

Mihintale: the birthplace of Buddhism

On Poson Full Moon Poya Day, large crowds of devotees pay homage to the sacred site of Mihintale, which signifies the arrival of Buddhism in the island



The Mihintale Rock, Aradhana Gala

Poson is the historical and significant occasion that recalls the arrival of Arahata Mahinda and his disciplines bringing in the word of the Buddha to the nation, which changed the island's history. This significant event took place at Mihintale. Thus it is called the 'Cradle of Buddhism' in Sri Lanka.

Mihintale is also called the 'rock of stupas' as it is studded with numerous stupas, some renovated and immaculate, others left in original molds of brick. The area of Mihintale is surrounded by dense jungle and rock boulders.

Upon reaching the foot of the mountain, the ascent begins with the grand staircase, fringed by *Araliya* trees (temple trees). Buddhist devotees trace the steps to the summit where Arahata Mahinda first preached the wisdom of the Dhamma to King Devanampiyatissa. It is known that the King was the first follower of the Buddha's philosophy in Sri Lanka and thus transformed the entire area into a Buddhist monastery. For hundreds of years, bhikkhus lived, meditated, and provided the spiritual teaching of the Buddha to the people.



The grand staircase fringed by Araliya trees

Next is the lead to the upper terrace, the plateau called *Ambastala*. On this historic site, King Devanampiyatissa looked back when he heard his name 'Tissa' being called by Arahata Mahinda. With his thumb on his bowstring and the arrow's flight targeting the deer stopped, he turned to find the source of this voice. The site where this momentous meeting took place is marked by a golden fence, and the *Ambasthala* Stupa. The imposing *Aradhana gala* – the rock on which Arahata Mahinda and the five disciples had been spotted – is directly in front.



Ambasthala Stupa

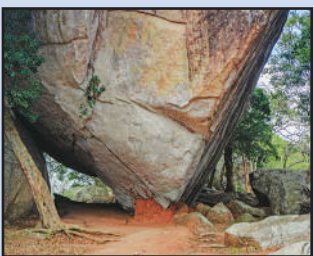
On the left is the *Maha Seya* – the biggest of the stupas at Mihintale. The *Mihindu Seya* is believed to contain the ashes of Arahata Mahinda.

In and around Mihintale too there are many places to see including caves, inscriptions and ruins of buildings which may have been dwelling places of bhikkhus. The Brahmi inscriptions of Mihintale are the earliest form of Sinhala writing. The earliest to decipher these was British archaeologist H. C. P. Bell. The credit of restoring the Mihintale places of worship goes to renowned archaeologist Prof. Senerat Paranavitana, Commissioner of Archaeology in Sri Lanka.



Mihintale Maha Seya

Mihintale is also of archaeological importance and is evidence of Sri Lanka's advanced hydraulic civilization. These are some of its must-see sites



MIHINDU GUHAWA (the Cave of Arahata Mahinda) is the cave where Arahata Mahinda meditated is one of the most interesting sites in this monastic complex. Its seat carved into the rock.



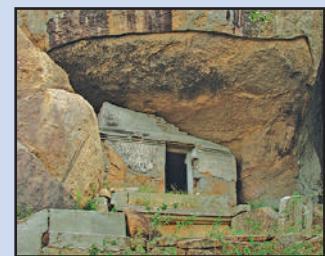
NAGA POKUNA with the impressive insignia of the *Naga* Tribe was the water source for the Ven. Thera. From here water was supplied to the *Sinha Pokuna*, which serviced the older bhikkhus of the monastery.



KALUDIYA POKUNA is a beautiful pond and structure, which bear witness to Sri Lanka's remarkable hydraulic technology. It can be seen from *Rajagiri Lena* and was a monastic complex used by bhikkhus.



KANTAKA CHETIYA which showcases the island's artistic heritage, has the oldest *Vahalkada* (four structures at the cardinal directions of the stupa) in Sri Lanka.



RAJAGIRI LENA is believed to be where the Kings rested when they paid homage to Mihintale. It is under the massive rock boulder close to *Kaludiya Pokuna*.