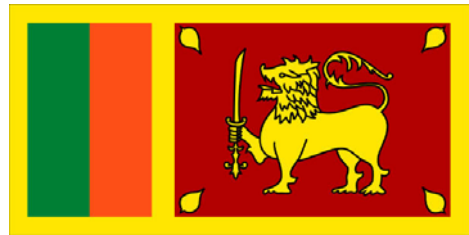


COLOMBO SRI LANKA

This morning we arrived bright and early at the port of Colombo, and are now able to go ashore!



Sri Lanka is similar in character to India - bursting at its seams - millions of people - traffic chaos - persistent taxi drivers and motorised rickshaw drivers with their "Tuc Tuc's" plying for hire. Amazingly, it all seems to come together, the traffic moves, the people get around, and the city "lives" at this frantic pace.

We walked from the dock area into town, through two checkpoints, and had difficulty in finding the main shopping area. Walking down the pavements was OK, but then we had to cross the road several times. Yes, they have yellow striped zebra crossings, but as the traffic totally ignores such minor details, you have to venture your way by walking a few steps, then stopping to allow the frantic traffic to pass you on either side. If you carry out this procedure for each of the many lanes on this race track, you eventually get to the other side! Why do the words "sitting duck" spring to mind?

We resorted to hiring a tuc-tuc, asking the driver to take us to the main temple, then on to the shops, and finally back to the port to rejoin the Van Gogh. You have to experience the complete traffic chaos to believe it, as all vehicles dart and dive into every available space on the roads, cut each other up from both sides, and motorcycles, tuc-tuc's, cars, buses and lorries all do battle on equal terms; our open tuc-tuc being at greatest risk!





The temple was really spectacular, and beautiful. Inside housed a museum, huge carved figures in both stone and brass, and we were given a Sri Lankan blessing, and a peace bangle made for us out of coloured threads. Nobody stood with hands outstretched for money, so we were pleased to be able to donate some cash in a voluntary box before we left the temple.



Back to the tuk-tuk - try as we might to close our eyes, it was impossible to realise the danger we were in, the constant tooting of horns still made us aware of this chaotic situation! Our driver projected his low powered motorised missile towards the Sri Lankan Independence Memorial, in Cinnamon Gardens, where a local guide took over the commentary. Here we

used the opportunity to photograph our almost suicidal death trap posing as a taxi, and also some of our fellow guests who were equally "bemused" by our tuk-tuk! OK for them as they had a proper mini bus!

We thought that we had seen it all, but no! The tuc-tuc journey back to the ship was now being carried out in the Colomban rush hour, and the driving became more frantic, daring, suicidal, and downright dangerous at times! Amazingly we were not involved with any accident, nor did we see any collisions or "things that go bump on the road". But judging by the many dents and scrapes on almost all vehicles, we were blessed with today's journeys!

During the evening we were taken by coach to a grand colonial style hotel, where we were entertained in grand fashion. Firstly was the food - the hottest curries we have tasted, and all very enjoyably so! Also on offer was some soup, Alvina vouched for its hotness and taste! Sweets were to follow, and were eagerly eaten by all.



Whilst we ate from this fantastic buffet, we were entertained by various artistes. A sari demonstration was given, followed by dancers in national costume, very energetic drummers who made much sound, and an unbelievable fire eating dancer. All in all, a very pleasant way to spend an evening, in a country far away from home.

