

Kandy is Dandy



The second-largest city in Colombo, and its cultural capital, is the delightfully named town of Kandy. It is the last of the ancient imperial cities, and thus is home to the current instantiation of the **Temple of the Tooth** -- the resting place of the most sacred Sri Lankan relic, a tooth of the Buddha. The tooth is kept in the innermost of seven coffins, which are

viewable only at a distance through a small window — not a particularly impressive view.



More interesting is the priest's entrance to this central temple, flanked by elephant tusks & colorful drummers (above). The temple also houses a library of ancient Buddhist scriptures, recorded on palm leaves and bound together (left). In 1998, the Tamil Tigers exploded a bomb at the external entrance to the temple, causing extensive damage. Fortunately, little damage was done to the temple artifacts. The sacredness of this site was offset by the local guide we used - an old man who mumbled in heavily accented English. All four of us heard him say "tooth fairy" when he thought he was saying "tooth relic". We'd hear things like "The tooth fairy was brought to this city in the 1600s" and "Many people come here to worship the tooth fairy". Combining the tooth fairy, the turbaned drummers, and the elephant-tusked doorway, it was quite a surrealistic experience.



Kandy is also famous for **local dance**, involving colorful costumes & drums & good-looking dancers with bare chests, with a firewalk at the end. The performance we saw was performed by the YMBA - the Young Men's Buddhist Association. (There is also a YMMA, Young Men's Muslim Association, in town). Outside of Kandy is one of the most famous tourist attractions in all of Sri Lanka, the **elephant orphanage**. Originally set up to truly house orphans, it now seems to focus more on the tourist angle. Most of the

elephants seem to be teenagers or older (former orphans?), and some of the grown-up orphans have babies of their own. Most eventually go off to become working elephants. The big events are feeding the babies - think gallons of milk; and taking the entire herd down to the river to bathe (which requires guiding 100 elephants across a busy highway and down a crowded, narrow shopping street).

