

Ancient Buddhist Sites of Sri Lanka

Aukana

Sasseruwa

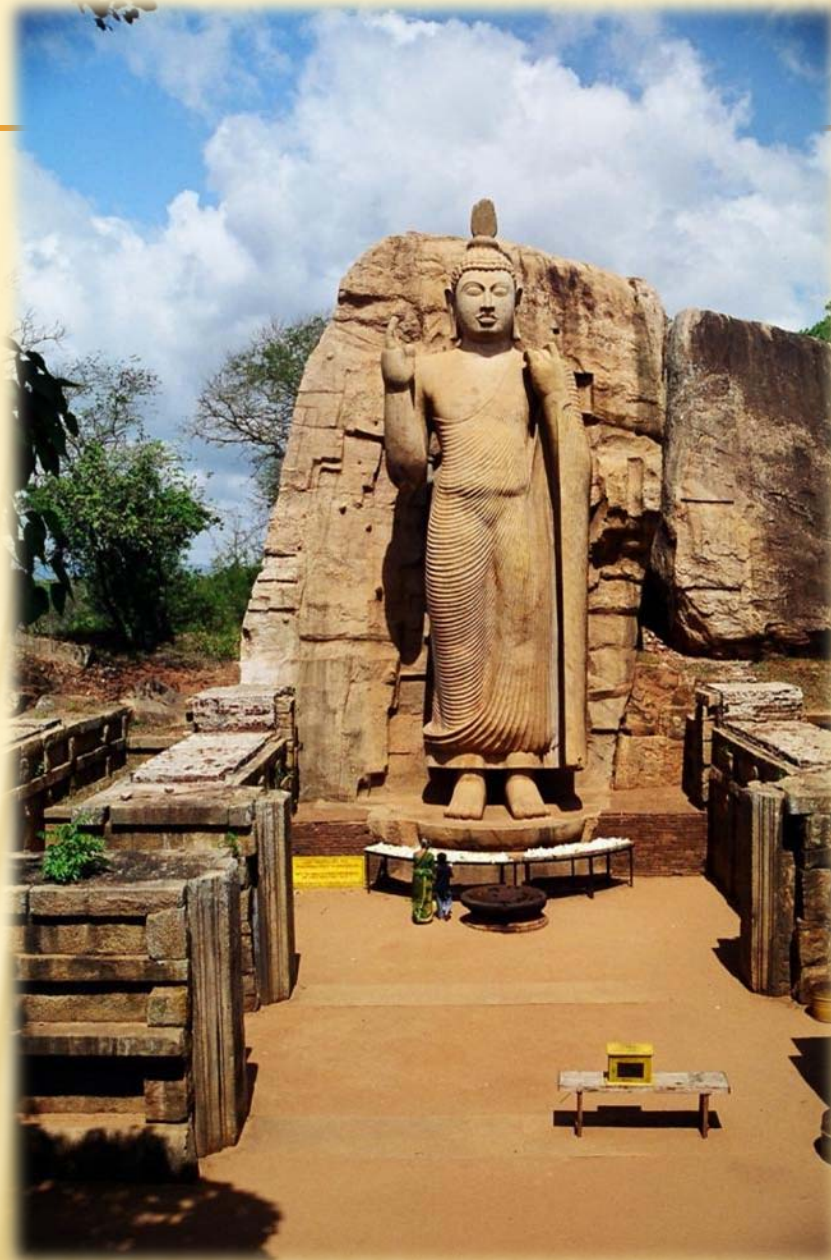
Ritigala

Considered to be the finest Buddha statue on the island, the 'Aukana' is situated approximately 32 miles southeast from Anuradhapura and a few miles from Kalawewa tank. Dating back to the 5th century, the construction of this statue has been attributed to King Datusena. Aukana means 'sun-eating' and dawn, when the first rays light up the finely carved features, is the best time to see it.

Although the statue is still narrowly joined at the back to the rock face it is cut from, the lotus plinth on which it stands is a separate piece.

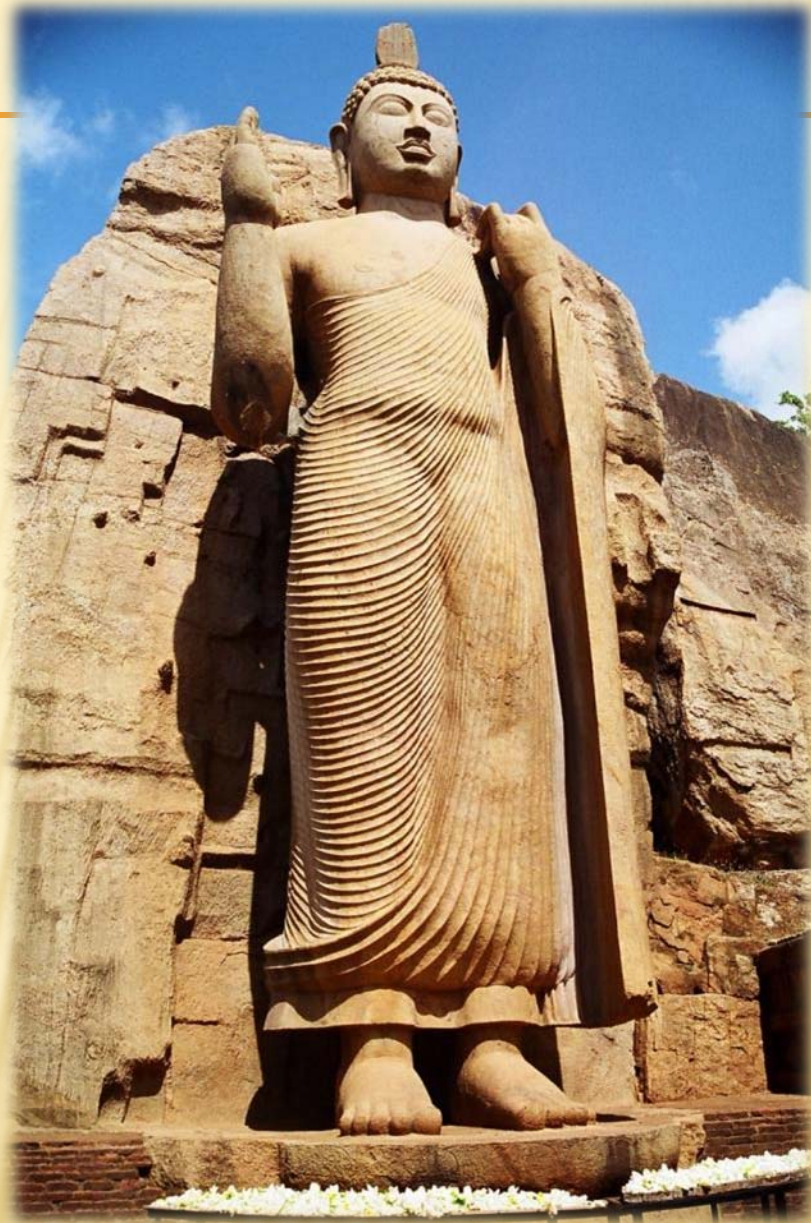
The statue including the pedestal on which this standing Buddha is constructed measures a height of 42 feet. The raised upper arm of the right hand, with the palm facing outwards indicates freedom from fear, while the left hand holds the robe. It seems that the statue would have been enclosed in a building, judging from the ruins of a foundation and the walls. A brick canopy that had been being constructed over it has now been dismantled.

The Aukana Buddha
with two women
offering jasmine
blossoms.

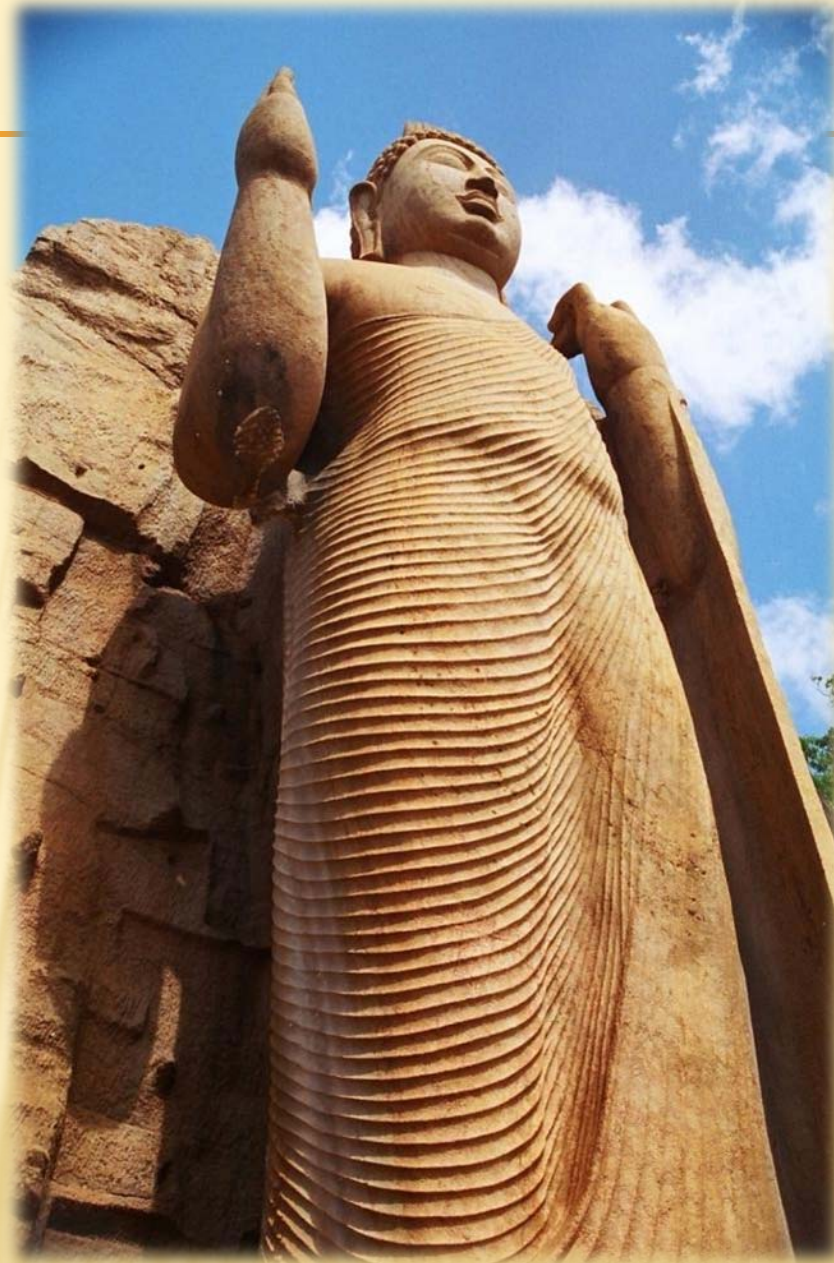




Another view.



A close-up of the
detail in the folds
of the robe.





Sunday Dhamma class at Aukana

Sasseruwa



Sasseruwa - This cave temple is near Aukana but requires 4-wheel drive to get there.

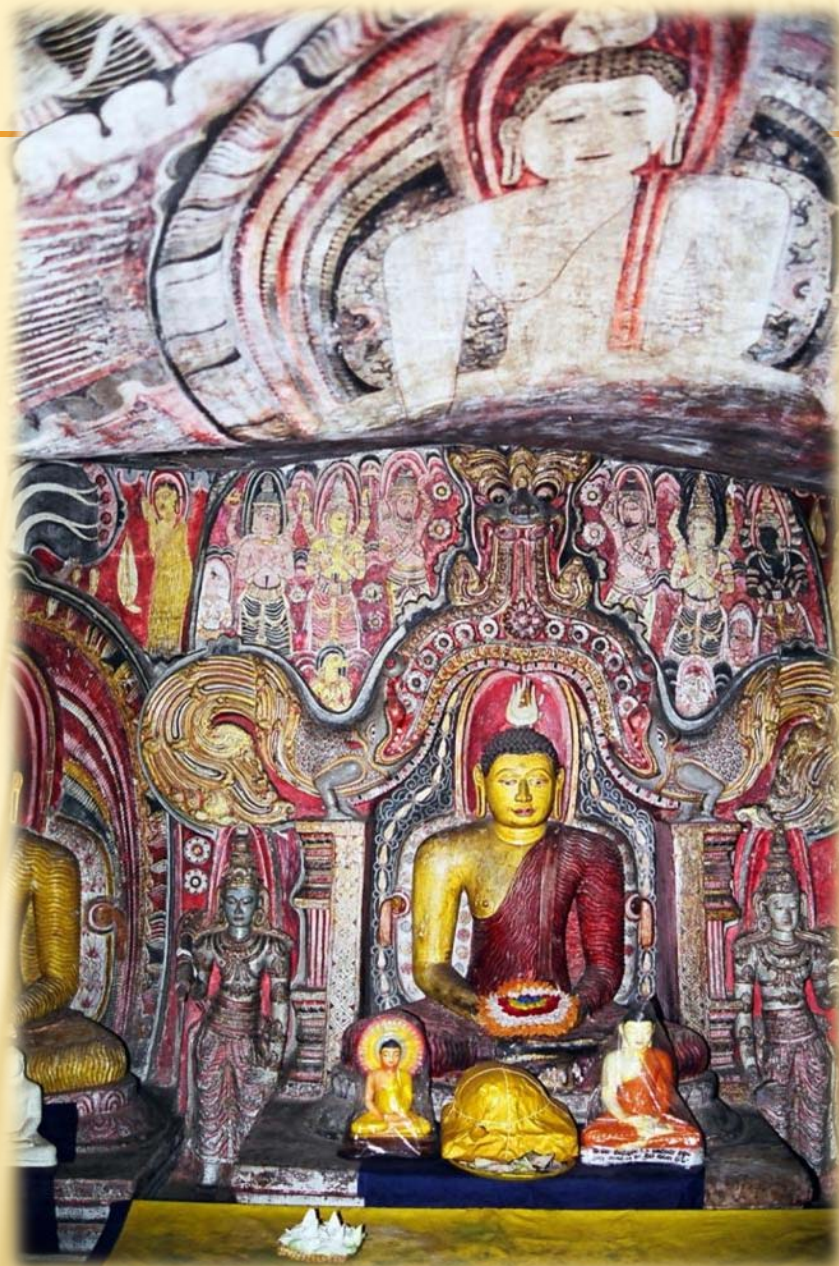


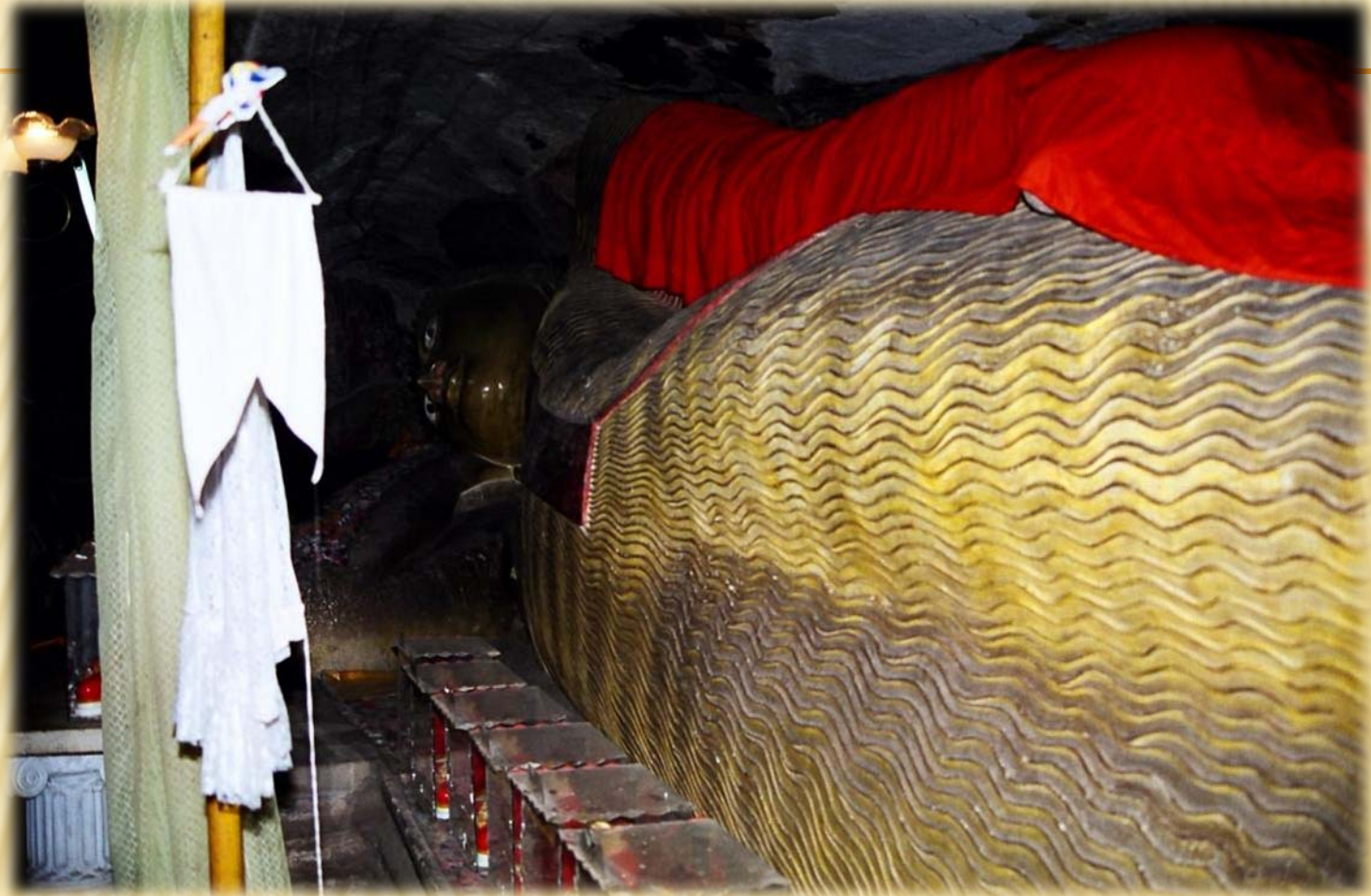
The monastery is “supported” by 3 villages (500 families) spread over 1500 acres. It is poor country and what little food production there is often is ravaged by 200 wild elephants. About 400 children attend Sunday school where they receive supplementary nutrition.

The entrance to
the main cave.



Created in the 1st
century, the images
received major
restoration in the
Kandy period.





The stone sculpture of this reclining Buddha was first draped in monk's robes of cloth before stucco and paint were applied. Some of the original fabric can be seen where the stucco has fallen away on the back of the image.



At the right rear corner of the image cave is an opening into the rock crevasses where a hooded cobra has its residence. I think the abbot was smiling when he said it was the “security guard”.





The Sasseruwa Buddha as you approach from below

Legend has it that this image was being carved by a student of the master who carved the Aukana Buddha.

When the master completed his work first, the student left this one unfinished.



Ritigala

The history of Ritigala dates back to the year 177 BC when Buddhism was established here. This mountain is just forty kilometres southeast from the ancient city of Anuradhapura. At 2514 feet, Ritigala is the highest mountain in the North Central Province.

In the old days when Buddhism was established in this island country, Ritigala was chosen for the construction of Vihares (temples). The first of such temples, Lanka Vihare, was made in the second century BC. A century later, Aritta Vihare, was built. Later in the ninth century AD King Sena made additions to the existing Vihares by constructing a large complex in the higher part of the hill for special priests called Pansukulikas.

At the foot of the mountains one can see the bandha pokuma that has been built by King Pandukabhaya in 307 BC. It is believed that King Pandukabhaya was hiding from his uncles who were trying to kill him. He made a palace here and ultimately won the battle. This palace was later donated to the Buddhist monks to use it as a monastery.

The mountain also has a large number of caves, broken Buddhist granite statues and inscriptions that corroborate the rich and ancient Buddhist culture that bloomed here in the ancient days. Almost seventy caves have been found to date. Also excellent water drainage system and fountains can be found at many places.

The ruins also give an insight into the living style of the ancient kings who lived here. There are delicate and intricate designed steps and passage ways. Around three decades back, the ruins were in very bad shape with most of them covered in layers of mud. The Department of Archaeology restored many of them with great care. The king's toilet and the ayurvedic centre are some of the places that have been restored.

There are numerous wild and herbal trees on this mountain. Although Ritigala is surrounded by dry and humid climate, the foot of this hill is cool and misty that makes the whole region very pleasant. This is also one of the most unique features of Ritigala. Due to its cool and wet climate many plants and vegetations can be found here that are not usually found in the adjacent plains.

Ritigala was given the status of Strict Nature Reserve on 7th November 1941 due to the rich source of flora and fauna. It is said that some of the species of plants that are found at Ritigala are found nowhere else in the world.

A local man
showing me
over the
maze of
walkways



A stone slab
bridge











A decorated urinal stone



Steps that would have led to a bathing pond



The steep path leading
to the upper level





Two puppies that struggled up the ruins with me. When they stopped climbing so did I.