

## 2012 SRI LANKA

Sunday, January 22, 1912. It was a long day waiting for the time to go to the airport for the plane wasn't scheduled to leave until 9:10 P. M. At last the limo came and I went. I met Martha and Dowell in the Sky Lounge. The old Elite lounge, which I prefer, is closed for renovations. This one is always crowded but Martha found a table in a small side room where we could wait.

We went to board the plane but they were still cleaning the plane. At last we were off almost an hour late. It will be fourteen hours to Dubai. I was thrilled that we have seats that lie flat. Eventually all of Delta's business class will be converted to them. Dinner was served but it was getting very late Atlanta time so I only made it through the first course. I watched the Moving Map on my TV monitor and was amused that it had an arrow pointing to Mecca and announcing how many miles it was away. Then I slept for six straight hours.

Monday, January 23. I had yogurt and a banana, started John Grisham's latest book, 'The Litigators', and then went back to sleep for 2 more hours. Before we landed I ate part of a roast beef and cheese sandwich. We have made up the time and are actually almost an hour ahead of schedule in Dubai.

The wheelchair was prompt and he took me a circuitous route to In-transit through the main waiting room. Martha and Dowell had to go another way. When we got to the security screening the man simply reached up and turned it off so I could be wheeled through pacemaker and all. We had to get new boarding passes for the flight to Colombo.

The Dubai International airport<sup>1</sup> is amazing. The fourth busiest in the world (by international passenger traffic), it is decorated to make you feel you are in the Arab world with huge murals of buildings. One wall is covered with Arabian horses. To make it even clearer, there were palm trees growing along the concourse!

The Sri Lanka Airways lounge was very pleasant, decorated in an Arabian Nights sort of way. They had a real buffet but I felt some of the food was very peppery and settled for a Chinese dish. It is evening in Dubai so we have another night flight to Sri Lanka.

I have long wanted to go to Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup>. In fact I was on my way there in 2004 when we were in India for Christmas. Unfortunately they had a Tsunami and our plans were cancelled. I thought I would never have another chance until Journeys sent out a wonderful itinerary I could not resist, even though it is more strenuous than I want.

At last we boarded the Sri Lanka flight to Colombo. There were only five of us in business class. I had a chicken dish for dinner followed by crême brûlée<sup>3</sup> for desert. I think I should have used the time for sleeping for on the four and a half hour flight I only slept for two.

Tuesday, January 24. We landed in Colombo, the largest city in Sri Lanka. It was a bus gate but they had a special bus similar to those that deliver the food to the plane to transport we wheelies into the airport. There we were placed in wheelchairs and taken to immigration. We had applied for our Visa online, and paid for them, but all we had to show for it was a reference number. Fortunately that worked and we were in the country. Our bags also made it. Outside customs a man had a sign with our name on it and we were taken to the Paradise Beach Hotel in Negumbo, 25 miles north of Colombo.

My room is at the end of the hotel, and has two views, one toward the ocean where a colorful fishing fleet is sailing out, the other of the pool. I lay down to rest but sleep would not come. I decided to wash my hair and asked the desk to send a hair dryer. Once it came I found there was no complimentary shampoo. I decided to take a shower and the water was only tepid. Once

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubai\\_International\\_Airport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubai_International_Airport)

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka)

<sup>3</sup> <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/creme-brulee/>

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dressed I started to get organized.

The first problem was my camera equipment. I had forgotten to bring a charger for the camera batteries, which means I am out of business. Fortunately I know Martha will be generous with her pictures and that suits me fine.

Then I found my large collection of adaptor plugs don't work here. I will need a hotel adapter to charge my electronic goodies.

Then I found the free WiFi doesn't work. I concluded I was too far from the lobby and took my computer there so I could pick up my emails.

About lunchtime my body started protesting that it wanted to sleep. I slid into the bed but only restless dozing occurred. It is far too hot in the room, perhaps 85 degrees, although the air conditioner works continually to try and bring the temperature down.

With a short nap I managed to stay awake until it was time to meet Dowell and Martha for dinner. This was a buffet, a warning that other buffets were ahead. We got them to move our table onto the lawn under the lights so we could see. Then it was off to bed for good.

Wednesday, Jan 25. We met the group. There are ten of us. They are Kerina Rowley from Journeys International<sup>4</sup> and her friend Lori Davis, Andreas Reik, a molecular biologist from Vallejo, CA, Michael, a urologist, and his wife Paula Cohn, from Elizabethtown, KY, Winnie Siatong and Linda Gambito, two anesthesiologists of Philippines descent from Walnut, CA, Dowell, Martha and me. Our excellent guide is Prisanth De Mel, the bus driver is Lal and his helper is Jonaca

As we boarded the bus I tripped on the high steps and fell. All seemed well but about two hours later I discovered a large flesh wound bleeding on the front of my right leg. At first the bus seemed roomy. However, Prisanth uses the two first seats for himself, although he actually stands most of the time to talk to us. Lal and Jonaca have the two front seats. I drew a single seat behind the cooler, which had a great view but no place to put anything or to hang onto. I later learned that the other seats were somewhat cramped.

Prisanth taught us to say Ayubowan<sup>5</sup> - Have a Long Life - which you say with palms together in front of your chest. We used this phrase over and over for the Sri Lankans are very friendly. Robert Knox wrote of the hospitality on the island, where often an extra serving of food is prepared in case a visitor shows up. There is a high degree of literacy, second only to Japan.

Prisanth talks of the history of Sri Lanka. This teardrop shaped island broke off from the legendary Gondwanaland<sup>6</sup> and drifted north until it rested 25 miles south of the southern tip of India. It is just 400 mile north of the equator. The first bit of known history was in the 3rd century BC when an Indian Rajah called Singile (or Lion) exiled his son Vijaya here. Prince Wizare named the island Singrila. Buddhism was established in the 3rd Century B. C. Muslim Traders later called the island Serendib (peaceful island) and then the Greeks called it Lanka. The Portuguese called it Ceilao and the Dutch called it Ceylan and the English finally took it over in 1792 naming it Ceylon. After independence in 1972, it became known as Sri Lanka, "Resplendent Island". The Sri Lankan Civil War began in 1983 but it was ended in 2009.

Our scenery started out with brick factories and palm trees and as we got into the country it became tropical forest.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.journeys.travel>

<sup>5</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ayubowan.png>

<sup>6</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gondwana>

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This part of Sri Lanka is called Little Rome because most of the people are Roman Catholic. The vast majority of the country is Buddhist although 7.5% are Muslim and 15% are Hindu. Only 7.5% are Christian. The majority speaks Sinhalese although almost everyone also speaks English. We saw some women in saris and almost all the ladies wear long skirts. The men wear sarongs. Like everywhere on earth people are abandoning their traditional dress for the ubiquitous jeans and t-shirt.

The tuk tuks (3 wheeled motorcycle rickshaws) are everywhere. There are two systems of buses. The red ones are public and the white are privately owned. They vie for passengers as they race along the road. The traffic is heavy with trucks and a few private cars. At one point a tuk tuk tried to pass us and got hit by an oncoming van. The tuk tuk turned on its side. I thought we should have gone back to try and help but the men seemed to feel it was someone else's problem and we continued on. I don't think anyone wanted a tuk tuk ride after that.

Then Prisanth announced that we each should ante up \$50 so that he could handle all the tipping and buy us snacks. I have never had this happen on a tour before. Usually the tipping is built into the cost of the trip. I wonder whether he actually spent \$500 or if some went into his own pocket. The only snacks I saw were a couple of bags of cookies and one package of gumdrops, but we always had bottles of water.

Our destination was the Pinnawela Elephant orphanage<sup>7</sup>. It was started in 1975 by the Sri Lanka Wildlife department. From a handful of orphaned babies they now have over 75 elephants due to the breeding program. It is the largest captive elephant herd in the world.

Asian elephants are smaller than their African counterparts with smaller ears and hollow tusks. They have two bumps on their forehead. They are more docile and have been trained to work in the logging and other industries. Now the government is trying to eliminate their use in working so no new elephants can be bought unless the purchaser passes a stringent financial test to prove he can support one. The term white elephant came because it was so expensive to keep a useless animal.

We were in time to see the first bunch return from the river. Horns were blown in warning and soon they came up the narrow street. They came in all sizes from babies to big bull elephants. It was a fun sight. Across the street from where we stood was a store boasting that everything was recycled and they sold elephant dung paper. I never got in the store to see what else they made of the dung! The one store I did enter had a charger for my camera battery. It was very expensive but I am back in the picture business.

We had lunch at the Elephant Hotel with a view overlooking the rocky river below. I wasn't very hungry and decided to forego the buffet in favor of a la carte. I ordered vegetable soup. When it finally came it was an almost clear soup with a few minced suggestions of vegetables. When I tasted it was just like salt water. It was a good thing I wasn't hungry.

Then we walked up a hill to where they feed the baby elephants. They are fed milk until they are five. For 2 1/2 rupees you could feed them and I had the pleasure of holding a bottle, which the baby elephant emptied in about ten seconds.

It was getting very hot and I decided not to walk higher up the hill to watch the adults being fed. Winnie, Linda and I walked down to a park near the entrance to wait. We then walked down the road to a lookout and soon the next bunch of elephants came to bathe. We had a great vantage point where we could look down on them. One was so small it looked like a newborn. They went into the water and were soon drinking and showering themselves. Two babies roughhoused as they played in the water. One adult elephant wandered off since it spied the greenery on the farm bank but a mahout ran after it and shoed it back. Then it was a hot walk back up to the bus. I am

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.elephant.se/location2.php?location\\_id=43](http://www.elephant.se/location2.php?location_id=43)

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not taking the heat very well.

Then it was back on the bus for three more hours. The bus rocked and rolled and I did sleep part way but was very glad when we reached the Chaaya Habarana Village<sup>8</sup>.

This is a large resort complete with pool, tennis court and spa. It caters to groups. I was assigned Room C-2 and Martha let me hold her arm as we walked over the somewhat uneven paving stones in the courtyard. Dinner was another buffet.

Thursday, January 26. We left at eight for the two-hour drive to Anuradhapura. I tried one of the other single seats but found it very cramped. Wonderful rock mountains filled the scenery and many have names like elephant or snake. There were rice paddies and tanks, the local name for artificial water reservoirs. Some were clogged with lotus. The blue lotus is official flower of Sri Lanka. We paused for pictures and one Sinhalese tried to sell me a lovely white lotus flower. Sri Lanka has lots of rivers and lakes, many not even named.

Anuradhapura<sup>9</sup> was the original capitol of Sri Lanka starting in 380 BC, and lasting for 1000 years. It was also a huge religious center making me think a little of Angkor Wat<sup>10</sup> in Cambodia. Some of the temples and stupas,<sup>11</sup> or dagabas as they are called in Sri Lanka, have been restored but many others have not been excavated. We went to one of the oldest ones, took off our shoes and hats and walked cross a sandy yard to reach the temple. There were sharp pebbles in the sand that hurt when you stepped on them. The 2nd Century BC Isrumumaya Vihara temple was lovely, carved in the rock with a large Buddha looking at us from behind a protective glass.

In the adjoining temple was a huge reclining Buddha and beside it in the grotto were figures of monks and worshippers. Overhead some weaverbirds had built a nest.

Nearby was a small museum displaying some of the artifacts found during the excavation. The most famous carving was of a Fourth century AD Romeo and Juliet: Saha and Yosakarra<sup>12</sup>. The prince sat with his Courtesan on his lap. The tour climbed up to the top of the cliff to see the huge dagaba but I stayed in the museum where it was cool. Then it was back across the sand to our shoes and the air-conditioned bus.

The next complex, Sri Maha Bodhi, had a long walkway in (perhaps a quarter mile) to the temple and the bus would be waiting behind. It was very hot and Martha helped me as I slowly walked to the temple with many stops to rest on my stool. The heat makes me feel limp, although I can breathe so it is not as bad as it was in PNG. When we finally got there I could see another area of sand we had to cross and frankly I just wasn't up to it. Thus I missed the oldest bodhi tree in the world, documented at 2200 years old. It was grown from a cutting of the tree under which Buddha sat. I then discovered there was to be another long walk to the bus. I couldn't do it and Prisanth went and got a wheel chair for me. I wish I had had it in the beginning for it made a big difference to move without exerting myself. I sat and looked at the Ruvanvelisaya Dagoba, built 140 BC, with a frieze of elephants standing guard around its wall

Back on the bus we found the main road closed. Much road construction was being done. We backed and filled finding another closed road and finally took a circuitous series of road through the site in order to get out. We saw the lovely pools where monks bathed in olden days. The town had an elaborate water system in its day. We also saw the Jetavanaramaya Stupa<sup>13</sup>, at one time the second largest building in the world after the pyramid of Cheops. I tried to imagine

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.chaayahotels.com/ChaayaVillage.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anuradhapura>

<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor\\_Wat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor_Wat)

<sup>11</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stupa>

<sup>12</sup> I could not find the legend on the web so the names may be incorrect

<sup>13</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jetavanaramaya>

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building the building with many layers of dirt pounded down until the great oval shape could be finished in brick.

We finally got back on the road and went to the Casserole Restaurant for lunch. It was Chinese and I had chicken cashew and a large coca cola for lunch. Then it was back on the bus for two more hours back to the hotel.

We were taken to a wood factory where they showed us the various woods that were used to make everything from small Buddha statues to furniture. We could see the woodcarvers at their work. Then, of course, there was a large showroom. Martha and Dowell bought a lovely Buddha statue in the teaching position. Miraculously it will fit in Dowell's backpack.

That night we were taken to the Saditka Restaurant which Prisanth described as "homely" until we pointed out that we thought he meant "homey". It was an open porch and we were the only guests. I ordered the grilled cuttlefish and French fries and found the cuttlefish very tough. Most ordered the grilled whitefish and said it was very good.

Friday, February 27. I took the morning off. The tour was slated to ride an elephant and then climb a 300-foot tall escarpment to see where a king's palace had been. I had thoughts of a massage but none seemed available. I used the time to catch up my journal. I had a room service hamburger for lunch, a refreshing change from the spicy foods. While I like a little spice, it doesn't like me very much.

The tour was supposed to return for lunch and we were to set out again at 2 P. M. Two came and went and no one showed up. I was preparing to embark for the hotel where they had massages when a little after three Martha appeared.

We were loaded into jeeps for our safari in the Minneriya National Park<sup>14</sup>. Unlike African safari vehicles, this pickup had two facing bench seats. We could with difficulty stand up between the roll bars of the roof.

An African safari it wasn't but we did see a number of elephant, including one baby that was still small enough to walk under its mother's chest. We also saw some wild peacocks and some storks. The ground cover was so thick it would have been impossible to see any other small animals that might live in the park.

January 26. We drove to Dambulla<sup>15</sup> to visit the rock temple built by King Walagambaha in the first century. It is a World Heritage site. Prisanth got special permission for the bus to go up a narrow road that avoided some of the steps. Then we were on our own. A rocky curving road or steps was the choice. I opted for the road. After a bit I decided I had had enough but Martha insisted I continue. She offered a strong arm to lean on. The last segment we decided to try the stairs for the path was very steep. With many stops we made it to the top! I was so glad she insisted.

There are five caves, covered with frescos on the ceiling and statues of Buddha. An enormous reclining Buddha in the first cave greeted us. The next room was even more interesting with many statues, some of monks. It was very warm in the caves to my surprise. The last cave also had a recumbent Buddha but it was of a much later period.

It was much easier going as we scrambled down the hill back to the bus. Then we drove on to Matale to visit Luckgrove spice garden. It is so difficult to navigate the tall steps of the bus that the calves of my legs ache. I decided to stay onboard. I have seen spice gardens before in India. Pretty soon a man came to the door of the bus and offered me some spice tea. It was the most

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.srilankaecotourism.com/minneriya\\_national\\_park.htm](http://www.srilankaecotourism.com/minneriya_national_park.htm)

<sup>15</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dambulla>

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enjoyable tea I have ever tasted. From the door of the bus I negotiated for a bag to take home. Then the man offered me a neck massage. It sounded wonderful but I still didn't want to get off the bus. Dowell finally came and told me everyone was getting free massages so I succumbed and got off the bus.

They were demonstrating Ayurvedic massage<sup>16</sup>. This is a traditional medicine that I first discovered in India. I had my tired feet and calves massaged with their special red oil for 15 delicious minutes. I bought a bottle of the oil to take home.

We continued on to Kandy<sup>17</sup>, the second largest city in Sri Lanka and the last capital of the ancient kings of Sri Lanka. It is in the mountains and the Chaaya Citadel Hotel<sup>18</sup> is even nicer than the one we had in Anuradhapura. It is built on the site of the Dunuvila Wallauwa, the ancestral home of the Dunuvila family. Dunuvilla was one of the king's ministers and legend tells us the King of Kandy never passed without stopping for a visit.

The tour was going out for dinner but we decided to stay behind and have a quiet dinner with just the three of us. We are tired of the endless buffets and sitting at one table with our ten fellow travelers, nice as they may be.

Since the tour was leaving at seven, we thought that was when the dining room opened. We presented ourselves to the door only to be told to come back at 7:30. We went down to the bar. The only way to have wine was to order a bottle so I did. We had a glass and then Dowell carried the bucket with the wine in it up to the dining room again. When we said we wanted to eat a la carte they said we had to go to another restaurant two flights down and past the swimming pool. By this time our bucket had been placed in a wine stand. A waiter offered to help and we formed a sort of parade following him bearing the wine and we trailing behind.

The a la carte restaurant must have been new for they were having start-up problems. Such as, starting the air conditioner. It did eventually come on. The next problem was placing an order. I think we sat for over a half hour before a waiter came, then it must have been almost an hour until the food came. Martha almost went to sleep with her head on the table. My lamb chops were delicious.

Sunday, January 29. Kandy is home to the second most important shrine in Buddhism, the sacred tooth of Buddha.<sup>19</sup> When Lord Buddha died his body was cremated in a sandalwood pyre at Kusinagara, India. The tooth was recovered from his funeral pyre and given to King Brahadatte. The belief grew that whomever had the tooth had a divine right to rule. Wars were fought over it. Finally, 800 years after Buddha's death, in the fourth century the tooth became the possession of King Guhaseeva of Kalinga. A Prince known as Dantha, married Hemamela, the daughter of the king. The city was attacked but the prince and his bride disguised themselves as Brahmins, Hemamela hiding the tooth in her hair, escaped and went to Sri Lanka and presented the tooth to the king. It was eventually brought to Kandy and a temple was built to house it. It is considered to be a symbolic representation of the living Buddha.<sup>20</sup>

Once every four years the tooth is paraded and you can see it in its golden reliquaries. As usual my timing is bad and we will not see it.

However, the temple it is in is very interesting. Inside the modern temple is the original wooden temple built to house the tooth, which lies inside seven golden and jewel reliquaries. Beyond is a large reception hall. Presiding over the hall is a large Thai Buddha, distinguished by his pointed

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<sup>16</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayurveda>

<sup>17</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kandy>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.chaayahotels.com/ChaayaCitadel.htm>

<sup>19</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relic\\_of\\_the\\_tooth\\_of\\_the\\_Buddha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relic_of_the_tooth_of_the_Buddha)

<sup>20</sup> China, Taiwan, Japan and Singapore also claim to have the tooth of Buddha.

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helmet. Around the walls were beautiful porcelain Buddhas in the various postures that Buddha is depicted. Above them was a series of frescos describing the history of the tooth and how it was brought to Sri Lanka.

In an upper room were displayed some of the old texts and reliquaries that belong to the temple. Then we were told we could climb two flights of stairs to see where the tooth rests. The stairway was solid people as far as I could see so I unfolded my stool and waited for the few who made the climb. They reported that they had a two second glimpse into the room where the tooth is encased. I am glad I did not make the climb.

However the people watching was wonderful. It was Sunday so families were bringing their babies to be presented to the temple. Each had a black spot on its forehead to ward off the evil eye. The women with their long black hair were wearing their Sunday best clothes. Many wore white sarongs. The men were mostly in western dress but we did see some in sarongs as well.

We headed back to the bus and found they were unloading two huge tuskers from a truck. In olden days the elephants walked from place to place but now are moved about in trucks. They are chained in the truck but as the chains were undone the elephant would throw it over his neck to get it out of the way. No one seemed to know why they were unloading elephants here and the thought is that they belong to the temple.

Kandy lies in a valley with an artificial lake built by one of the Kings. Twisty narrow streets are lined with shops and various businesses. Overlooking the town is a large Buddha and Buddhist temples abound, readily identified by the stupa. These are not tombs (Buddhists are cremated) and they are solid but they sometimes hold relics.

This is the heart of the gem industry in Sri Lanka and we were taken to a jewelry factory. Here there was much high pressure to buy something but I did not find anything that appealed to me. Dowell did buy Martha a gorgeous star ruby after much discussion and bargaining. Prisanth hovered nearby. I am sure he gets a commission. Winnie didn't see anything she wanted but the owner even pursued her to the bus to see if she would meet his last offer.

Then most of the tour went to an Ayurvedic spa. Winnie, Martha and I were ushered into a three-table room where we were told to take off our clothes and wrap a cloth around us. Then we sat in a chair while they rubbed and rubbed oil into our hair as they massaged our scalp. Then I had to climb onto the high table. Unlike tables at home there was no extension to hold your head. I was given a towel to cushion my head instead. Then the full body massage began. It is somewhat athletic as they pound you and stretch your limbs. Full body is exactly that for my chest and stomach were included. Kerina and Lori had male masseurs and said this part made them feel uncomfortable. My lady was very good as she worked around my bruises and the wound on my leg, which has not fully scabbed. In short I felt wonderful if a bit over lubricated in oil. Martha who suffers from Plantar fasciitis<sup>21</sup> said all the pain was gone from her foot.

We went back to the hotel for a short time and then we went to a culture show. I feel the tour goofed here. We should have gone straight from the massage to the show, or Prisanth should have worked out reserved seats. When we got there it was almost show time and there were few seats left. Prisanth did find me one in about the sixth row on the aisle, but there was a large man in front of me who pulled his chair half into the aisle and blocked a lot of my view as he poked his camera over his head for pictures. The show was very acrobatic with the dancers doing flips. One man spun around like a top! The costumes were colorful and the music was on ancient drums.

Then the crowd moved out of doors for the fire dance. Martha managed to get me a place in the front row where I could sit on the ground and watch. They danced through a fire pit. One even

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0004438/>

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brought the flame to his chin. How they did it without at least setting their clothes on fire I do not know.

After the show we went to D. J.s restaurant for hoppers.<sup>22</sup> This is served in a sort of taco shell with a fried egg in it. The string hoppers were noodles made from rice flour. Fish and chicken curry and chutney were also offered. I did manage to eat some of a potato dish and the egg.

Monday, January 30. We stopped for a panoramic view of Kandy and then went on to a batik factory. Some of the batiks were real artwork. I succumbed to a small wall hanging showing the parading the tooth.

We went to the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens.<sup>23</sup> Once the private garden of a Kandy King, it is huge and there was no way I could explore much of it. I told Martha and Dowell to go and see it while I killed an hour near the gate. There was one grove of enormous fig trees. I also saw a wedding party. In Sri Lanka they dress in elaborate golden clothing while they tour the nearby sights. After that it seemed as if every school child in Kandy appeared in their white uniforms with their teachers to tour the gardens.

We then went back into Kandy so Martha and Dowell could pick up their ruby. We dropped them off and then went on to another jewelry shop where Prisanth took Winnie to look at sapphires. While they were there we circled back for Martha and Dowell but they apparently were not ready. Then we circled back for Winnie and Prisanth. Winnie had not found anything she wanted. We circled once again to the first shop and at last found Martha and Dowell. They had been ready all along but the bus only could park for a moment so we had missed them.

We went to the Arts and Crafts rooftop restaurant for lunch. It was sort of open air. I had a club sandwich. Also admired the multi colored lobsters in the tank. We explored the arts and craft store. I found one wildly overpriced sandal wood Buddha but not much else that I wanted. I did not buy it.

At last we were ready for the three-hour ride up into the mountains. It was a gorgeous trip as the bus rounded many curves and gave us many views. There were many terraced tea plantations. I had to brace myself with each turn so it was a rather athletic drive. At last we reached the Blue Field tea plantation<sup>24</sup>. After a tour where it was explained how tea is processed and graded. We had tea and cake before driving on to Nuwara Eliya.

The Grand Hotel<sup>25</sup> was built in 1891. It is a little piece of old England that once belonged to the Governor of Sri Lanka. It reminded me of hotels I visited fifty or more years ago with lots of wood and space. It still retains some 1890s splendor, such as no WiFi. We are 6100 feet above sea level and the temperature is on the cool side. I was glad there was a heater in my room.

We were tired and went to the coffee shop for dinner. I ordered chicken that I thought was safe but sure enough it was peppery. The pesto pasta that went with it was okay for dinner. Then it was off to bed.

Tuesday, January 31. My room has a bathtub and though there was no stopper I managed to jam a towel into the drain and had the luxury of a hot bath. Went down to breakfast and then came to my room to really work on pictures and journal. The tour has gone off on a nine-mile hike to see a waterfall. I had pizza for lunch. Tried to reach the Howards but did not have their room number and the hotel did not seem to have it either. Martha is having trouble with her Plantar fasciitis and the hike did not help matters, so she spent the afternoon quietly in her room.

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<sup>22</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lankan\\_cuisine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_cuisine)

<sup>23</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peradeniya>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bluefieldteagardens.com/historyofceylontea.html>

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.tangerinehotels.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=61&Itemid=37](http://www.tangerinehotels.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=61&Itemid=37)



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The group is meeting at seven to discuss tomorrow.

Dowell, Martha and I had dinner in the supper club of the hotel. It was lovely service since there was only one other couple there. A man who sang and played a keyboard entertained us.

Wednesday, February 1. We had a long day twisting and curving our way back out of the mountains. On this side the mountains seem steeper and there was no terracing. We stopped to take pictures of the Sita Temple,<sup>26</sup> for it was here Rawanna brought Sita, the wife of Rama, according to Hindu stories. Rama came and burnt the mountain explaining why the soil is black.

We stopped at a small Buddhist temple so that Jonaca could make a prayer for the safety of our trip and continued on. We stopped to view the lovely Rawanna waterfall<sup>27</sup>.

We had lunch at the Seafood Garden Restaurant. I split an anchovy and olive pizza with Dowell.

We stopped in Tissamaharama,<sup>28</sup> which was once the capital of the Sinhalese kingdom about the 3rd Century BC. Here there is an ancient stupa, built for the father of the man who built the big stupa in Anuradhapura. How amazing that it still survives. There was a small shrine by the side where you could leave offerings.

After a very long day we got to the entrance to the Chaaya Wild Hotel.<sup>29</sup> It is more than a resort it is an extension of Yala National Park<sup>30</sup>. Then it got very interesting. First an elephant blocked the road and stood there with his ears flapping. It was clear we did not want to mess with him. Lal honked the horn and made other noises but it did not faze him. Finally he moved of with his accompanying tickbirds. Then we saw water buffalo and finally a wild boar wallowing in a mud hole. There were quantities of birds as well. Tomorrow's safari promises to be much better than the last.

The hotel rooms are in cabins. With the bed draped with mosquito netting the circulating fan was not very effective but at least the air conditioning worked. Dowell and Martha came to my room and we sampled the Cabernet Sauvignon<sup>31</sup> that Dowell had found at a liquor store. Wine has been a problem the whole trip. The local wine, we are told, is sweet. The imported wines are better but heat means they are not at their prime. If they have wine by the glass it is Chardonnay<sup>32</sup> or Sauvignon Blanc<sup>33</sup>, never Pinot Grigio<sup>34</sup>.

The dining room is on the second floor of the open-air lobby. There is a lift and we found it took us up to the kitchen, and from there we entered the open-air dining room. There was a nice breeze, which made the temperature quite nice. The buffet was in a small closed room, carefully kept close to keep the predatory crows from entering. One crow flew in and grabbed a sugar packet off the table before being shooed away by the waiter.

Friday, February 2. It was very hot in my cabin for I managed to turn off the a/c during the night and could not get it on again. I went up for breakfast and it was very hot out. I decided to forego the trip to the school and spent the morning reading and trying to keep cool. There was a small breeze near the swimming pool. Martha and Dowell don't seem as bothered by the heat and took

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.tourslanka.com/ramayana-sri-lanka.php>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.nature.sarisara.com/en/ravana.htm>

<sup>28</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tissamaharama>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.chaayahotels.com/chaayawild.htm>

<sup>30</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yala\\_National\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yala_National_Park)

<sup>31</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabernet\\_Sauvignon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabernet_Sauvignon)

<sup>32</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chardonnay>

<sup>33</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauvignon\\_blanc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauvignon_blanc)

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.cal-italia.org/varietals/pinot\\_grigio.html](http://www.cal-italia.org/varietals/pinot_grigio.html)

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a walk to the beach beyond the dunes.

At three o'clock we were put in safari wagons and taken to the park. Kerina had managed to find ones with forward facing comfortable seats, a great improvement over the ones we had last time. We were in a bus with Andreas and Michael (Paula had stayed behind). At the park entrance we acquired a wonderful spotter who made the trip a lot of fun.

We saw a few elephant at the entrance, birds and buffalo.

Then the word came that a leopard had been spotted in a tree. Every safari vehicle in the park and perhaps a few from as far away as Africa converged on the spot making the most colossal traffic jam I have ever been in. Periodically one would turn around and come back along the one lane road, squeezing its way between the waiting vehicles and the rocks. We inched our way forward, enjoying the people dynamics of the jam. At last it was our turn. I had a hard time at first making the leopard out. He was so well camouflaged, but with the spotter's help saw his tail dropping down from a faraway branch. Then he came down from the tree and lay on the rock below. Finally I could see his face peering at me. I couldn't help but wonder what he thought of us! And the diesel fumes! The Sri Lankan leopard<sup>35</sup> has tawny skin with close-set rosettes, smaller than the Indian Leopards.

Then it was our turn to turn around and inch our way past the waiting cars. After the leopard everything was anti-climatic. We saw many birds, which the spotter identified and would show us pictures in his book. The colorful bee-eaters flew near the truck. A crocodile of two were spotted and a herd of deer. There was one Sambar<sup>36</sup> with a broken rack. This may be the time of year he sheds it. One fun sight was a herd of water buffalo<sup>37</sup> buried to their horns cooling off in a pond.

Perhaps because of the leopard traffic jam, it was one of the most fun safaris I have ever been on.

For dinner I treated the group to wine. It was appropriately named Leopard's Leap<sup>38</sup> Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. I decided to try one of the colorful lobsters. Clawless it reminded me of the Spiny lobsters<sup>39</sup> of Florida. They had a cake for me. It read Happy Birthday Mr. Meg. The one candle blew out before I got a chance.

Friday, February 3. We had a long day in the bus as we drove along the coast to Galle.<sup>40</sup> We did have views of the beaches and the surf. There were colorful fishing boats.

Prisanth stopped at one coconut dealer where we were shown how they open the coconut and then drink the water inside<sup>41</sup>. Then you scrape the meat out. I was really more interested in the dealer's small house. A large wall hanging of a Buddha was prominently displayed and there were offerings made to it. The wife and two small boys watched us with interest. They may not have seen Caucasians before. Prisanth also demonstrated the betel nuts. After he was paid for all the coconuts it must have made the vendor's day.

We stopped at Sammin Restaurant. At first it was a bit disconcerting as a conference was loudly going on in the adjoining room. Then I had a chicken sandwich to the sound of John Denver singing open road.

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<sup>35</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lankan\\_leopard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_leopard)

<sup>36</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sambar\\_\(deer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sambar_(deer))

<sup>37</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water\\_Buffalo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_Buffalo)

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.leopardsleap.typepad.com/>

<sup>39</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiny\\_lobster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiny_lobster)

<sup>40</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galle>

<sup>41</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coconut\\_water](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coconut_water)

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The Cloisenberg hotel in Galle is a really old fashioned one. I could not even find a place to plug in my electronics and charge them, to say nothing of no Internet. However my room is pleasant and overlooks the bay. I declined the trip to the lace factory.

They took us to the Ramparts Hotel in Galle, inside the old fort. It was our farewell dinner and Karina bought us some Sri Lankan wine. It turned out to be run-of-the mill Italian wine. The food was sort of run-of-the-mill as well. I have become very weary of the tourist food we have eaten.

Lal and Jonaca joined us and we handed out tips. Kerina had wanted to do a joint tip but we declined. First of all tipping is a personal thing and secondly, the figure she suggested was too low. I don't think she liked the fact that we didn't join in.

Saturday, February 4. Dowell had found a whale watching excursion and many of the group got up at 5.30 AM to do it. Michael, Paula, Andreas and I decided not to do it. I have seen whales many times before.

The hotel breakfast was not a buffet for a change. I had poached eggs on toast and a huge fruit plate. Paula had to help me finish it.

Then Jonaca loaded us into two tuk tuks and we set off for Galle. The Portuguese landed here in the 16th century, when it was the main port on the island. In the 18th Century the Dutch came and started fortifying the city. It is the best example of a fortified city built by Europeans in south and Southeast Asia. It was expanded until they had fortified the whole peninsula. About 100,000 people, mostly Muslim, live inside the walls today. It suffered badly during the 2004 Tsunami.

We entered through the historical gate, paused to photograph the mosque, and drove to the Historical Mansion<sup>42</sup>. Abdul Gaffarhad collected over 40 years all sorts of things, an eclectic collection of pottery, old cameras, old clocks and so forth. The House is now a museum of his collection. I was not impressed with the collection but the Old Dutch house was interesting. Also in the Historic Mansion was the inevitable jewelry store. They are as common in Sri Lanka as rug stores are in the Arab world.

We paused for pictures of the mosque and drove on to the lighthouse. It is modern but we got out and looked at the rampart. Then we drove further on for more ramparts. It was pretty hot and so I did not walk to see the Independence Day celebration. Michael showed me the marching band on his camera. Sri Lanka got its independence from Britain in 1948 and there are many flags on display on cars and bridges and houses.

We stopped at the Old Dutch Church<sup>43</sup>. Built in 1640, the floor is paved with stones from the Old Dutch cemetery,

Then they took us back to the Rampart Hotel. I did not want to wait for the sandwiches to be prepared and said I rather go back to the hotel. Andreas wanted to take more pictures of Galle but the rest of us started back. Paula and Michael got out to examine the fish market. I just wanted to get back to the air-conditioning.

The hotel was getting ready for a welcome home party. When a couple marries in Sri Lanka, the bride's parents give the wedding and reception. After the honeymoon the groom's family give the welcome home party. The bride meanwhile, clad in a red sari and in a car decorated with flowers, was being photographed in all sorts of places. We saw them at the ramparts.

When we got ready to leave our room the party was getting started and I felt badly that I was

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~lkawgw/hmmgalle.htm>

<sup>43</sup> <http://lankapura.com/2009/04/the-old-dutch-church-in-galle-ceylon-1903/>

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wearing my tourist clothes when the guests were in loveliest saris.

We drove toward Colombo stopping at the interesting Kosgoda turtle hatchery<sup>44</sup>. The fishermen are paid for the eggs and they are buried in the sand until they hatch. After they hatch, for three days they are kept in holding tanks before being released at night into the ocean, where hopefully the birds wont catch them. Permanent residents of the hatchery were some handicapped turtles that had been born without the full compliment of flippers. There was one albino Loggerhead turtle<sup>45</sup> and one whose shell was imperfectly formed.

We dropped Michael, Paula, Karina, and Lori off at a beach resort for a post tour stay. Andreas was also supposed to get off here, but his ride to the airport did not appear due to an accident. Thus he had to continue with us. He was so nervous about how he would get to his flight that he did not seem to enjoy the rest of the trip.

We drove into Colombo and Prisanth took us to his house where we were served tea and given a cooking demonstration of onion sambal. Prisanth's mother and father live with him. His mother is a teacher. We also met his wife and son. It was a treat to see how a family lives. The house was roomy and had a beautiful wooden staircase that Prisanth said he had designed (this is a wood working part of Colombo). The house was not air-conditioned although it stayed fairly cool by breezes that came through the open windows.

Then we moved on the to Cinnamon Lake Hotel,<sup>46</sup> billed as the best five star hotel in Sri Lanka. It had all the amenities. We ate in the main dining room, another buffet.

Sunday, February 5. Prisanth came with our familiar red bus and Lal and Jonaca to take us to the airport. We checked in and then were taken to the Sri Lanka lounge. I discovered they had free Ayurvedic massages and lay in a chair while the lady worked over my legs and feet until plane time.

Business class was very nice for the 4 1/2 hour flight to Dubai. On the airbus the reclining flat bed seats are side by side with a large TV screen controlled remotely. I watched the movie 'Johnny English Reborn'<sup>47</sup> which was a very funny spoof on James Bond. Then I slept the rest of the way to Dubai.

Since Dubai is such a different world I am treating it in a separate journal.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.induruwabeachresort.com/front/content.php?id=1&type=3>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.induruwabeachresort.com/front/content.php?id=1&type=3>

<sup>46</sup> <sup>47</sup> <http://www.cinnamonhotels.com/CinnamonLakeside.htm>

<sup>47</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny\\_English\\_Reborn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_English_Reborn)