

# Moving up in the world



(We've changed to Microsoft Publisher to do these postcards—the layout of the pictures is much easier.)



Sri Lanka has some pretty spectacular ruins, and they are located in some pretty spectacular locations - most involving lengthy, steep climbs.

From the ancient city of Pollunarawa, it was onto the Dambulla caves - located high on a rock outcropping, and filled with exquisite paintings and statues. Many are over 2000 years old, still with the original paint. As usual, it was at the top of a very long flight of stairs. We learned a bit of interesting Buddhist lore from the guide. One of the classic Buddha statue positions is the "reclining Buddha".



Ready for Nirvana



Resting

But another classic position is the Buddha, also horizontal, in the moment of his death, reaching Nirvana. How to tell them apart? It turns out that the reclining Buddha has his toes aligned, and the dead Buddha has them slightly out of line. Now you know.

Moving on from the Dambulla Caves, we headed to our favorite site, Sigiriya, the mother of all rock outcroppings and our deadliest climb to date (see header for a picture—yes, we climbed all the way up, on stairways clinging to the side of the rock). According to legend a son had his father, the king, walled in alive and took over the throne. The king's wife threatened to bring an Indian invasion to unseat him, so he built the strongest fortress he could find -- an entire palace complex at the top of 300m rock.



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In the bizarre ending, he went to fight a battle with the invading army, took a wrong turn into a swamp, mistakenly thought he had been deserted by his army, and killed himself. Getting to the top involved an incredible series of stairs up the side of the mountain. We went at dawn - there were absolutely no other people there - we had the entire site to ourselves. The top was just ruins; the real treat was on the way down, where there are some cave paintings, called the Sigiriya damsels. They are the only ancient, non-religious paintings in Sri Lanka, and date from 1400 years ago. They are seen often throughout the country on tourist literature, signage, etc.

Next stop will be the delightfully named town of Kandy, home of the current Temple of the Tooth.