a rough finish. Two cist tombs, of which the capstones were intact, have been archaeologically investigated. It has yielded terracotta urns containing cremated human remains and rich finds of grave articles in the form of pottery and beads of high craftsmanship. Symbols have also been found inscribed on some of the capstones. These archaeological investigations



have revealed the burial and ritual practices generally associated with a megalithic settlement.

This and other such settlements, therefore, are amongst the oldest villages and the proto-urban settlements discovered in Sri Lanka so far, which throw significant light on the rural base of Sri Lanka's classical civilization. The pottery and terracotta beads found inside the cist tombs showcase the pottery usage and terracotta technology while the beads reflect rich artistic sensibilities, social differentiations, symbols of wealth, status and power, and the imported items such as carnelian beads which are indicators of foreign trade associated with these settlements. Associated with this settlement are a number of micro-

tanks and riverside marshes, which are the potential sites to investigate early irrigated rice cultivation in the Island.

Archaeologists believe that the settlement associated with this cemetery formed the social and economic infrastructure which sustained the early Buddhist monastery at Dambulla and that the titled donors of its monastic rock-shelter residences were from amongst the elite of these hinterland farming communities. Therefore, this site is historically linked closely to the Dambulla Manastic complex. One of the clusters of cist tombs of this cemetery have been conserved and laid out, while the artifacts recovered during excavations are displayed at the Sigiriya Museum.



Somawathi Stupa and Remains of the Monastic complex

The Somawathi Stupa is the major monument of a monastic establishment lying at the western side of Dambulla Rock, adjoining Sri Valagamba *Pirivena*. It is dedicated to the queen of King Valagamba and the complex associated with Rangiri Dambulla *Vihara* (Dambulla Cave Temples).

This monastic complex dates back to 5th Century A.D. and flourished through patronage of kings up to 13th century A.D. The stupa is of modest proportions, and the complex also

has a *bodhighara* or *bodhi-tree* shrine and a chapter house, being the three important ritual buildings of a Buddhist monastery. Around the stupa a sacred foot print (*Siri Pathula*) carved stone and some stone “*mal-asana*” are displayed.

Remains of a flight of carved stone steps that lead to the rock summit runs through this monastic complex. Some rock inscriptions, possibly made by ancient kings can be found cut into the sides of these rock steps. One such record refers that King



Bo tree shrine and Chapter house

Kutakanna Abhaya (41-19 BC) was responsible for making thirteen steps of the flight.'

Some believe that the stupa was originally a square shaped and subsequently converted into a platform and a bubble shaped Stupa was built up on it. The entrance which served the Stupa when it was square had been unearthed during excavations and has been preserved.



Rangiri Dambulla Temple / Cave Shrines

Dambulla rock, located near the geographical centre of Sri Lanka, rises to a height of about 180 meters from the surrounding plain. There are about ninety caves scattered in two clusters facing the south and the west, but both associated with the Dambulla rock.

Brief History

Dambulla is an extremely complex heritage site, with a history extending from prehistoric and proto-historic times, right down to the modern

period. Along the western slopes of the Dambulla rocks are a series of large boulders, terraces and caves, which formed the habitat of the prehistoric man. As evidenced by the archaeological investigations in the plain south of Dambulla rock, and the remains such as the megalithic cemetery at Ibbankatuva including the associated settlement, prehistoric man at Dambulla was succeeded by the first settlers and farmers of the proto-historic period at some time during the first millennium BC.

Around the third century BC, the western and southern rock face boulder area of Dambulla became the site for one of Sri Lanka's largest early monastic settlements of the Buddhist monks. From the upper terrace downwards there were nearly ninety rock shelters in two clusters facing the south and west that had been adopted as dwellings by the monks of the monastery. These early monastic cave dwellings are marked by a drip-ledge cut along the brow so as to prevent rain water flowing in to them. Some of the caves contain donor inscriptions in Brahmi script, carved just below the drip-ledge ranging between the 3rd century BC and the 2nd century AD. The chronicles such as the Rajavaliya and the Rajaratnakara ascribe the formal establishment of this monastic settlement to King Valagamba (103 and 89-77 BC). It is the uppermost group of five rock shelters on the southern face of the Dambulla rock that continued into the historical period as the ritual and religious centre of the Dambulla complex.

Since its founding in the 3rd century BC, the uppermost group of rock shelters seems to have been in continuous occupation for more than twenty-two centuries, and continues to be so right down to the present day. During the middle historical period (*circa. 5th to 13th centuries AD*), Dambulla continued to develop as a major religious centre with the conversion of the ancient residential rock shelters on the upper terraces into shrines for religious veneration.

The literary sources and inscriptional evidence suggest that the uppermost group of cave shrines have become a center of royal and religious activity during the 11th and 12th centuries, when Polonnaruwa was the capital of the Island. Renovations and additions have been carried out by King Vijayabahu I (1055 – 1110) and King Nissankamalla (1187 – 1196) at these cave shrines. King Nissankamalla has also gilded seventy-three Buddha images and given the cave shrine the name 'Svarnagiri-guha' (meaning Golden Rock Cave).

From the middle of the 17th to 18th centuries, Dambulla once again became a centre of major political and religious activity. The entire cave complex was restored and refurbished with this revival of Buddhism and art in the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasimha (1747-82). Apart from Cave No. 4 being established as a shrine, by introducing Buddha images and painting into its interior with murals, all other shrines were also over-painted in the post-classic style of the Kandyan School of art of the late- eighteenth century. It is this phase of revival that is considered to be the climax of the spatial design of Dambulla that has earned it status as a World Heritage Site. Cave 5 was built at a later period, probably in the nineteenth century which underlines the importance of Dambulla to the people in the region even in the absence of royal patronage.

This last cycle of significant re-painting activity has been carried out from 1915 onwards, when Cave 5 was repainted on the commission by a local nobleman. The artists in charge of these refurbishments were hereditary master craftsmen, the direct descendants of the eighteenth-century masters some of whom were engaged by the Cultural Triangle Project in the refurbishments of the murals in the 1980s. A more recent addition to Dambulla was the erection of the present verandah facade by the abbot of the complex in the 1930s.

Paintings

The wall and ceiling paintings at the Dambulla caves depict mainly religious themes such as Buddha images and life incidents of the Master. At the same time, several themes dealing with political and religious history as well as Buddhist cosmological subjects are also found. These paintings are largely composed as continuous narratives or as centralized compositions. The rows of arahants (enlightened disciple of the Buddha) approaching the Master amidst the clouds, either in worshipping attitude or in carrying flowers are also depicted. Decorative motifs in abstract, geometrical and naturalistic forms have also been painted in abundance. These murals cover an area of more than 2,300 square meters of internal wall and ceiling surface within the five cave shrines.

The murals at Dambulla are the largest preserved group of mural paintings in the region, after the array of ancient paintings at the Indian site of Ajanta. They are also one of the finest examples of the Late Historical Period murals belonging to a pan-regional tradition that extends across South and Southeast Asia, including India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand. Dambulla is undoubtedly one of the finest and most impressive expressions of this tradition.

Sculpture

Dambulla has also one of the richest collections of Buddhist sculpture in the form of large Buddha images in standing, seated, and recumbent postures as well as a few outstanding figures of deities as *Bodhisattvas*. Additionally, it also has three rare royal portrait sculptures. A large number of these images date from the 5th to 8th century AD, but many of these have been restored, re-modeled or added to in the 18th and 19th centuries, although their original styles and iconography have been substantially preserved. Few of the extant standing Buddha images follow the 7th or 8th century AD style of sculptural characteristics with the heavy swag and convex folds and the concave pleats of the robes. A number of new sculptural elements have also been added to during the Kandyan period and in more recent times, but follows the traditions of the classic era.



Architecture and Interior Design

The shrine complexes at Dambulla have been formed out of a series of part natural and part excavated caverns. These are separated by screen walls or natural rock partitions, on either side of each. The five cave shrines together contain an internal floor area of about 1800 square meters and constitute one of the largest complexes of ancient caves or rock shelters of Architectural conclaves in the South and South East Asian region. The architectural masterpiece of the Dambulla cave complex is Cave No. 2, which has been formed by the introduction of a frontal wall separating the central section of the great cavern. Despite the absence of conventional spatial elements

like walls, a loosely defined but clearly observable system of spatial progression and hierarchy exists within the elaborately painted and sculptured spaces of the caves, thus creating a purposive interior layout for distinctive ritual functions devoid of physical divisions.

The cave shrine complex when compared with any major Indian site such as Ajanta, Ellora or Karle, this belongs to an entirely different type, consisting of a simple outer verandah sheltered by a lean-to-roof and set against the frontal screen walls of the caves. The present galleried outer verandah and the arcaded façade, was constructed by the then abbot of the 1930s, which conceptually was



similar to that was known to have existed there in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the style of the new was a mixture of European and Asian detailing. Thus Dambulla is probably the largest, the most dramatic and the best preserved and, indeed, the most integrated example of a living cave shrine of the Buddhist world.

The Golden Temple of Dambulla is a masterpiece of human creative genius representing different facets of creativity and an outstanding example demonstrating the artistic skills of humans in transforming natural rock shelters into vast spaces of Buddhist ritual practices. The site portrays the skills of the arts and crafts in carving large scale religious statuary out of the living rock within

the caves and in molding in various media the outsized polychrome sculptures and in decorating the extensive interiors with murals. It showcases an innovative approach to interior design, utilizing sculptural art and mural paintings, and offering a most dramatic, and unique interior spaces as a boost of Asia. The site is also tangibly associated with the longstanding tradition of living Buddhist rituals for the pilgrims and the people of peace. Due to such outstanding universal value, Dambulla has been inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1991.

Cave 1 (Devaraja Vihara)

The cave Devaraja Vihara is comparatively small in size with less depth and the interior space almost totally taken up by the sculptures. The colossal image of the Buddha in the reclining posture virtually takes the full width of the cave and somewhat resembles the reclining image at Galvihara at Polonnaruwa. The image of venerable Ananda, the lifelong attendant and the devout disciple of the Master, is positioned at the foot of the reclining figure while the statue of god Vishnu stands at the opposite end of the cave. The paintings on the walls are faded almost beyond recognition, mainly due to the dampness seeping through the rock above.

Cave 2 (Maharaja Vihara)

This is known as the Maharaja Vihara after its traditional founder, king Valagamba of the 1st century BC, this is the largest and the most elaborate cave at Dambulla and one of the most ambitious undertakings of the painters, sculptors and architects of several periods. Measuring about 52 meters from east to west, and 23 meters deep, it has a maximum height of seven meters near the frontal screen wall. It is one of the most dramatic internal spaces in Buddhist architecture. The space is not compartmented into cells, but is spatially differentiated by a complex arrangement of paintings, statues and other ritual objects like stupas

being placed most strategically.

The main entrance to the shrine, from the south is at the west end, which leads one directly to the principal Buddha image and the *makara htorana* both fashioned out of the living rock. The *Bodhisattva* Maitreya and the god Natha, stand beside two seated Buddha images. Behind the main image are the two statues of gods Saman and Visnu/Upulvan, two of the guardian gods of the Island. The paintings beside represent god Kataragama and god Ganesa. To the right as one faces the main image is a rock-cut stupa with eight directionally orientated Buddha images. To the right of the second door is the largest recumbent Buddha image in this shrine, dating from the late 19th or early 20th century. Two royal portrait figures, one representing King Valagamba, the traditional founder of the temple in the 1st century BC, and King Nissankamalla who visited Dambulla and refurbished the cave shrines in the 12th century. These are positioned at the western and eastern ends of the cave respectively. Also within the cave is an enclosure to collect the water that drips through a fissure in the overhanging rock. The devotees consider this as holy water. This is also used to prepare the daily food offerings for the Buddha shrines. Three sets of paintings in the form of continuous narrations are found here: *the Buddha Charita* (the life incidence of the Master) in the central area, the 'Arrival of Vijaya' and the 'Advent of Buddhism' in the southern recess. The Buddha's enlightenment after



the *Mara Parajaya* ('Defeat of Mara') constitutes the main theme on the ceiling. The Isipatana panel, with its exquisite craftsmanship in the treatment of the nimbus around the Buddha and the elegance and variety of its vast gods and goddesses, is rarely matched elsewhere.

Cave 3 (Maha-Alut Vihara)

The Maha-Alut Vihara, meaning the great new shrine was a work of Kirti Sri Rajasimha (1747-1782). The fragments of painting remaining below the drip-ledge of this cave, dates from between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. The centre piece of Cave 3 is an outstanding example of 18th century Kandyan sculpture.

It is the principal Buddha image seated on a throne decorated with the lion motifs, and surrounded by a *Makara thorana* executed in elaborate polychrome detailing of the Kandyan tradition. This cave contains the third royal sculpture at Dambulla, an unusual mid-19th century full figure of its founder, King Kirti Sri Rajasimha, standing against a painted mural backdrop depicting royal attendants. The great celestial palaces on the ceiling are some of the most impressive and architecturally informative expressions of this subject in Kandyan painting.

Cave 4 (Pacchima Vihara)

Pacchima Vihara, meaning the western shrine, is not at present the western most cave shrine of the complex. This suggests that at one time this was the western most cave shrine and the present Cave 5 is a later addition. Comparatively small, but a spacious cave interior has several images of the Buddha in the seated posture. In the middle of the cave is a painted stupa of small scale, which was broken by treasure hunters some decades ago and restored by the Cultural Triangle Project. It is traditionally believed that this stupa contains the jewellery of Somawathi, the queen of king Valagamba of the 1st century BC.

Cave 5 (Devana-Alut Vihara)

There are no references to Cave 5, called *Devana Alut Vihara* (meaning the second new shrine) in the *tudapatas* (documents of land grants by the royalty) up to Kirti Sri Rajasimha. The Englishmen John Davy who visited the site in 1819 and left an elaborate account of the cave shrines at Dambulla has also not mentioned this last cave. However, according to the legends written on the walls of this cave, the nobleman Ehelepola of Tolambugolla Korale of Uda Walauva had renovated the cave in 1915. It is, therefore, obvious that it was built at a much later period, probably after the second decade of the 19th century.

There are several Buddha images with a large reclining image of Buddha as the central figure. Of the two seated Buddha images, two have *Muchalinda Naga* spreading the cobra hood over the heads, depicting the 6th week of the Master's enlightenment. In addition to the Buddha images, this cave also consists of the images of god Vishnu, Kataragama and a local god known as Devata Bandara.



Dambulla Museum

Located at the foot to the Dambulla rock on the east, is the Museum at Dambulla which displays the evolution of Sri Lanka's painting tradition from its possible prehistoric origins up to modern times using copies of paintings taken from various sites across the country as conceived by Prof. P.L. Prematillake. The storage facility at this museum will show the facsimile copies on canvases of the classical collection of wall and ceiling paintings in the Dambulla cave shrine covering 2300 square meters that had been undertaken under the Cultural Triangle Project as one of its many ambitious programmes.

This documentation programme was mainly carried out in the second half of 1980 by the team headed by painter Kushan Manjusri.

Acknowledgements and credits for text, information and Photographs:

Dr. Nilan Cooray - for providing text and Photos on sites (from Tour Booklet No.26)
<http://podimenike.blogspot.com/2014/04/somawathi-chethiya-archaeological-site.html>
<http://amazinglanka.com/wp/dambulla-somawathiya/>
<http://amazinglanka.com/wp/ibbankatuwa/>
<http://amazinglanka.com/wp/dambulla-temple/>
<http://www.lakdana.lk/si/node/42691>

Meals

Each participant is requested to bring their own breakfast or have self paid breakfast during comfort stop. Tea and a buffet lunch has been organised to accommodate both veg and non veg meal preference.

A pack of fruit juice will be provided and bottles of water will be available on board.