

AIMGA's OVERSEAS MEDICAL CONFERENCE: IN Sri Lanka

1/9/18 TO 9/9/18

This AIMGA's overseas medical conference trip was the second one for me and Uma . It was different in many ways when compared to our first experience when we toured South America a few years ago. The most important and in my opinion the only commonality between the two tours is the comradeship among all the members of the group. It was very much palatable throughout the tour .

It was interesting to note that, instead of leaving the shores of Sydney and returning back to home as a group, most of us "trickled" into Srilanka from Sydney, London, Thailand and India and at the end "drifted" away to Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Sydney. Hence, one can describe the travel arrangements were "custom made".

It was almost midnight when we reached Colombo and were well received with garlands by our tour guide , a very handsome young man called Bevan. I experienced yet again (not for the first time) the good nature and "political" wisdom of Dr Harinath when he gently offered his garland to Bevan (since he had run out of garlands) to greet another member .

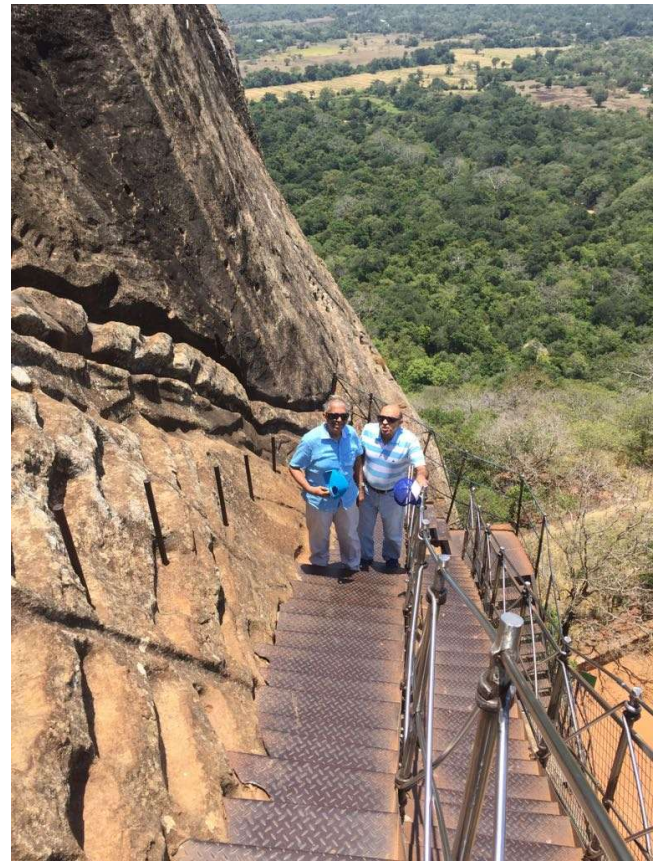
The accommodation and food in all the hotels were of good standard. The company of the group which was good made it up for any deficiency if one had felt otherwise at any time

The hotel management "hurriedly" organized the place for our first conference which went off very well. Four speakers (Kishore, Purushottam, Nagamma and myself – melanomas, osteoporosis, PCRs and histology of skin lesions respectively)did justice for the day. .



While in Colombo, we visited the Private Hospital "Asir vad" and learnt about the services the hospital provides . The Management of the hospital, it appears , is keen to attract patients from Australia.. We had a lighter moment to bless and wish a young man , Kesavan , who , it appears to have organized the presentations . That day was his first wedding Anniversary.

The first evening was spent in the conducted bus tour of Colombo followed by "lantern lit "dinner made better by the three instrumentalists who delighted us with old Hindi film songs inclusive .



Day 3 was mostly consumed by travelling by bus to reach Kandalama . We were entertained by a flutist at lunch and we managed to reach just in time to enter the safari site to witness herds of elephants. The journey towards our hotel was delayed because the bus ran out of fuel and we were stranded in darkness in the “elephant country”.

Next day was exhausting as well as exhilarating – 6 of us (Kanta Aluwaliah, Gayathri,,. Lalitha, Ajay, Purushottam Sawrikar, and Niranjana) managed to climb to the top of Sigirya rock fortress. Niranjana came back first within 40 minutes and most of us were not even aware that he had climbed. Kanta, our senior most proved and showed us that “if there is a will, there is a way”. Some had marginal success in climbing to a certain height and the rest were ready to welcome back the successful climbers with energized clapping (nothing else to do while others were away and hence we had the energy to clap).

The afternoon was spent touring around the medieval ruins of Polonnaruwa – ruins of palaces and temples to Buddha. It was entertaining to engage with the guide with his knowledge of history. In reply to a query “Who are the Sinhalese descendents of ?” He reckoned that they are from North India and the South Indian kings were the invaders !

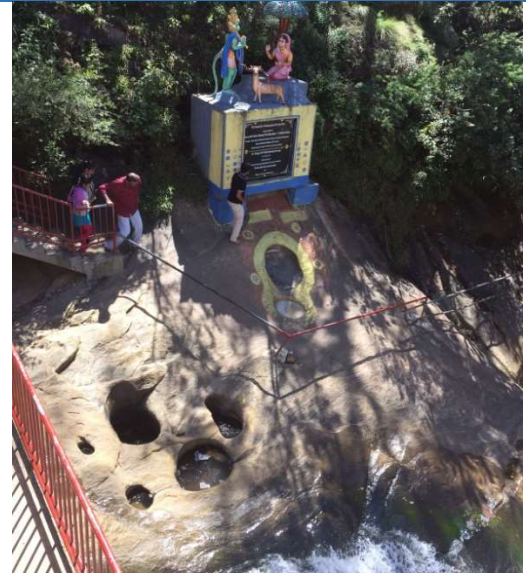
Day 5: The visit to spice garden at Kandy was very informative and an opportunity to spend some money. The visit to the iconic Temple of Tooth Relic was exhausting but interesting. How ever we did not happen to see the tooth!

Day 6

The planned train journey started late because the train was late. The journey in the train was anything but spectacular but definitely was a change form long trips in the bus.

By this time , we had started pestering our tour guide, Bevan that our trip to SriLanka will not be complete and fulfilled unless we visit historical places of Hindu Epic Ramayana. So a deal was done at Labookellie tea centre that we will visit Sri Hanumanji’ temple that evening and visit next morning the Asoka Vatika where the story goes that Sri Seetha stayed during her imprisonment by Ravana.

We gave up the idea of learning how to pluck the tea leaves but rushed to have darsan of Sri Hanumanji at the hill top. This temple belongs to Chinmaya Mission and so, with our connections with



the Mission at Sydney, we were treated “right royally”. We all chanted Hanuman Chalisa as a group and Dr Sawrikar with his dear wife Preethi accepted the prasada on our behalf.

Our stay at Grand Hotel was excellent and was more noteworthy because we had our one and only “Happy hour” gathering before dinner. The successful “ hill climbers” were presented with small gifts for their achievement . Dr Harinath conferred “honorary Indian” title to John for being a regular member of AIMGA overseas tours. We also presented Dr Sowrikar with a T shirt as a memento for his unselfish work as the tour organizer and the opportunity was not wasted to inform all about his seva not only to AIMGA but also to individuals who were in need , during all these years. His name befits him.

Day 7: As promised we visited the Sita temple . It was an unique opportunity to physically stand at a place where Sita Devi spent her time as Ravana’s “prisoner” . The water fall and a massive “foot print” in the rock where Sri Hanumanji was supposed to have landed , Ravan falls etc were interesting. After the visit to this place, most of us felt that our trip to SriLanka had been fulfilled. Again a long bus trip took us Mirissa a beach resort.

Day 8 –We had our second conference. Again competent speakers (John, Ajay and Niranjana)with well chosen subject matters (nanometric measurements in management of oesophageal lesions, psoriasis and metabolic syndromes respectively) were presented and discussed. On the way to Colombo, we visited the fort at Galle. The walk around the fort was exhausting and it was hot . While we all lumbered, Dr Harinath and Gayathri took an alternate easy approach and did a better job by hiring an auto rickshaw. Once we reached Colombo, on the way to airport, the group divided into two , one for a sea food meal for dinner and the rest for a superb (the very best of all dinners) vegetarian meal.

When we look back and reflect , we will realise that this tour was a test of strength , stamina, will power, team spirit and comradeship. Either silently to ourselves or openly we all declared , “ I did it” in spite of each one’s “assumed” or real inability and doubt arising out of advancing age, ill health and self doubts. As we were standing in the queue to check in at Colombo air port, one of our group members said with satisfaction ” For the first time in my life, I did everything in this tour with out the presence or help of my spouse !”

The icing on the cake for Uma and me happened at Singapore. When we were about to board the flight, we were upgraded to business class for no reason !!