



### The Over 50s Sri Lanka Tour April 2007

THE Devon over-50s tourists are safely back in the country after a successful trip to Sri Lanka.

...and brushes with monkeys, a holy tooth, flies and a tour guide with "something cooking in the kettle."

It was the stock phrase used by tour leader Nissanka as he guided our party throughout the length and breadth of the beautiful, but under-developed country still trying to come to terms with the after effects of the devastating tsunami. The 15-day trip took in five games, one of which was washed out by an unexpected monsoon - as you basked in tropical sunshine back home.

We started the first match at 9.30 in the morning. Bearing in mind Sri Lanka is almost five hours ahead of us that was like batting at 4.30 our time. Some of the grounds were former and current Test arenas but, sadly, need quite a bit of work if they are to be restored to their former glory.

The road network in most parts of the country are fine, but choc-a-bloc around the clock and littered with little motorised scooter taxis, whose drivers dice with death as they dive in and out of the heavy traffic. Smoking was banned in public places which was rather ironic as you needed a smoke as they weaved their daring way. Religion plays a heavy part in every day life with Buddhist temples everywhere.

Kandy was one stop-off point and the location of the 'Temple of the Tooth Relic' or the golden-roofed Dalada Maligawa, where the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha is enshrined. It is considered the foremost sacred place of worship in the Buddhist world. Thousands of ordinary folk travel thousands of miles on the off chance of being allowed through the heavily guarded silver gates to pay homage to the gold case-encased tooth but only a few ever realise their dream.

Enter Nissanka and his intricate web of, let's say 'contacts'. Suddenly we were allowed in the inner sanctum and were within feet of the tooth. Mind you, some would say that we had our very own Buddha in the camp. Debutante tourist and Barton colleague Chris Shelton was dubbed the Buddha of Barton after being spotted perched by the pool, legs tucked neatly beneath paunch. Not a nice sight.

Travelling by coach was a long drawn out affair. Covering 20 kilometres took almost two hours. So it was a welcome change to take the Kandy 'express' train back to the capital Colombo during part of the trip. It was quiet which was down to the fact that Sri Lanka was about to welcome in the New Year which had a surprising knock-on effect for us tourists... a ban on alcohol for four days. Enter that man Nissanka again and we somehow managed to find enough Lion Beer, which did a roaring trade, to keep us going.

The country lives in its Colonial past. Some has been preserved, like the majestic Mount Lavinia Hotel in Colombo and the idyllic Grand Hotel in the tea plantation mountains of Nuwara Eliya. But much has been left to fall into decline. Like so many other Third-World countries you wonder where all the cash aid from around the world has gone. The threat of the terrorist has also decimated the tourist trade. The Tamil Tigers do cause problems but not on the scale the outside world fear and Sri Lanka, by and large, is as safe an anywhere in the world. Nissanka usually hosts 42 tours a year. Ours was his last for four months which said it all.

Some time was spent on the south coast of the country, still trying to pick up the pieces from the tsunami which claimed thousands of lives. The eerie crumbled shells of buildings still litter the shoreline. Nissanka, whose own house was destroyed in the disaster and who saw relatives die, pinpointed where lives were lost as we drove along in silence.

On the way back to our hotel we stopped off at one development trying to raise itself from the ashes in Galle which took the brunt of the giant wave. It is owned by the business manager of Sri Lanka cricketing superstar Muttiah Muralitharan and once boasted a complex of villa, tennis courts and other historic buildings. All that was left standing was one main building which still bore the mark of the tideline left by the tsunami...30 feet up its front wall.

Tavistock CC based and Lords Taverner official Stuart 'Excuse Me' Munday



Stuart Munday is pictured above with Devon over 50's captain Stuart Lott and members of the team presenting the cricket bags to charity director Shane Bayley.

#### Results from the tour:

Devon 92 all out  
Colombo Colts 93 for 4 (B Howard 2-32).  
Colombo Colts won by six wickets.

Dambulla 69 for 4 (F Pyle 2-16, B Howard 2-18).

Rain stopped play.

Old Trinitans 115 all out (B Howard 4-28, S Lott 3-22)  
Devon 116 for 4 (J Parker 41n/o).  
Devon won by six wickets.

Devon 174 for 4 (R Eames 81, R Meyer 41)  
Pannadura Sports Club 188 for 1)  
Pannadura won by nine wickets.

Devon 134 for 7 (C Theedom 27, D Rice 25)  
Matara 135 for 9 (F Pyle 5-15)  
Matara won by one wicket.

presented cricket equipment to the 'Foundation of Goodness' project. Houses, a sporting complex, medical and education facilities are being built on the site for over 2,000 children.

Highlights of the trip were seeing the ever-masculine Mr Munday in a sarong; seeing the ever-covered up Rob Meyer in a pair of swimming trunks, seeing former Gloucester bowler Jack Davey wander into the wrong chalet one night - must to the surprise and, possible, delight of Jackie Theedom, seeing tour organiser Stuart Lott getting all emotional during the farewell dinner night - and meeting a couple from Kingsteignton in the jungle in the Yala national park! Other not so enjoyable moments were the never-ending battle to stop sweating in the stifling heat; constantly tackling the flies especially at one ground where a stream of sewage kindly lined one boundary (we didn't attempt the curry for lunch that day) and constantly being fearful of being struck down with the Lanka lurgies.

Last but not least were those monkeys. Signs warned us of their presence at our hotel in Kandy. One tourist, who will remain nameless, chose to ignore them and decided to enjoy a well-earned beer and cigar out on the balcony one night. He thought nothing of leaving the empty bottle, glass and ash tray outside as he went to bed. At five the following morning he and his wife were awoken by an almighty racket on the balcony.

On pulling back the curtains there was one monkey with glass in mouth, another having a smashing time with the bottle and one more having a couple of drags on the stub of a cigar. The couple needed to act quickly - so he sent the wife into action and she managed to grab the offending objects from a tiny gap between the glass doors. He stood guard with cricket bat to the ready behind her... just in case. The tour was a huge success and Stuart and Katie deserve all the praise in the world... thanks a million.