

Saturday, March 9

After final preparations, I walk to the bus station at 3.15 for the 4pm bus. It's fairly mild and grey, with frost forecast for next week. The bus arrives at Heathrow on time at 5.05, and walking and Heathrow connect gets me to terminal four by 5.30. Phillip arrives at about 6.15 and we check in and go through security, all very smoothly. A croissant and hot chocolate helps pass the time until the plane. It's delayed because of the incoming flight being delayed, but only by half an hour.

Boarding is efficient, and the plane is almost full. Drinks and meals are served after about two hours, followed by some TV watching and a little sleep.

Sunday, March 10 Colombo

The time difference is 5.5 hours and we have breakfast at 10.30 Colombo time, with fruit, juice, yoghurt, rotisserie, veg curry, croissant and coffee - OK.

We're just 15 minutes late arriving at 1.15 and the 25 deg heat hits. The airport is very much like any other with efficient immigration, but the baggage takes quite a while.

I get 20000/- from an ATM, and the car costs 2600/- into town, to the Suprun Arcade Residency. I'm not sure whether they're expecting us, but we're soon settled into a large three bedroom apartment (vice the 2 X 1 bed that we had booked) which has all you would want for a long stay (we've got two nights).

After unpacking, we go out to look at the neighbourhood which is about four kilometres from the city centre. We go along the street to the station and the sea. There seem to be plenty of trains, but no timetable available. We walk south, partly along the beach where there are lots of people in the sea (Sunday afternoon) and partly along the road; the railway interferes with 'a promenade'.

We find the recommended restaurant, Shammugas, but it's too early. There's a bridge over the river and a bar on the beachfront EGB, the local ginger beer, and some photographs of the sun setting over the ocean. We go back to the restaurant for doses and papaya juice and walk along the Galle Road, past the Buddha statue, which has lots of traffic. We spot two possible hotels for our return to Colombo. We go back to the flat for tea and telephoning hotels in Annuradapura and Galle, successfully finalising arrangements. The former will pick us up from the station if we let them know when. I use the wifi in the lobby to pick up emails, and get the hotel location.

I go to bed at 9.30 with the AC achieving 18 deg and a good firm bed. I have a decent night to 5.30 and rest until 6.30.

Monday, March 11 Colombo

After a pot of tea at seven, and this diary, we are out by eight to a warm sunny day which is fairly busy. We go down the lane to the station to get 10/- tickets to the Fort station. We have to wait about twenty minutes. There are five stops and the train has plenty of people standing but no worse than the London Underground and eventually I get a seat.

At the Fort station there are the usual touts, but the booking office is easy to find and we get 2nd call reserved seats for tomorrow's train at 1620 for 369/- each. The train is due into Anuradapura at 2015.

We gently make our way to the Fort area for a mixture of colonial era buildings, including Cargill's department store, and new, including the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. Crown's restaurant seems to have closed, but the Pagoda around the corner serves veg cutlets, etc and cakes and tea to form a very good breakfast.

Afterwards we head to the clock tower, a converted lighthouse, but the area around the docks is restricted. We have a walk past the World Trade Centre, which has circular towers and is the highest building in Sri Lanka, and go to the post office for stamps (PCs to UK, 25/-) which are Xmas 2012. Then we have an hour's walk to the Viharamahadevi Park. The road is largely near to the lake but unfortunately little can be seen and it's mostly a busy suburban road, warm and humid. We find a supermarket, with interesting fruit and veg, with an AC coffee shop.

Part of the park is being reconstructed and we leave to go to the Palmira restaurant, which is part of the Renuka Hotel (we book for a night on our return). We have a good meal with an appetiser of spicy soup with poppadoms, cabbage curry, cashew nut curry with rice, FLS and a sweet of hoppers, milk and jaggery ones.

From there we go to the National Museum which is well laid out and interesting. There is a cheerful and friendly school party from Nuwara Eliya, on a four day trip from their Muslim school. Phillip returns by auto, and I walk back, initially through an interesting residential area and then along busy roads, being forbidden entry to a Hindu Temple on the way.

Shower and emails. Washing in the twin tub which is successful after a little experimentation, tea and bed by nine, but not much sleep.

Tuesday, March 12 Colombo to Anuradapura

I'm up at 6.45 for ironing, shower and a cup of tea. We reclaim our deposit and leave luggage at the reception, and we are out to the station at 8.30. It is a sunny morning with the temperature in the upper twenties. We take a train to the Secretariat from which it is a short walk to the Pagoda where we have a similar breakfast to yesterday, and find that lunch is possible from 11.30 to 3pm.

Then the walking starts, via the post office to Pettah, the area to the north of the Fort station and is a maze of narrow, busy shopping lanes. In the centre is the Dutch Period Museum, which

was formerly the Dutch Governor's residence, and costs 500/- plus 250/- for the camera. It is not as extensive as yesterday's museum, but interesting and has a delightful, calm garden which is unimaginable outside in the noise and bustle. Round the corner is the Jami-ul-Alfan mosque: very much a working one with a distinctive red and white brick facade.

After this the maze of streets is confusing, but we find the Wolfendahl (wolf valley) church; C18 Dutch on the site of an earlier Portuguese church. There is lots to see and a friendly keeper to show us around. It is on top of a hill but there is no view as it is now surrounded by development. The streets are confusing again but we reach the catholic cathedral of St Lucia with its large grey classical exterior and large white interior. We get an auto back to Galle Face for 250/-.

We choose Chutneys restaurant in the Cinnamon Grand Hotel for lunch and it's a good choice with poppadom appetisers, Veg Thali (plenty of variety with roti, idli, rice and two sweets) and tamarind juice (sweetened and with ginger) and coffee for 1500/-, and the restaurant is comfortable and friendly.

A three wheeler ride along the coast gets us back to the apartment to pick up luggage and download the Archers and then we get a taxi back to the Fort station to catch the 4.20 to Anuradapura. We have almost an hour to wait but the train comes in and leaves on time. The second class is rather grubby but there are fans and the windows open. The track is poor and we make slow and rattling progress. For a long time there are no stops, but after the line branches off to Kandy there are plenty and the train gets quiet and slower and we end up 1.25hrs late at 9.15 using the mobile phone to identify where we are. Muhammed is waiting for us in a three wheeler and we are soon checked in to comfortable but not luxurious rooms with very efficient AC. After a glass of EGB (Elephant House Ginger Beer) and a shower, I go to bed for a decent if rather cool night.

Wednesday, March 13 Anuradapura

I'm up at 6.45 for a shower and to put things away. Then it's breakfast at 7.45: roti, fruit, juice, jam, honey and coffee.

We leave at nine with Mohammed in his three wheeler for a comprehensive tour of the northern part of the very extensive site (details in guide book). The arrangement is good; he gives us some practical information and background and then leaves us to look around with the guide book. The ticket for the day is 3150/- with the cultural circuit ticket no longer available. After stupas, lakes and museums we head back to the Shalini for lunch at 1.30, with poppadoms, six curries including jackfruit, rice, fruit and coffee.

After a couple of hours rest we are away again to see the bo tree and the buildings around, and finish up with a visit to the temple on the rock at evening where we meet again another school group from NE, with a uniform very similar to the one used by the school we met in Colombo.

As the sun sets we return to the hotel for a large pot of tea. There is by slow computer where I upload four photos in an hour, but the wireless connection is good and so I'm able to send the round robin email at the same time. There are lots of insects around. After that it is a restful evening but followed by a poor night.

Thursday March 14 Anuradapura

Up at 6:30 and to breakfast at 7:30, which is much the same as yesterday but toast instead of Roti. By 830 we are ready to leave with Muhammad by three wheeler. It takes about 35 minutes to Mihintale, initially along a Smooth road but when we leave the Kandy Road it is being rebuilt, and very rough. When we get to Mihintale the weather is very warm humid and sunny, and the steps start relentlessly. All the time the steps are shaded by frangipani trees with occasional blossoms on the steps, and there are lots of people including several school parties going up to the site, mostly from the first landing where there is another car park. We buy the 500/- tickets and look around the monastery and lion pool before starting off to the next level, up more steps.

At the top of these the shoes and hat have to come off. The latter is particularly sad as the sun is strong. There is the sacred area around the tree and a Bhudda above and other stupas, with good views of the surrounding countryside. Neither of us climbs to the top of the very steep rock. Then it's back down with a detour to the naggar pool, getting back to the three wheeler after two hours. This gives us time for the return journey stopping at a cash machine and a rest before lunch as yesterday. Then it's a relaxing afternoon with a walk in the light spotty rain to the Lakeside and back as it gets dark to tea and cake.

Somewhat better night.

Friday, March 15 Anuradapura to Dambulla

Up at 7 o'clock for breakfast at 7:30. But it's a little before the staff arrive and then Phillip arrives soon before eight, for breakfast as on Wednesday. There is plenty of time for packing and reading before Muhamed takes us to the bus stand at 10.

There is a small bus waiting which is going to Kandy which will drop us in Dambulla. It is supposed to depart at 10:20 but is about 20 minutes late. The seats are comfortable with air conditioning. The fare is 180/- and the journey takes just under two hours, with road works along the way. We get down in the town centre, but the hotel (Sunderas) turns out to be rather farther out of town than the map suggests and it is a hot walk of about two miles to get there. But there is a good welcome, with pleasant large rooms which are sparsely furnished, but with good terraces. After a shower and laundry I settle down to lunch (carrot and potato soup, veg curries and rice, fruit salad and good strong coffee) while Phillip decides to wait until evening and makes do with fruit salad.

After a rest, we go out at 3.30, using a three wheeler to get us to the arboretum, which turns out to be nothing special but a damp walk throughout the woods, following the coloured signs. We walk back along the road in about three quarters of an hour. Time in the room, and then Phillip takes dinner and I have hot chocolate.

To bed at 9.30 for a decent night, surrounded by mosquito net.

Saturday, March 16 Dambulla, Sigiriya

Up at 6:45 for breakfast at 7:30. We have it leisurely on my terrace with excellent coffee, fresh fruit, toast jam and butter. After getting ready we're away to the usual hot sunshine and the walk into the town, which takes half an hour or so. Fortune shines on as a small bus with lots of space is just about to depart for Sigiriya, although it does stop in the town for 15 mins until its full. The journey takes about 45 minutes, initially along the Trinkomalee road NE then along a side road to the right. It drops us at the entrance, and a ten minute walk alongside the moat ('crocodiles go here'), takes us to the ticket office (3750/-, \$30) and the museum, although the modern design of the latter is more interesting than the exhibits. The site is well labelled and kept, with water in the water gardens and terrific views up to the rock towering above.

We start up stone and brick steps, and then on to metal steps including spiral stairs to the frescoes. Eventually we get to the lion terrace where I find the next lot of metal steps off putting and I let Phillip go up while I sit and read, only briefly disturbed by load school children. We make our way down to the exit and walk to the village as a bus returns to Dambulla, but we decide its too soon (1.30) and so we go to the Sigiriya Rest House where I have lunch and Phillip has an EGB. Several buses pass by as we eat but when we leave the auto drivers say that the next will be in an hour; in fact it comes after about five minutes and is virtually empty. The driver drives very slowly initially and then recklessly; when he breaks the lights around the religious figures at the from light up.

We get back to a scorching town centre and separate. I get 50000/- from the ATM, buy an adaptor for 100/- and visit the heaving wholesale vegetable market, and get various photos. Back at the hotel, it's time for tea on the terrace with a book.

Later I join Phillip as he eats his dinner and I have a beer, and return to the room at 8.30. Bed at 9.30, decent.

Sunday, March 17th Dambulla

Up at 6.30 to another hot sunny day; the temperatures are up to 33bdeg and fell even more in th strong sun. Breakfast at 7.30: cheese omelette, fruit, paratha, dal, coffee.

We're out by 9.30 for the short walk, in the strong sun, to the Golden Temple, and buy our tickets for the Rock Temple, 1200/-, which also allow entry into the golden Temple museum. The latter

is above the square which has lots of bougainvillea, a stupa and a giant Buddha statue in gold.

The walk up to the caves is in the hot sun, partly on the living granite, and partly on steps, but not nearly as much a climb as yesterday. We have to leave shoes at the entrance, no hats and knees covered. There are lots of Buddhas in the caves, and extensive paintings on the ceilings. There are also good views of the town and surrounding countryside, which is quite hilly. After some sitting and looking we descend, visit the museum which has Buddhist gifts from other nations, and walk along the road to the Dambulla museum. This is more interesting and has lots of large reproductions of the cave paintings, which are of course much more visible.

Then it's back to the hotel, for lunch for me: beer, egg fried rice and curd with treacle.

After a lazy afternoon I head into town to find an Internet cafe to upload photos, but the only one I find is closed. Back by three wheeler, and out for a short walk in the heavily wooded country behind the main road. I sit with Phillip as he has his supper, and then to the room. It's cool and I can use the wifi to put captions to photographs on the Google albums, a long job!

To bed at 9.30 for a good night.

Monday March 18 Dambulla to Kandy

Up at 6.45 for a shower and out for a walk - across the main road and down the back streets, which soon are dirt road with lots of single story houses with people taking their children to school, walking their dogs, etc. Back to breakfast at eight with hoppers, cheese omelette, fruit and coffee.

Packing and we are ready to go, after paying the bill for food.

Outside the hotel we pick up a three wheeler for the 100/- ride to the bus stand. After two ordinary buses there is a small AC bus which has come from Anuradapura and takes us comfortably to Kandy in just under two hours, dropping us at the bus stand near to the station. I go off and get tickets for Thursday in the super deluxe coach on the 8.47 train. I hope the 1250/- each is worth it! A rickshaw takes us to the guest house, the Expedito, for 160/-, grinding up the steep hill. The driver is cheery and leaves his card, (in case we need more transport). They are expecting us, but one room isn't ready so we sit chatting to the husband and wife who run the house, talking about his trip to India, and drinking a pot of tea.

The rooms are OK, with fans, and more furniture than last night. After a shower and a rest, I'm ready for the out, and we walk down to the lake, with its 'Geneva' fountain, and to the Bakery for Short Eats and more tea. Then we split and I manage several jobs - mosquito machine, bookshop, Internet cafe for photo uploads and naming of them. The computer is much faster than the last one, but the screen is poor for viewing the photos. I finish the afternoon with a walk the long way around the lake; but it's not the four kilometres that's claimed. I get back before Phillip and have time for a rest and another shower.

We have supper at 6.30 which we ordered earlier: string hoppers, some made with white rice, some with red rice, dal and potato curry followed by curd and honey. The beer hasn't arrived so I have water, but it arrives later. Also the wifi cards haven't arrived but I can use the house's which is quite efficient and allows Phillip to check emails, me to check the uploads and to write this. An Italian couple from Venice come in and have the same menu as we had.

To bed at 9.30, but a poor night; too much beer.

Tuesday, March 19 Kandy

Up at 6.45 for breakfast at 7.30: fruit, coffee, toast, jam and omelette.

The morning is misty and mild and the cloud clears away soon after breakfast to another hot sunny day. We leave the house at 8.45 and walk down the hill towards the lake and alongside it. The children seem to be at school by now. The traffic grows as we get to the town centre which already seems familiar. We get a bus, 15/-, at the same stand by the station and are soon underway, reaching the botanic garden in about 20 mins. Entry is 1100/- (50/- for locals) but it seems worth it for the large area (150 ha plus), the decorative areas, and the scientific planting. Of particular note are the mature trees, including imposing avenues of Cabbage Palms and Palmyra. Unfortunately the cactus house is closed, but there are good displays of orchids and wet area plants.

We have three hours there, interrupted by ginger beer and tea, although the latter is stewed and bitter.

At two thirty we get a bus back into Kandy. Plenty of room to start with but later it fills up with school children, who are well behaved. In Kandy we go to Devon's bakery for Short Eats and tea/coffee, good, but without the style of yesterday. After a look around the supermarket and bookshop in the impressive air conditioned shopping centre we head back up the hill to the guest house, and to book for supper at the Sharon just above.

After a rest, to the Sharon at 7.30 for the set meal: carrot soup, buffet (modest choice, but good quality), limon soda and tea. Back to the room for a better night.

Wednesday, March 20 Kandy

Up for breakfast at 7.30: fruit, toast, omelette, coffee. Out to the usual clear blue sky, with the temperature heading up to 32. We walk along the lake side; idyllic to one side and buses, rickshaws and lorries belching out fumes to the other. The security to get into the temple is quite strict, but not too time consuming and after paying 1000/- we are just ahead of the crowds with time to look in the sanctum before the 9.30 ceremonies start, with lots of drumming, blowing and marching. I find that I have lost my hat, but can't find it. After leaving the compound, we head for

the bakery for tea and cakes. The tea is better than that at the botanical gardens, but still a little bitter.

We separate for the afternoon, and firstly I attend to such business as finding another hat, getting my hair cut, uploading photos before starting out on the walk to the tea museum. The first part is steeply uphill through the outskirts of the town, with the road easy to find, and indeed the museum is signposted; three kilometres. The town thins out but the road remains relentlessly uphill in the bright sun; the umbrella is a blessing. There are lots of schoolchildren heading home and nearly all ask for money.

I think it turns out to be nearer four km and about 300m of ascent, and I'm sweating freely when I arrive. But it's a very attractive place in the woods and tea gardens, with only a few cottages. The museum has three floors of machinery and photographs in the old factory, and a couple of shops and a 'restaurant' where the only item seems to be a free cup of (very good) tea. I stroll around the area and then down the hill back to town and to the guest house for a shower, laundry and rest, before we go out to the Hotel Suisse for dinner. It's a decent and reasonably priced buffet which is helped down by a strong stout, and observation of the overweight tour group members.

Back to the guest house, and to bed.

Thursday, March 21 Kandy to Nuwara Eliya

Up a little earlier, for breakfast at seven, paying (cash, 3% for CC) and auto at 7.55 for station, arriving with three quarters of an hour to spare. But there is plenty to see, with several trains arriving and a driver to talk to, although it's his day off. There are plenty of people waiting for the train; some locals but more Westerners, many with rucksacks. The train arrives about ten minutes late, and seems to be almost brand new. The AFC is comfortable, with efficient AC, but none of the extras I was expecting; I must have been reading about a different train.

Progress is steady along the reasonable track, first to Peradeniya, a triangular station where the routes to Colombo and Badulla diverge. After that the route climbs, gently at first and then more steeply. For the first hour or so we wind through farming land with rice changing to tea with trees interspersed. Later tea predominates with the more defined hills, with some tea organised but also some rather scruffy land. A few people get on and off at the intermediate stations, but a large proportion seem to be on for the duration. The guide from Bradt gives a good description of the route and the stations. Towards Nuwara Eliya, the track climbs more steeply, with a tunnel and many bends. We get to NE just 20 mins late, at about one.

At the station there are lots of taxis and autos waiting, and we are soon in a car heading to the Alpine Hotel. We'd made a mistake in the email and they were expecting us tomorrow; but they have the rooms; again the credit card machine is not working. After a spell settling in we get lunch of rice and curry at two and soon make a foray into town for a general look around, cash

machines and tea shop. The one we choose leaves something to desire. Using the somewhat inaccurate map, we find the Holy Trinity Church, a remnant from Victorian times, and apparently well used now. The graves are very poignant reporting lots of children dying in infancy.

Back for a bath, rest and email (there is fairly efficient wifi near the reception, but not in the rooms). About seven we have a drink with potato wedges in the bar, and to bed at nine. It's quiet and cool, but I don't sleep well, with a nightmare and a water pump starting up at 5.30.

Friday, March 22 Nuwara Eliya

Bath and down to breakfast at about 7.45. A large Indian group and the room is a mess with no clear tables, and the remains of a buffet. I get some weak coffee which I have replaced and fruit and eventually a decent cheese omelette, followed by toast and marmalade.

We set out at nine fifteen, walking to the Pedro tea gardens, through the town, a forest park and eventually the tea gardens. The staff are welcoming and for 200/- we get an interesting tour and a cup of excellent tea. I fall for a selection of local teas and a mug, and we look around the carefully manicured vicinity of the offices. A bus gets us back swiftly to the hotel to leave the goods.

After a GB and piece of cake at the Victoria Gardens Restaurant, we hire a car to take us to the Botanical Gardens at Hakgala. It's much smaller than the one in Kandy, and overrun by school parties, but it's very pleasant with some splendid trees although it's too early for the planting. We get a free ride on a bus at breakneck speed, with no other passengers.

I spend some time reading in the garden, finishing the book I brought with me about an American who spends a year travelling down the Mekong. Then it's rest and laundry, followed by a visit to the Grand Indian restaurant at the The Grand Hotel. We get an Indian Thali, drink and sweet very reasonably and decent.

Back to bed for another poor night with the alarm set for 5.30.

Saturday, March 23 Nuwara Eliya

Awake way before the alarms, and time for a shower before meeting at six our driver with his very comfortable vehicle, which could easily seat six passengers. The hotel has provided packed breakfasts with fruit, egg sandwiches and veg sandwiches and bottles of water. The light is beautiful just before sunrise as we set off down the road towards Badulla and turn off towards the Horton plains National Park. It's an interesting drive, first of all through vegetable farms, then fields with herds of cows (little England, New Zealand?), wind farm and then into the forest, crossing the railway line at the. Highest station in Sri Lanka. We zig zag steeply upwards with increasingly good views of the mountains around Nuwara Eliya.

Eventually we get to the National Park Boundary where the various fees come to 5700/- for the two of us (the car costs 5000/-). Then there is drive through the grasslands on a bumpy road to the beginning of the trail at the museum. We elect to walk anti-clockwise on the advice of the driver, along the good track in the morning sun. There's a hint of freshness, but it soon gets warm. We eat our breakfast on a bench, when an Indian family arrives. Father and daughter go on, but mother elects to stay and return to the vehicle. We see father and daughter several times during the walk. They are on holiday from Mumbai, having flown to Colombo.

The path has some steep rough bits, but is mostly well made. The first site is Baker's Falls, where several western groups arrive, and needs a stiff climb through the muddy tree roots to get back onto the main track. Then there is a lengthy stretch through the grasslands with native Rhododendron and the introduced gorse. After that we come to 'World's End', the top of a 700m cliff looking down onto tea gardens, and across to other mountains. The mists are arriving; we set off early to get to this point before they hide the views. It's quite hazy; in good conditions you can see to Colombo. A path a little away from the cliff top leads to 'Little World's End' with a rather narrower view and by now the clouds are really filling the valley, and those arriving miss most of the views.

As we return through the grasslands we are back into the warm sun, but the clouds follow us. the journey back is along the same route, and both of us are rather sleepy, and we get back at 12.30. After a short rest we meet to finalise transport and accommodation in Ella, which several calls. As we work at this, the heavens open with heavy, torrential rain for half an hour or so, followed by more general rain. As we leave at 3.30 it has virtually finished, but it remains gloomy for the rest of the afternoon. We return to the Victoria Restaurant for our tea and cake. I spend the rest of the daylight looking for photographs, returning for a shower at six, and we leave for dinner at 6.30, and have a decent meal at the Milano.

Back to the hotel to type up today's diary and to bed for a much better night until five.

Sunday, March 24 Nuwara Eliya

Up at six and out for a walk down to the lake. The sun has just risen and for a while there's a golden light but there are plenty of clouds around. The horses are out feeding on the grass around the race track. Back to the hotel at seven for a bath and down to breakfast soon after 7.45 and it turns out to be much better, although rather disorganised to start with (Sunday morning?).

We leave about 9.15 to a mostly sunny morning although plenty of clouds around. Our path starts from the top of the road behind the hotel, and climbs through the tea bushes and some copses of trees to the transmission masts on top of Single Tree Hill. There are some good views but limited by the extensive shrubbery, which has lots of flowers in it. We retrace our steps to a col on the ridge and then up along a good path/track through forests with lots of eucalyptus and individual lower trees, potatoes growing in the fields alongside. After a mile or so

we come to the spread out village of Shantipura(m), which has the reputation of being the highest in Sri Lanka at 2100m. There are confusing tracks through the village but eventually we get on the Tarmac road to Nuwara Eliya and by now the sun is hot. We pass a stupa and eventually arrive at part of the golf course, and then the second part where we get to the Pastry Shop of The Grand for coffee (poor) and chocolate cake (good).

Then it's back to the hotel for a rest, with puzzles and emails, and then out at 3.30 delayed by heavy rain. We soon return as it is unsettled with plenty of rain. So it's relaxing in the hotel for the early evening. Back to the Grand to the Indian restaurant for supper, sharing several veg dishes - OK, but not as enjoyable as the Thali previously.

To bed for a decent night.

Monday, March 25 Nuwara Eliya to Ella

All the usual followed by breakfast at 7.30. The French group is just leaving and there is a reasonable buffet left behind, including fresh juice, fruit, coffee, stringhoppers and curry, bread and marmalade. There's plenty of time so we can take our time.

Phillip goes out for a walk around the Lake and I stay in with careful packing, diary, puzzles and reading. We pay the bills and check out at 10.45. We look for a three wheeler to Nanoya, but the first wants an outrageous 1000/-, so we get the bus which turns up straight away, although it's crowded.

At the station reserved second class seats are available at 600 each (100/- unreserved). It's an hour before the train; Phillip waits on the platform with the luggage and I have a look around the village. There's a Hindu festival on with several temple carts pulled by tractors, and the sun is getting hotter: threw hundred metres lower seems to make a difference. The village is in the middle of the tea gardens on the Edinburgh Estate. The train comes in about ten minutes late and we're soon underway for a fascinating journey - through tea gardens, forests, vegetable gardens and open landscapes. Before long the clouds and mists arrive, with rain eventually. The journey to Ella takes about two and a half hours, and we arrive at the station to plenty of touts and autos, but our place is less than half a kilometre away, and easily walkable. By now it's overcast and there is a damp feeling in the air.

The reception seems rather disorganised, and we will have to change rooms after the first night. But the room I have is fine, large with a double bed with mosquito net, balcony and shower room. After using the latter I go down to find a Canadian from Vancouver using a laptop; he gives me the key for the wireless but warns me that it is very slow, as I confirm. I take my jacket and a pair of trousers to the laundry round the corner and get water. Phillip and I have a pot of cardamom tea, before we each go out for a walk. I visit the Motel down the road where we failed to get rooms and the helpful manager confirmed what we knew about transport and I could see the views of the gap and Little Adam's Peak from the garden in the developing clouds.

After a shower and rest we stout to the Motel to order, and eventually get, dinner. Start with and indifferent glass of white wine, but it's cold and cheap. Then lime soda, set eastern meal (veg soup, curries, rice, fruit salad) and hot chocolate. ASTB, moderate night.

Tuesday, March 26 Ella

Up at six thirty, and to breakfast at 7.30: set with plain omelette, papaya juice, coffee, toast, butter and 'red' jam. I pack up and go the cleaners to collect my laundry which is immaculate and sealed in plastic. The lady says that business isn't good with another laundry on the main road. Back at the hotel one of the new rooms is ready and we put our bags in there. It's smaller and less convenient than the other, but acceptable.

It's overcast but pleasant and the temperature gradually goes up. The way to little (or mini) Adam's Peak is straight forward, along a side road and then branching off on a tea plantation track. Along the road we meet a gentleman working in his garden and he gives us the names of some plants, including the horn shaped Gramophone, the red African Tulip Tree and the yellow 2pm bush (only lasts till 2pm). After a while along the tea track, there is a small snack bar offering drinks and then steps up to the triple summit of Little Adam's Peak, with tremendous to the south and west in particular, including the 'gap' and the mountains. After some photographs and contemplation of the scene we retrace our steps, stopping for Sprites at the cafe.

Back at the crossroads, we head down the road south and enjoy walking though the gap and the impressive valley to the Ravenna falls, and then back on a crowded bus. The second room is ready, and Phillip moves his things in, and we go to the Nescoffee for a late lunchtime snack: devilled cashews, potato wedges and lemon, ginger and honey tea.

The new room is rather ramshackle but good enough for a night. Then it's time to relax with a short walk, before we go out for dinner at the Dream restaurant. It's pleasant sitting under cover in the garden as the rain suddenly starts to pour down. I have a rather good veg rice and curry with Ginger beer. Then it's back to the hotel for a rather better night.

Wednesday, March 27 Ella to Galle

Up at six to shower and pack and to breakfast at seven. The staff are just arriving and it's a while before we get our meal. But we are in time to check out and get to the bus stop For the 8.30 to Mattara which turns out to be 8.45. There are a lot of westerners with luggage getting on but most people get a seat. The road down the pass is as spectacular as it seemed yesterday and goes rather further before the plains. I pass about an hour talking to a man from Banderwalle who is a gems dealer and is visiting his brother who deals in Mattera. We talk about the war, schools and a whole range of topics. The rest of the journey is through many paddy

fields and other types of farming before reaching the bird reserve and the coast. There are some alluring views of the emerald sea.

Along the coastal strip there are many towns and villages and resort type hotels. The journey to Mattura takes just under five hours. When we get there we get straight into an air conditioned mini bus for which will drop us in Galle after another hour. From there a short three wheeler journey gets us to the guesthouse just across the rampart from the sea. The family's very welcoming and we are soon settled in to two comfortable air-conditioned rooms which are much better than last night for not much more money.

We are drinking a pot of tea of tea on the terrace before long, overlooking the ramparts and the sea. The tea is rather strong and bitter, but the outlook is exceptional; the best location yet and probably the best rooms since Colombo. After tea it's time for a stroll around the old town within the ramparts, with views out to sea and of the old houses from the Dutch period. One Dutch church has been converted into a Jamma Masjid; there seem to be lots of Muslims in the area.

Aft s shower is time to go out for supper. One of the prime contenders has closed but we get a reasonable meal at the Serendipity Arts Café. A walking tour arrives which includes several pretentious young people. After ginger and pumpkin soup and fettuccini with pesto I feel better; I need to eat earlier. Then it's back to the guest house for an early night and a much better night. The efficient AC certainly helps.

Thursday, March 28 Galle

After a brief sortie at six to see the early morning light I'm back in bed with podcasts until seven and after a shower it's reading on the terrace until breakfast arrives. It's excellent with hops, egg curry, watermelon juice, pineapple, coffee and 'yellow' jam. Eating it overlooking the ocean helps.

After breakfast we go our separate ways. I stay on the balcony until 10.30 enjoying the privilege of the view and the ability of watching the world go by, and also lots of school children on trips, marching along th ramparts. I think I must be end of trm treats. All the girls are in white dresses with pigtails, and the boys have white shirts and blue/white shorts or white trousers.

I venture out in the heat along the ramparts and to the new town, which is where the dramatic effects of the Tsunami were worst felt, particularly in the bus station and around. I check the South Ceylon restaurant for lunch and the book shop but they do not have a book on the wild flowers of the area. I then go, via the station (train at 11.15, second and third classes unreserved), to the cathedral where there is supposed to be a good view; it's disappeared behind new building. Then down to the information office for a photocopied map, and sign my name below Phillips's; he came an hour earlier apparently. From there I head back to the hotel to meet up with Phillip.

I go back to the South Ceylon by myself for pineapple curry, rice and ginger beer (tasty but not

special), and return gently in the hot humid afternoon via Dutch and English churches with enthusiastic caretakers.

After some time on the balcony we go to the Rampart Hotel to join the hordes watching the sun go down from their terrace, with a Weißbier in hand, imported from Germany. The sun does not produce one of its best shows, but the beer is enjoyable.

Friday, March 29 Galle to Colombo

It's a leisurely start with breakfast and then reading on the terrace, after a sunrise walk along the ramparts. Phillip goes out after breakfast but I enjoy sitting and reading. At ten we get a three wheeler to the station for the 11.15 to Colombo. Getting the tickets is easy and we have plenty of time to sit on the platform to watch the world go by. The train comes in pretty much on time, but is very busy and we are lucky to get seats, all be it apart. It's a pleasant ride up the coast with the ocean on one side and often backwaters on the other side. To start with there are beach resorts but later it gets more suburban.

From the Fort station it's a three wheeler to the Renuka Hotel, where there is an altercation about the cost, but we are soon settled into the very comfortable business hotel type rooms. After a shower and a rest I go for a walk, along the coast as far as possible to the Fort for a last snack at the Pagoda, and a further look around the colonial buildings, and then back to the hotel.

At 7.30 it's dinner in the Palmira restaurant with a similar meal to the previous one, including the cashew nut curry. We arrange for one of the budget taxis outside the hotel to take us to the airport, getting the mobile phone number of the driver.

And then to bed for a decent night.

Saturday, March 30 Colombo to London

It's a leisurely and decent breakfast, and after packing we ring the taxi driver and are away by nine. The drive to the airport takes just over an hour and so we have plenty of time for the 1pm flight. It's pretty much on time and as comfortable as the outward flight, with the daytime flight not so taxing. Two meals are served during the twelve hours, and we get in to Heathrow at 7.30. My luggage comes through promptly and I leave Phillip, get to terminal three and ring Derek, and am home soon after nine to a cold house.