

Golden Temple of Dambulla (Sri Lanka)(C561)

State of Conservation Report



DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY

CENTRAL CULTURAL FUND

**Ministry of Buddha Sasana, Religious and Cultural
Affairs**

THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

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Execute Summary of the Report

The Golden Rock Temple of Dambulla situate in the Matale District of Sri Lanka bearing GPS Coordinates of N 7° 51' 24" and E 80° 38' 57" has been inscribed as the 561st cultural site in the World Heritage list bearing an exceptional universal value under **criteria (i)** as a ***“monastic ensemble of Dambulla is an outstanding example of the religious art and expression of Sri Lanka and South and Southeast Asia. The cave shrine, their painted surfaces, and statuary are unique in scale and degree of preservation. The monastery includes significant masterpieces of 18th-century art in the Sri Lankan school of Kandy”*** and under **Criterion (vi)** as ***“an important shrine in the Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka, remarkable for its association with the long-standing and wide-spread tradition of living Buddhist ritual practices and pilgrimage for more than two millennia”***.

The rock of Dambulla is the center of a Buddhist cave-temple complex established in the 3rd century B.C. and occupied continuously to this day. The site has been in continuous use for over 23 centuries, when it was occupied by a Buddhist monastic establishment, following the arrival of Buddhism on the island. Remains of 80 rock shelter residences established at that time on the site have been identified, most likely in the first century B.C. The uppermost group of shelters on Dambulla's South face have been transformed into shrines. These transformations continued and were intensified between the 5th and 13th centuries: cave-temples were extended into the sheltering rock, and brick walls constructed to screen the caves. By the end of the 12th century, with the introduction by King Nissanka Malla of sculpture to the caves on the upper terrace, echoing the rock carving that had preceded it, the caves assumed their present general forms and layout. The next major phase of development took place in the 18th century when following a long-standing tradition, the upper terrace was restored and refurbished. All of the painted surfaces within the caves were painted or over painted in a style characteristic of the Kandy school of the late 18th century. At that time, the modest Buddhist figures in the caves were repainted, maintaining original details and iconography; the fronting screen walls were rebuilt and roofed to form an outer veranda. Throughout the 19th century, following the loss of royal patronage in 1815, periodic repainting of sculptures and deteriorating surfaces continued. In 1915, thanks to the efforts of a local donor, caves were entirely repainted. And in the 1930's,

the veranda was rebuilt incorporating a mixture of European and Asian detailing, and the complex's entrance porch was reconstructed in a conjectural 18th century style.

Dambulla is an extraordinary and unique complex. It is the second largest cave-temple complex in South and Southeastern Asia, after Ajanta in India, and its 18th century rock paintings are among the best preserved in the entire region. The extent of the painted surfaces in the five caves exceeds 21,000 square feet; 157 statues of varied sizes are also present. A Sri Lankan expression of a Southern Asia temple concept, Dambulla is without doubt the largest and best preserved in the country. Uniquely among comparable sites in India such as Ajanta, Elephanta, Ellore and Karla (which are natural caves), it is largely an excavated complex – no comparable examples exist. One of the spaces, cave No. 2, is undoubtedly one of the single most dramatic and artistically important spaces in all of Asia.

The Department of Archaeology (DoA) together with the Central Cultural Fund (CCF) and with the close collaboration with the Temple Authorities has commenced remedial treatment of murals with a team of 20 trained and experienced mural conservators. Removal of dust and grime layers using a mechanical cleaning method is currently used. The reason for this is the high water sensitivity of Dambulla Paint layers towards water based solutions. It's currently decided not to use chemical cleaning methods on Dambulla Murals and such an intervention may be embarked upon after the intended material tests are carried out.

A new and revised management plan for Dambulla was adopted in 2019. Many of the planned activities of the revised management plan could be carried out in 2019 and in early 2020. After that due to circumstances beyond our control things could not be achieved as planned.

Responses to the Decisions of the World Heritage Committee

State party wished to submit the following responses of the implementation of the recommendations stated in the Decision : 42 COM 7B.16 in respect to the Golden temple of Dambulla (Sri Lanka) (C561).

4.1 Decision of the World Heritage Committee

“Encourages the State Party to continuously implement the Revised Golden Temple of Dambulla Management Plan (2019-2026) with further refinements as recommended by ICOMOS through the Technical Review.

Response

In keeping with the above decision several meetings have been held with the Site Management Committee held since 2019.

Dambulla World Heritage Management Committee

Chairperson: Chief Incumbent Monk

Members: Chief Registrar Monk of the Asgiriya Chapter
Custodian Monk of Dambulla Temple
Secretary, Lime Ministry responsible for Cultural Affairs
Director General, Department of Archaeology
Director General, Central Cultural Fund
Director General or Representative, Urban Development Authority
Director General or Representative, National Physical Planning
Dept. Government Agent or Representative, Matale District
Divisional Secretary, Dambulla
Assistant Commissioner of Buddhist Affairs, Matale District
Mayor, Dambulla Municipal Council
Secretary, Lay-Committee of the Temple (Dayaka Sabhawa)

Meetings of the Management Committee: Meetings of the Management Committee will be held with the Chief Incumbent Monk as Chair. Decisions taken at the meetings will come into effect only after such decisions are endorsed in writing by the Chief Incumbent Monk. In case if the Chief Incumbent Monk is not available to chair a meeting, the Chief Registrar Monk of the Asgiriya Chapter or the Custodian Monk of Dambulla Temple will Chair the meeting. Decisions made at meetings not chaired by the Chief Incumbent Monk will come into effect only after such decisions are endorsed in writing by the Chief Incumbent Monk.

Term of Office of the MC: The Committee will have to be re-established once in every three-years.

Meeting Frequency: Meetings of the Committee will be held once every two months.

Note: due to pandemic conditions and the financial crises prevented the normal schedule of meeting.

Line of Reporting: The Committee Reports to the line-ministry of Cultural Affairs.

The lines of responsibilities have been clearly identified in the management plan and the committee has been given full responsibilities on the implantation of the management plan and the tourism stagey. It was decided that all matters connected with the Dambulla Temple would be carried out with the participation of the Buddhist clergy in-charge of the Dambulla Temple and progress of all conservation, development and research activities would be informed to the priests in every two weeks by the relevant authorities.

4.2 Decision of the World Heritage Committee

“ Request the State Party to submit the conservation approaches and related reports arising from the implementation of the immediate and short term priorities identified in the 2019 management plan to the World Heritage Center for review by the advisory bodies.@

Responses

In keeping with the revised management plan following approaches and steps have been taken.

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
8.1 Policy, planning, and management				
<i>Objective 1. To improve the mutual trust and respect among members of the Management Committee to improve working relationships to arrive at management decisions with consensus to protect the Attributes and OUVs of the Property.</i>				
8.1.1 Initiate discussions among the members of the MC as soon as possible on issues; make discussions open and transparent.	None	TA DoA CCF	None	Immediate This is being done.

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
<i>Objective 2.To provide on-site office and temporary accommodation facilities for the Chief Incumbent Monk during official visits to provide his services seamlessly to ensure the protection of the Property, its attributes, and OUVs.</i>				
8.1.2Construct a new building for the purpose on a suitable premises	Funded by CCF	DoA CCF	NPPD UDA	Immediate Not done due to financial restrictions.
<i>Objective3.To improve working relationships and communication between the conservators of the DoA and CCF to carry out conservation treatments in a professional manner.</i>				
8.1.3Initiate professional meetings between conservators of both institutions to develop amicable relationship between them	None	DoA CCF	None	Immediate It is being done
8.2 Urgent Restorations/Repairs				
<i>Objective 4.To restore the damaged Buddha images as early as possible to a state that they can be worshiped, and thus safeguard the OUVs.</i>				
8.2Expand the on-going restoration program by increasing the number of restorers by adding 04 more to the team.	Salaries and allowances	CCF	None	Immediate There are about twenty conservators stationed
8.3 Conservation and Monitoring				
8.3.1 Conservation Research				
<i>Objective 5-a.To continue with the past research programs for several more years until conclusive evidence are found to develop solutions to arrest the problems of water ingress, insect repellence, interior-environmental conditions, and micro-biological activity.</i>				
8.3.1Renew previous MoUs for research collaboration with local universities continue them for another research cycle.	Research funding by CCF	DoA	Local universities with MoUs	Immediately It is being done Post Graduate Institute of Archaeology, University of Moratuwawa etc.

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
Objective5-b <i>To review the existing knowledge on the original materials and methods of the paintings and polychrome sculpture.</i>				
Assign a Conservation Scientist to do A literature review of existing Knowledge on original painting& Sculpting materials and techniques	Funds from CC Fto pay Conservation Scientist	DoA CCF	----	Immediately
Objective5-c <i>To generate new knowledge of the original materials and techniques</i> Objective5-d <i>To study the deterioration products.</i>				
Assign a Conservation Scientist for a 4-month research project to collect Samples of materials from paintings And deterioration products, and Analyse them at a well-equipped Conservation Science laboratory (in A foreign country).	Funds from CCF to send the scientist to a foreign laboratory.	DoA CCF TA	Foreign museum laboratory	Short-term It is being done by the mural conservators
8.3.2 3-D Laser Documentation of Wall Paintings and Polychrome Sculpture				
Objective 6. <i>To open a discussion on the presumed ill-effects of the 3-D documentation technologies that use Laser and other scanning methods for mapping the wall paintings and polychrome sculpture.</i>				
Holda forum with an invited team of scientists on the effects of 3-D Laser mapping technology on wall paintings	Funds from CCF to hold a half-a day forum	TA DoA CCF	Selected Local universities	Immediately Still under considerations
8.3.3 Mapping of Previous Protective Coatings				
Objective7. <i>To map the areas of previous application of protective coatings using IR&UV documentation methods that might affect the OUVs in the long-run.</i>				
Commence an IR-UV documentation program in partnership with an agency that has the technology.	Funds from CCF to pay the agency	DoA CCF		Short-term Still under considerations

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
8.3.4 Preventive Conservation				
Objective 8. <i>To re-evaluate the Italian Hydrology Engineer Ippolito Massari's recommendation by a team of local experts.</i>				
Appoint a committee of experts to re-evaluate Massari's recommendations, and propose a solution to the water ingress problem.	Funds from CCF to pay the experts	DoA CCF	Selected Local universities	Short-term Still under considerations
8.3.5 Remedial Conservation Treatment				
Objective 9. <i>To implement the recommendations of the ICCROM Consultant on the remedial conservation treatment program without further delay as it is the most central action to safeguard the OUVs.</i>				
Commence a conservation treatment program with a team of senior conservators from the DoA and CCF	Cost of chemicals and consumables from DoA and CCF	DoA CCF	-----	Long-term It is being done
8.3.6 Trial Studies on the application of Laser Cleaning Technique.				
Objective 10. <i>To find an alternative solutions to ICCROM Consultant's suggestion.</i>				
Appoint a team of experts to discuss the matter and submit proposals for future action.	Cost of experts meetings from CCF	TA DoA CCF	Local universities	Immediate Still under considerations
8.3.7 Decaying of Terracotta Tile Flooring. It is conserved				
Objective 11. <i>To obtain expert opinion on the best solution as early as possible.</i>				
8.3.8 Program for Monitoring the Remedial Conservation Treatments It is being done				

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
Objective 12. <i>To implement a program to periodically monitor the performance of the remedial conservation treatments as this is directly connected with the safeguarding of the OUVs.</i>				
Set-up a joint team of conservators from DoA and CCF to design a periodic monitoring program and implement it	None	DoA CCF	-----	Long-term It is done
8.3.9 Conserving all Attributes of the Property that contribute to the OUVs				
Objective 13. <i>To Conserve and manage all attributes of the Property other than those of the Five Cave Shrines that contribute to the OUVs.</i>				
Set-up an archaeological and architectural conservation program to conserve and maintain all caves and rock shelters on the Dambulla rock with evidence of past human occupation; the Somawati monastic site, and the ancient pathway.	None	DoA CCF	-----	Long-term
8.3.10 Transmission of Traditional Knowledge and Skills in Wall Painting and Sculpting Technologies				
Objective 14. <i>To equip the younger generation with knowledge and skills in wall painting and sculpture technologies through structured training programs</i>				
Organize a training program on traditional painting and sculpting technologies for young students	Funds and resources from the DoA& CCF	DoA CCF	-----	Long-term
8.4 Maintenance of all conserved attributes that support the OUVs				
Objective 15. <i>To have an overall maintenance plan, implementation mechanism, and a monitoring and reporting program to assure that the Attributes and OUVs are safeguarded on a long-term basis.</i>				

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
Set-up a maintenance team, provide them training with knowledge and skills to maintain a heritage site	Resources of the DoA	TA DoA	-----	Long-term Maintenance team is at the site
8.5 Launching an Archaeological and Anthropological Research Program				
Objective16. <i>To help the visitor know the intangible heritage elements associated with the Property; and thereby, help them understand the OUVs better.</i>				
Produce interpretive and information material in print and electronic formats about the intangible cultural heritage associated with Dambulla	Resources of the DoA and CCF	TA DoA CCF	-----	Short-term Still under considerations
8.6 Use of the Property: User-induced Threats to the Attributes				
8.6.1 Ritual Use, Pilgrim-induced Damage to OUVs, & Restricting Pilgrim Numbers				
<p>Objective17.a.<i>To have management policies that does not compromise the ritual needs of pilgrims.</i></p> <p>Objective 17.b. <i>To gather data systematically on visitor numbers, negative impacts of overcrowding on OUVs.</i></p> <p>Objective17.c.<i>To know the opinions of pilgrims on the imposition of restrictions on maximum number of visitors inside a cave shrine at a time, and maximum duration a visitor can spend inside a cave shrine.</i></p>				
Establish a research project in collaboration with local universities to study over a period of time the visitor opinions and visitor induced harmful effects on the paintings and sculpture	Resources of the DoA and CCF	DoA CCF	-----	Long-term
8.6.2 Tourism:TourismManagementPolicy				
Objective 18. <i>To gather data systematically through a visitor opinion survey and through expert consultations to develop a Tourism Management Policy and Strategy that will help visitors to have a holistic experience of the OUVs of the Property.</i>				
Assign a multidisciplinary team of heritage tourism experts to develop a Tourism Management Policy after	Resources and funds to conduct	DoA	SLTDA UDA	Mid-term Still under considerations

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
conducting a survey to know visitor and stakeholder opinions.	surveys and meetings	CCF	NPPD	
8.6.3 Tourist Misbehaviour				
Objective19. To mitigate incidents of tourist misbehaviour				
Appoint a heritage communication specialist or a team of specialists to develop information materials in print and electronic formats to educate tourists on appropriate behaviour at the site.	Resources and funds from DoA and CCF	DoA	SLTDA	Immediate Still under considerations But pulic awareness programmes are routine in the project
8.6.4 Policy on Flash Photography				
Objective20. To develop a policy on the use of photography with or without using the flash for the benefit of pilgrims who are engaged in ritual activity, and for visitors who enjoy the OUVs of the Property.				
Appoint a team of experts to develop a policy on photography inside the cave shrines.	Funds to pay for experts.	DoA	-----	Short-term Still under considerations
8.7 Interpretation and Presentation				
8.7.1 Interpreting the OUVs of the Property				
Objective 21. To develop new educational materials and means to interpret the OUVs of the Property for the visitor.				
Appoint a heritage communication specialist or a team of specialists to develop interpretive means and materials to convey the OUVs to the visitor.	Funds from CCF	DoA CCF	SLTDA	Short-term Still under considerations But this information is given to the public routinely by the site office

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
8.7.2 Presenting the Property				
Objective 22. <i>To develop a better information and signage system to help the visitor orient him/herself and understand the Attributes and OUVs better.</i>				
Appoint a heritage communication specialist or a team of specialists to develop a signage system to orient the visitor within the Property.	Funds from CCF	DoA CCF	SLTDA	Short-term Still under considerations
8.7.3 Guides Services				
Objective 23-a. <i>To mitigate tour guide misbehavior to help pilgrims' ritual activity, and other visitors' enjoying the OUVs of the property.</i>				
Conduct programs to educate tour guides on proper behaviour. Conduct training programs for tour guides on the OUVs.	Resources in the DoA and CCF	DoA CCF	SLTDA	Long-term
Objective 23-b. <i>To produce other means of information-provision to the visitor to minimize the use of tour guides.</i>				
Appoint a heritage communication specialist or a team of specialists to develop information materials in print and electronic forms on the art and archaeology of the site for the visitor	Resources from the DoA and CCF	DoA CCF	SLTDA	Short-term Still under considerations but site staff dose this job routinely
8.7.4 Lighting System for Cave Interiors				
Done in cave two and three will be continued in other caves				
Objective 24. <i>To have the new lighting system be installed as scheduled. (on-going project; no issues)</i>				
8.8 -Visitor Access and Facilities				
8.8.1 Access to the Property				
Objective 25.-a. <i>To carry-out necessary repairs to the two pathways.</i>				

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
Objective 25-b. To develop the original historical pilgrim-way as the third pathway, to help the visitors better understand the OUVs.				
Commence repair work.	DoA resources	DoA	-----	Immediate Restored and lighting system has to be installed
8.8.2 Lighting along Pathways				
Objective 26. To improve the lighting system for the pathways that enhances the OUVs.				
Prepare pathway lighting system plan and implement it.	Funds from CCF	DoA	-----	Medium-term To be done
8.8.3 Awareness of visitors on the appropriate attire, opening hours etc.				
Objective 27. To educate the visitor on the suitable attire and on cave shrine opening hours.				
Prepare educational materials in the print and electronic formats to be dispersed among tourists free-of-charge	Resources at DoA	TA DoA	-----	Short-term Partially done and still under progress
8.8.4 Visitor Movement within Cave Shrines				
Objective 28. To re-evaluate the interior visitor movement designed to allow the visitor to have a holistic experience of the OUVs.				
Employ a heritage visitor management specialist to prepare a plan on interior visitor movement.	Funds from CCF	DoA CCF	-----	Short-term Still under considerations
8.9 Risks to the Property				
8.9.1 Quarrying and Blasting				
Objective 29. to prevent the rock from vibrations caused by blasting of rocks situated away from the Property but are geologically connected to it underground to ensure that OUVs are protected from such occurring.				

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
In collaboration with specialist institutions, carry-out a comprehensive investigation on blasting of rocks that are geologically connected with the Dambulla rock	Funds from CCF	DoA CCF	GSMB and Univ of Peradeniya	Long-term
8.9.2 Theft or Vandalism				
Objective 30. To prevent acts of vandalism and theft to protect the OUVs.				
Prepare a security and surveillance plan	Funds from the CCF	TA DoA	Sri Lanka Police	Short-term Still under considerations
8.9.3 Risks of Fire				
Objective 31-a. To prevent accidental fires occurring inside the cave shrines that might damage the OUVs. Objective 31-b. To mitigate the risks of fire, if occurs				
Develop a fire-safety program.	-----	TA DoA	-----	Short-term Still under considerations
8.9.4 Natural Disasters				
Objective 32. To reduce damages to visitors as well as to OUVs caused by natural disasters.				
Develop a natural disaster preparedness plan.	-----	DoA	-----	Short-term Still under considerations
8.9.5 Terrorist Activities				
Objective 33. To protect the Attributes, OUVs, and visitors from terrorist attacks.				
Expand the electronic surveillance system; and Study the possibility of installing x-ray scanning system at entrance.	Funds from CCF	DoA	Ministry of Defence	Long-term Still under considerations

Objective and Supporting Action	Resources Needed	Stakeholders Responsible for Delivery	Key Partners	Timescale for Completion
Objective 34. To develop community and stakeholders participation; (a) to ensure sustainable protection, conservation, management, and presentation of the OUVs; and (b) to ensure that some part of the benefits are passed on to the community.				
Set-up a committee of experts to study and develop a plan for community and stakeholder participation, sustainable protection of the site, and distribution of benefits to community and stakeholders.	Funds from CCF to cover costs of experts' study	DoA	Local universities	Long-term

4.3. ‘Urges again the State Party to finalize a Visitor Management strategy, including a Tourism Management Strategy and a Pilgrim Management Strategy, and submit the World’ Heritage Center for review by the Advisory Bodies’

Response: Dambulla being Buddhist living sacred site receives thousands of pilgrims on full moon poya days. This is the pilgrim tradition which has been gone for many centuries. As such it is not possible enforce hard and fast management strategy on this pilgrims tradition. However there is a system to limit the number of visitors entering the caves on pilgrims days. This is done in collaboration with the Temple authorities.

Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, CCF and DOA are currently in a discussion on the possibility of developing a concrete and manageable visitor management policies in collaboration with temple authorities .

4.4. ‘ Also request the state party to invite a joint WH Center/ ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission to the property.’

Invitation was sent in November 2022