

# Quarterly Tours – No. 26



**National Trust – Sri Lanka**

**1st June 2013**

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## **National Trust – Sri Lanka**

*Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013.*

### **Programme**

0630 hrs.	Leave PGIAR
0830 - 0850 hrs.	Comfort stop at Kurunegala
0950 –1010 hrs.	Visit Megalithic cemetery at Ibbankatuva
1030 – 1230 hrs.	Visit Dambulla Cave Shrine
1245 – 1345 hrs.	Lunch at Popham Arboretum at Dambulla
1400 – 1430 hrs.	Visit the Painting Museum at Dambulla (to see the documented paintings)
1445 – 1515hrs.	Visit the monastic remains at the foot of the Dambulla Rock
1545 – 1630 hrs.	Visit Diyabubula, the studio of Artist Lucky Senanayake at Madawala-Ulpota
1700- 1730 hrs.	Visit Manikdena archaeological site
1830 - 1845 hrs.	Comfort stop at Kurunegala
2100 hrs.	Arrive PGIAR

## Megalithic Cemetery at Ibbankatuva



Located about 2 km to the south-west of the Dambulla Rock at Ibbankatuva along the Kurunegala Dambulla Road, this megalithic cemetery 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 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.

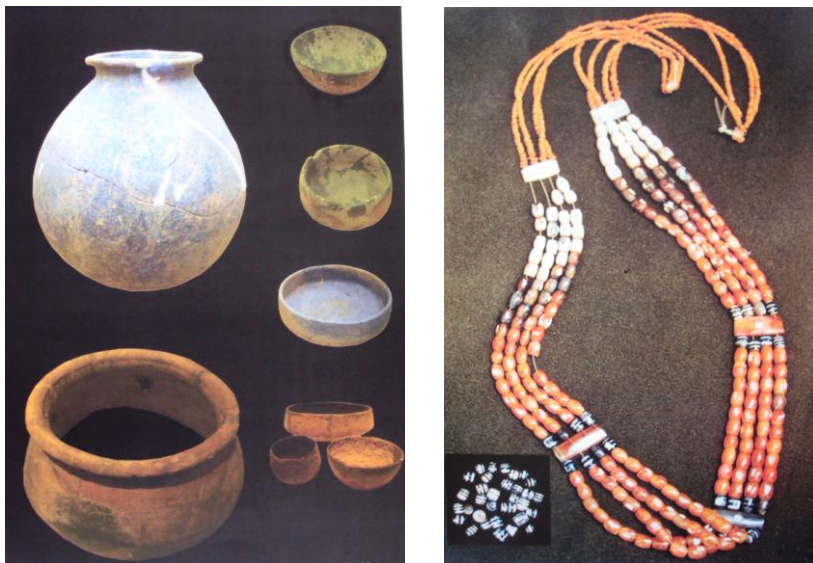
The cemetery which covers an extent of about one square kilometer has 42 clusters of cist tombs, each made of a floor slab, four upright stone units and a capstone forming a rectangular chamber. The stone slabs used for the cist tombs are broadly regular in shape with a rough finish. Two cist tombs, 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 reflects 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 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.

## **Dambulla Cave Shrine**



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 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 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 *arhants* (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 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, but many of these have been restored, re-modeled or added to in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, although their original styles and iconography have been substantially preserved. Few of the extant standing Buddha images follow the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> 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 Polonnaruva. 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 torana* 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 torana*

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 have 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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.Prematilake. A visit to the storage facility at this museum will show the team of the National Trust, 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 the painter Kushan Manjusri.

## **Monastic remains at the foot of the Dambulla Rock**

The remains at the foot on the western side of Dambulla rock dating to the period from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries could be a ritual center of a monastic establishment that was associated with the Dambulla cave shrine. It consists of a *stupa* of modest proportions, a *bodhighara* or bodhi-tree shrine and a chapter house, the three important ritual buildings of a Buddhist monastery. According to local traditions the *stupa* here is called Somawathi after the queen of King Valagamba of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

## **Popham Arboretum**



Located 2 km. from the Dambulla town on the Kandalama road, this arboretum was established by the planter Sam Popham in 1963 on a 7.5 acres plot of land. The arboretum is also unique that it is the only one of its kind in the dry zone of the Island. At present it is managed by the Ruk Rakaganno Association. A visitor centre has been set up in the cottage built by Mr. Popham. Walking through the arboretum one will see many of the trees and shrubs for which Sri Lanka's dry zone is famous and which are now rare and are found only in the wild.

## **Diyabubula**



Located near Dambulla, about 3 km along the Kalundava-Bakamuna road off the Dambulla Matale main road, this is the studio and the jungle home of Laki Senanayake, one of the foremost artist of modern day Sri Lanka. *Diyabubula* Meaning

a ‘bubbling water spring’, was the property bought from Laki Senanayake’s elder brother in 1971 and there designed his jungle home. The entrance to the property is through a tunnel of bamboo trees and then through an entrance doorway, on which a leopard is sculpted as if the beast is monitoring the peoples’ movement into the property. His open air house where his studio is located is a structure on stilts, partly upon a boulder overlooking a pond that surrounds the stone perch.

Among other interesting features at the *Diyabubula* are, first a two storied tree house made from *areca* palms employing the technique of an ‘A’ framed structure. Second, the garden which has many trees and shrubs has many pond and pools and is punctuated with numerous sculptures designed by the owner.

## **Manikdena**



Covering an extent of 2 hectares, Menikdena Archeological reserve lies about 2 km off Pannampitiya on the Matale Dambulla road along a cross road which 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 meters.

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 built 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 attributed to the 5<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century period by scholars, 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.