
Revel in a Fascinating Colombo City Walk

Explore old Colombo during a leisurely 3-4 hour guided walk that takes you through the city's commercial heritage. You have a chance to see how the city grew under the Portuguese, Dutch and English, and how some traditions remain in how people conduct their day-to-day business and unique palette. The main focus of this walk takes you past buildings that date back from 17th to the early 20th century that were erected during the Dutch & British rule.

While Colombo is tremendously lucky to still have a few stunning examples of Dutch Architecture to admire, very little of the Portuguese period remains. Since the end of the recent conflict in 2009, tremendous effort has been put revitalizing Colombo's buildings. It is an opportune time to explore the capital on foot, and discover 300 years of history. The Dutch ruled the Sri Lankan coast from about 1640, when they defeated the Portuguese, until 1796 when the British took over after Napoleon's forces controlled the Netherlands. This legacy is found in forts from the Dutch period around the island, churches and graves. But some of the most accessible history is in the older parts Colombo.

The best way of experiencing the thriving old city, known as the Pettah is on foot. The word pettah is a corruption of a Tamil word 'pettai' for 'a town outside a fort'. You will meet your guide and head off on a walking tour of the busy trading centre of Pettah. The walk starts from and includes the Wolvendaal Church completed in 1758, and the Bellfry that called the faithful from the bottom of the hill. The walk continues through the Pettah and stops at the Museum of Dutch involvement located in the 17th century residence of a Dutch Governor on Prince Street, and a visit to the country's largest wholesale bazaar where you are encouraged to negotiate prior to purchasing anything.

After a short break for a soft drink in a local cafe, you will continue up to York Street past British colonial buildings such as Cargills into the Fort Area. The tour ends with a visit to the recently restored Dutch Hospital (the oldest surviving Dutch building in Colombo, believed to date back to at least 1681), where you can grab a drink or a meal at one of the many excellent restaurants. One VOC (Dutch East India Company) Medical Officer who spent time in Colombo was Paul Hermann who is remembered as one of the founders of Sri Lankan botany, and perhaps more importantly as the Chair of Botany at Leiden from 1679-95 during which time he developed the Botanical Garden into Europe's finest. This is a gentle and relaxed walk through a bustling and vibrant city punctuated with little known facets of Dutch history.

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