

SCATS NSW takes a road trip in Sri Lanka with emphasis to charity....

A part of the SCATS NSW Committee toured Sri Lanka on holiday during the last few weeks. They combined pleasure with charity in helping the needy upon their observance in the far and remote areas on the way.

The holiday travel began in Colombo with the first stop at Ahungalla, boating on the Maadu River. Experiencing the domestic activity of how Sri Lankan Cinnamon is prepared to the world market by the traditional peelers was educative. Those peelers are the essence of the unique trade. However they appear to have traditionally been stuck for generations in their humble trade while the business globally produces rich returns.



The next was a late lunch at Hikkaduwa Coral Sands. The coastal town of Tangalle was selected for the night stay in order to enjoy the fast up & coming tourist environment over there. The night life was active along with overseas tourists enjoying the beach front.

The trip turned inland from Tangalle to Embilipitiya. Farming being the primary livelihood, the villagers in the area were predominantly depending on the precious water they receive either from the Udawalawe reservoir or Chandrika Wewa for their crops. It was a pleasure for the travellers to part away with some gifts of clothing and school ware to a few needy families in the area on the way up to Thanamalwila. Some even received cash donations.

Thanamalwila has today become a trade hub. Passing Wellawaya, Koslanda, Diyaluma and Beragala, the travellers enjoyed the scenic Haputhale climb. En route to Bandarawella, the travellers were signalled by a wayside vendor who carried a newly carved wooden domestic pounder for sale. In talking to him, it revealed a story of him carving pounders to manage his family of two young kids. SCATS travellers were elated to help the hard working peasant with cash and kind in view of the deserving family. The donors massively enjoyed the brightness on the recipient's face when he learned that the pounder yet remained for him to vend, having been paid almost in full.

Rushing to Ella through Bandarawella was high fun. The night life with good food and the vibrant young company of tourists from various parts of the world was fascinating. The cordial hotel staff made the two night's stay quite enjoyable with oriental breakfast of different spreads.

The following day was devoted to visiting the Adhisham Bungalow in Haputhale and the Lipton's Seat in Dambethenna Estate. The drive through beautiful Diyathalawa to return to Ella was enjoyable.



The fourth day of the tour began visiting Dunhinda in Badulla. The evening was reserved for sightseeing and shopping in Nuwara Eliya, later to spend the night at the Golf Club. A donation of clothing to an orphanage in Nuwara Eliya through a request from an employee of the Golf Club, brought pleasant smiles to the donors.

The party enjoyed driving down to Gampola through Ramboda helping a number of needy children on the way with school bags, pens and clothing etc, having enjoyed freshly made Strawberry products too from a Strawberry farm in Labookelle.

Seegiriya was destined to spend the sixth and seventh nights. The staff at Sun Shine Resort made the stay really delightful having accommodated a few old friends of some of the travellers creating an ambience to refresh old friendships with a singsong prior to a sumptuous dinner.

In Minneriya, the beautiful tank and the needy children contented the travel party. Refreshments at Hela Bojun treated the travellers with fine local cuisine. A safari to the Minneriya National Park was a great experience to the wildlife enthusiasts amidst many animals and the birds, including a couple of herds of wild elephants and a loner in the far waters.





Distributing gifts to the needy in the Habarana surrounds was alluring to the party.



Seeing the sorrowful sight of the defunct Sugar Factory in Kanthale was pathetic to start with, on the day eight. The way the national treasure had been made to perish unmercifully is heart breaking. A vibrant township once around the vast Sugar Factory has today become a grim ghost. 21600 acres of sugarcane cultivation is dead. The entire operation & the property which belonged to the government have remained non productive for more than a couple of decades with no attention. It looks like the salvage value of the remnant machinery will apparently run in to millions even today.





With a heavy heart having seen the dead Sugar Factory, the travellers drove to Trincomalee and settled in Nilaveli for the night. The idea to visit the Pigeon Island by boat on the following day had to be abandoned owing to the rough seas. Instead, drove to the Marble Beach followed by a visit to the sacred Koneshwaram Temple.



The day ten was to visit the sacred Madu Church via Pulmudai and Vauniya. The drive along the scenic Kuchchiwelly coast was soothing. Much into the contemporary highlight, the Pulmudai Ilmanite plant was in operation, but the travellers were directed only to witness the gathering area on the coast.

The party reached the Madu Church for the evening mass having enjoyed some shopping in Kabithigollewa on the way. The road from Vaunia to Madu junction was eagerly awaiting quick reconstruction.



After the religious observances, it was a challenge for the party to find accommodation in Mannar. The travellers were lucky to have secured the best available accommodation in town with dinner & breakfast.

The drive up to the defunct Thalai Mannar Pier in the morning of the day eleven was very interesting. However the Pier is dilapidated today and the ferry service is no more. Once highly popular, the economical & comfortable legal crossing to the neighbouring India by sea is no more today. The Light House does operate and the train from Colombo reaches the adjacent station.



From then was a drive to Kalpitiya via Madawachchiya and Anuradhapura where the travellers met a number of families to help in charity. They greatly appreciated receiving the donations of clothing and school ware on the way up to Thabbowa.

Accommodation in the Beach Cabanas in Kalpitiya was captivating. Sea food was in plenty for the beachside dinners.

The charity work along with sightseeing was making the travel party from SCATS NSW proud, which made them decide resting for two days in the beach front atmosphere. Visiting the sacred Church in Thalavila and witnessing the famous Kite Surfing on the

Kalpitya Beach were delightful. Some Purchased some commodities available locally to bring home.

The party took a break in Colombo on the day thirteen in order to attend to a couple of official matters and also to bid farewell to the loved ones in Colombo, with the idea of returning back to Negombo.



SCATS NSW was represented in the road trip by its Secretary – Devika Fernando, Vice President - Palitha Merennage, The Cultural Coordinator – Bonny Fernando, Committee Members – Kanthi Merennage & Surangi Dassanayaka and the President – Lal Dassanayaka from the 6th to the 20th Feb 2020. All expenses were borne by the individual participants on personal funding.



The gift materials for charity did solely belong to the travellers and all the donations were personally funded by the travellers. The relevant pictures are included with permission from the recipients.

The total distance covered on the round trip was 2610 km. The six participants travelled in comfort in a self driven Toyota KDH 14 seater.

The travellers returned back to Negombo when their commitments in Colombo were over and spent the fourteenth and the fifteenth nights over there. They occupied the Paradise Beach hotel enjoying the beach and the surrounds while continuing the charity work to conclude prior to the departure back home, to Sydney.

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