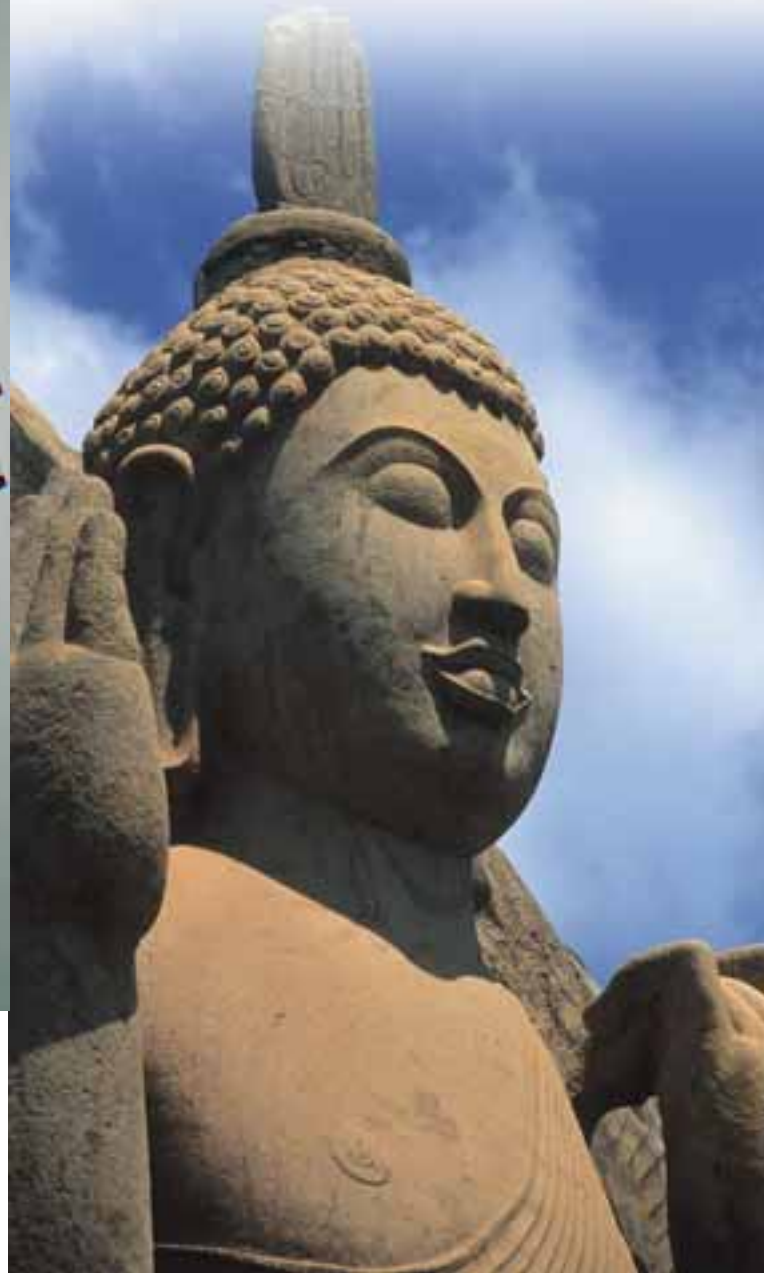


Sri Lanka Tourist Attractions



SRI LANKA

Sacred Buddhist Sites



Sri Lanka Tourism

80 Galle Road, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94 11 243 7059/60

Fax: +94 11 244 0001

E-mail: info@srilankatourism.org

Website: www.srilankatourism.org



Sri Lanka
A land like no other

In the Steps of Lord Buddha

A large footprint embedded atop a 2,234 metre mountain, Sri Pada, is believed by Buddhists to have been made by Lord Buddha on his second visit to Sri Lanka in 523 BC.

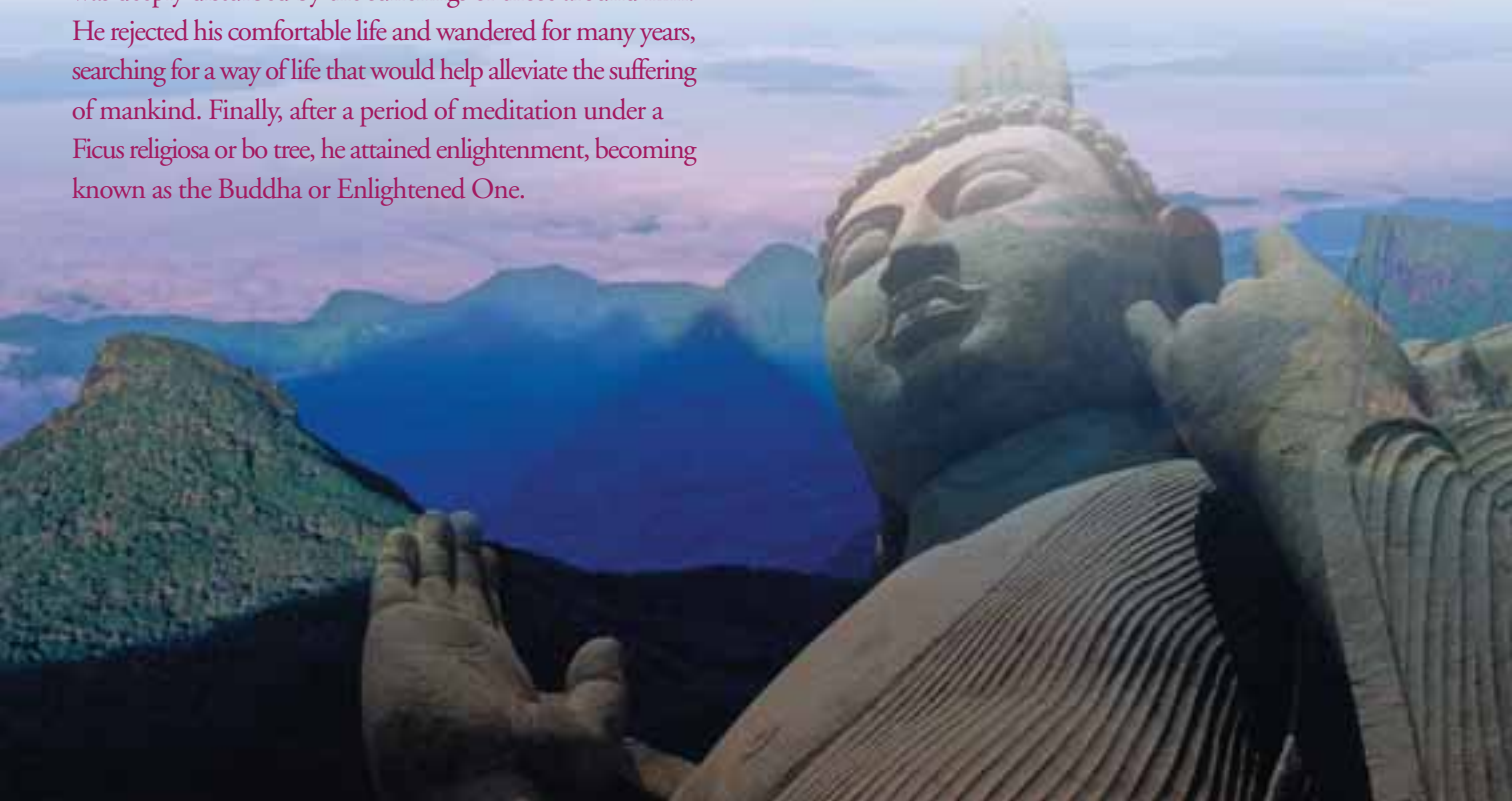
This site, which draws tens of thousands of pilgrims each year, is one of several sacred places associated with Lord Buddha. Born into a royal family in India, Siddhartha Gautama was deeply disturbed by the sufferings of those around him. He rejected his comfortable life and wandered for many years, searching for a way of life that would help alleviate the suffering of mankind. Finally, after a period of meditation under a *Ficus religiosa* or bo tree, he attained enlightenment, becoming known as the Buddha or Enlightened One.



He travelled throughout India and visited Sri Lanka on three occasions, spreading the doctrine (dharma) that is the foundation of one of the world's major faiths, and the faith of the majority of Sri Lankans.

Lord Buddha's first visit to Sri Lanka in 528 BC

was to try to avert a war between two rival factions of a clan. While Lord Buddha was still alive, a dagoba — believed to contain locks of his hair — was built on the site where he is said to have levitated, terrifying and instantly converting the primitive local Vedddhas to the Buddhist faith.



This ancient dagoba or dome-shaped stupa at *Mahiyangana*, east of Kandy, has been added to for more than two thousand years, and is revered as one of the holiest Buddhist sites in the country.

Lord Buddha returned to Sri Lanka five years later, again in an attempt

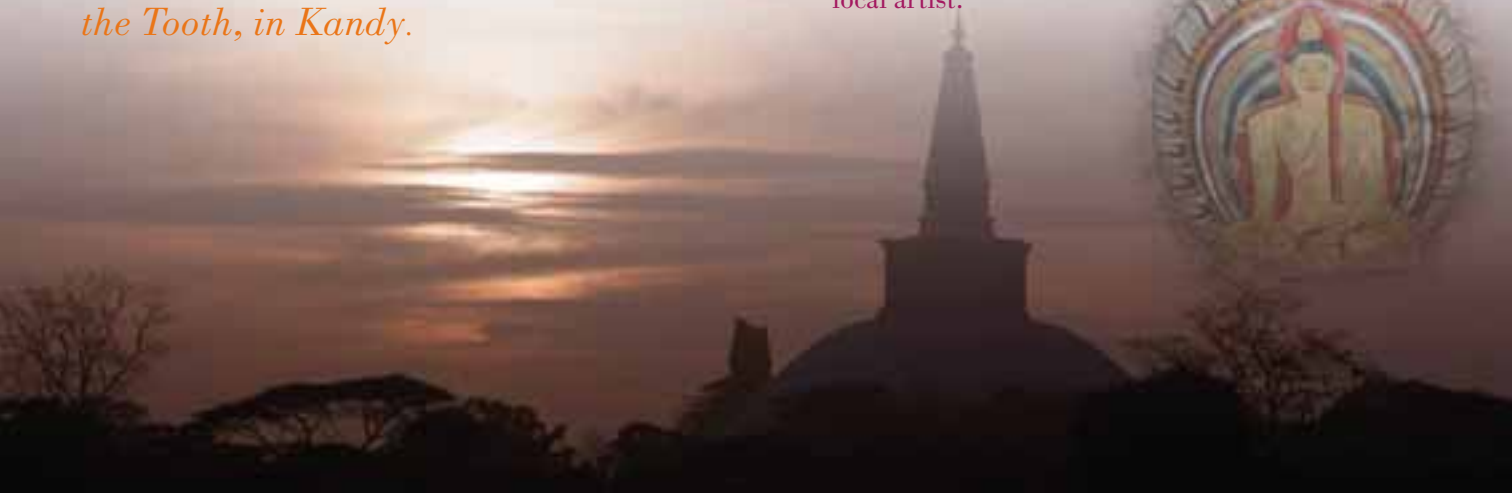
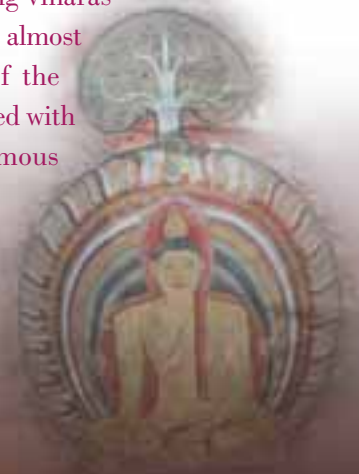
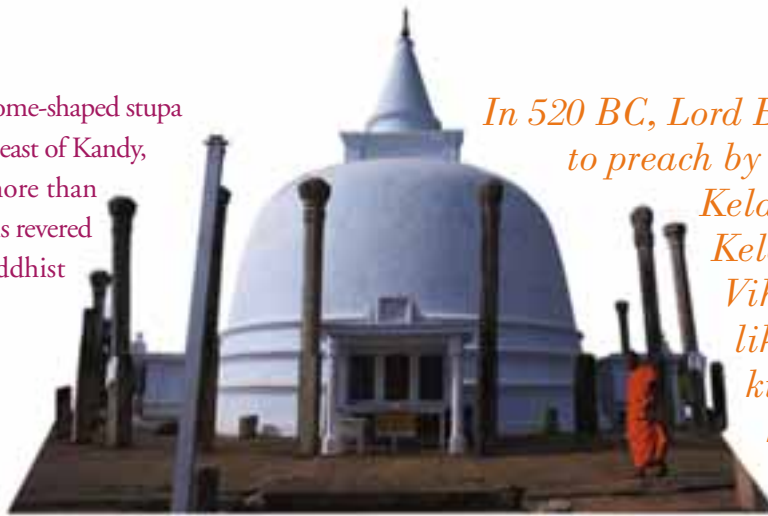
to prevent a war. Today, a bell-shaped dagoba marks the site on the small island of *Nainativu*, west of Jaffna. Near the dagoba is a robust tree, the cutting of which is supposed to have been brought with Lord Buddha.

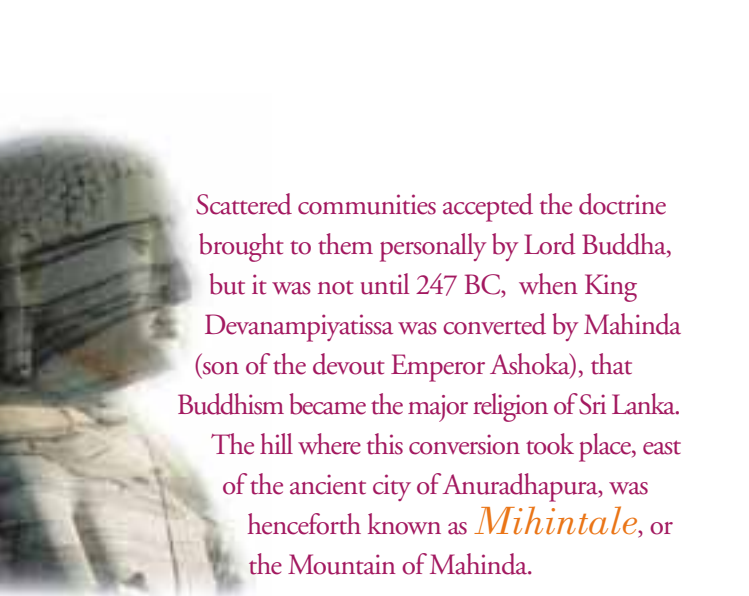
After leaving the mountain peak of Sri Pada where, according to legend, he left his footprint, Lord Buddha is said to have meditated at a spot near the east coast, a remote region between Batticaloa and the beautiful Arugam Bay. The *Digavapi dagoba* was built here in the 2nd century BC. Another sacred relic, a tooth of Lord Buddha, is enshrined at Sri Dalada Maligawa or the *Temple of the Tooth, in Kandy*.

In 520 BC, Lord Buddha was invited to preach by the king of Kelaniya. Today, the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara sits in a park-like setting, just 9 kilometres from the heart of Colombo.

The main courtyard contains a shrine house or vihara, a stupa (dagoba), and a sacred bo tree, the type under which Lord Buddha gained enlightenment.

The vihara was destroyed and rebuilt several times, the current incarnation having been constructed in the early 20th century. This is arguably one of the most interesting viharas in the country, for inside it, almost every square centimetre of the walls and ceiling is decorated with frescoes, executed by a famous local artist.





Scattered communities accepted the doctrine brought to them personally by Lord Buddha, but it was not until 247 BC, when King Devanampiyatissa was converted by Mahinda (son of the devout Emperor Ashoka), that Buddhism became the major religion of Sri Lanka.

The hill where this conversion took place, east of the ancient city of Anuradhapura, was henceforth known as *Mihintale*, or the Mountain of Mahinda.

Mahinda was entrusted by Emperor Ashoka with a cutting from the sacred bo tree under which Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, placing it in a golden vase. It was eventually planted at Anuradhapura, and today, 2,240 years later, worshippers still come to pray at the world's oldest documented tree, the Sri Maha Bodhi.

For further information, please contact Sri Lanka Tourist Board or click onto www.srilankatourism.org

