

KANDY MAHA ESALA PERAHERA

A glittering piece of glamour and splendour



Kandy amidst thundering shouts of "sadhhu, sadhu" from the countless devotees who line up the streets and occupy every vantage point to catch a glimpse of this splendid spectacle. These numbers will be swelled by thousands of tourists from across the world who come to witness the grand pageant, irrespective of their religious faiths and beliefs.

Kandy will be showered with the blessings of the Triple Gem, especially during the month of August, as the festival season started on 19 July 2012 with the Kapsituvima followed by Kumbal and Randoli Peraheras and the final Esala Maha Perahera on 1 August 2012 night, ends on 2 August 2012 after the Day Perahera and the Water-Cutting Ceremony.

Kandy Esala Maha Perahera leaves the octagonal Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth) winding its way through the streets of

The festival can only be compared with that of the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, though they are poles apart in purpose and set-up, but are the greatest draw cards for tourists who bring vibrancy and economic boost to the

two cities.

The Esala Maha Perahera is the grandest Buddhist procession in Sri Lanka and the display of the Tooth Relic of the Buddha while Rio de Janeiro has long been regarded as the Carnival Capital of the World celebrated by Brazil and other Catholic countries. Both festivals display most endearing artistic and cultural events, including traditional dancers in breath-taking costumes unique to their countries. The Rio carnival, as the name suggests, is more bent on fun and frolic with erotic dancers dancing away from their chariots and some on foot to the explosive beat of drums and deafening music.

The sacred Tooth of the Buddha is reported to have been retrieved secretly from the funeral pyre and later brought to Sri Lanka during the reign of Kitty Siri Meghavarna (Kit Siri Mevan) by the daughter of the King of Kalinga, travelling in disguise with her husband as ascetics with the relic concealed in the hair of the princess to prevent it falling into the hands of hostile kings.

The Kandy Esala Perahera, in fact, has its origins from a similar procession held in Anuradhapura when the tooth was taken out from the shrine specially built within the outer walls of Thuparama, where it was originally kept, along the streets decorated with paintings of jataka stories to a special temple in the Abhayagiri Monastery. Here, huge crowds gathered to pay homage to the relic. Because of the Dravidian invasions and the fear of falling of the sacred Tooth Relic into the hands of the ferocious invaders, the Tooth Relic was moved from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya and other cities, and finally to Kandy as the seat of the

Kingdom changed. Now it lies in resplendent glory in a golden lotus blossom in the Dalada Maligawa. It is only a replica of the Tooth that is carried through the streets in a casket on the back of the majestic Maligawa Tusker draped in a glittering and highly colourful dress illuminated by hundreds of twinkling electric bulbs (globes). An exclusively embodied canopy is held above it.

Kandy perahera is a classic display of traditional Kandyan dancing and their dresses and costumes made extraordinarily elegant by the torchbearers who make the entire route alight. The whip-crackers, who head the procession in order to announce the approach of the procession and for the



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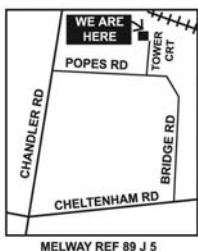
people to clear the way; the drummers, dancers both male and female; acrobats; and the illuminated elephants that make their way in measured steps is indeed a heart-throbbing spectacle to watch. It is, no doubt, a tribute to the ingenuity and cleverness of trainers and mahouts to domesticate these huge and the strongest animals of the wild to take the leading part in the procession, displaying the solemnity of the procession and the reverence in which the Sacred Tooth Relic is held by Buddhists, and even surpassing humans.

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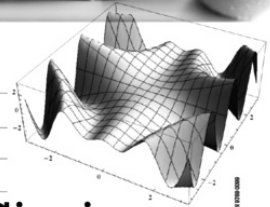
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