

FLYING HIGH IN 'VE

The annual Kite fest of Velvettiturai with roots in the 17th century

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Velvettiturai which is situated at the Northern tip of Jaffna Peninsula is one of the key sea ports in South Asia, and it remained a transit point for the Arab and Indian seafarers who were sailing between the Middle East and the Far Eastern countries. The name Velvettiturai is derived from 'Velvet' as the Arabs traded velvet in the port city when their sailing ships reigned over the oceans.

Velvettiturai also remained a popular destination for the building of sail ships and there were several highly skilled ship builders and navigators who remained in Velvettiturai during the era of sailing ships.

The coastal port city Velvettiturai is also famous for its beautiful beaches in the Jaffna Peninsula.

The annual Kite festival of Velvettiturai which takes place on Thai Pongal day in January dates back to 17th century according to historians from Jaffna.

The Kite festival originated in the backdrop of the clear skies after the North Eastern monsoon from the Velvettiturai beach as a leisure sport by the seafarers who rested in the port city.

However, the leisure sport soon blossomed into a festival with the people of Velvettiturai taking part with great enthusiasm designing kites in various shapes.

The kite festival of Velvettiturai an event which is unique in Sri Lanka was stalled for nearly three decades owing to the civil strife in the Island.



Velvettiturai being the birth place of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran remained the 'epicentre' of the three decades of militant struggle.

Following the first military offensive which was code named 'Operation Liberation' against the LTTE in 1987, had virtually thwarted Velvettiturai forcing the civilians to be internally displaced from the port city.

The elegance of the city was shattered due to the clashes between the Security Forces and the LTTE with beautiful features such as the kite festival coming to a halt.

REVIVAL OF THE ONCE POPULAR KITE FEST

So, with the end of civil strife in 2009, the enthusiastic people of Velvettiturai resumed the kite festival after nearly three decades, in January in 2011 on Thai Pongal day, Velvettiturai's exclusive kite festival resumed with the initiative taken by the members of the Wigneswara Community centre in Velvettiturai which remains a driving force in

conducting the cultural activities of the Velvettiturai people.

A. Vaseekaran, the secretary of the Wigneswara Community centre Velvettiturai told *Ceylon Today* from the time the kite festival resumed in 2011, a large number of youngsters are taking part with great enthusiasm from various parts of Jaffna. However the majority of participants are from Velvettiturai according to Vaseekaran.

"58 kites in various shapes and sizes were flown in the backdrop of clear skies from the sandy beach of Velvettiturai on the Thai Pongal festival day on last Saturday (14). Nearly fifty thousand people gathered at the Velvettiturai beach for the kite festival in the evening after performing their rituals for Thai Pongal in the morning", Vaseekaran said.

Elaborating further on the festival he said that a large number of kites were brought for the festival. But only 58 elegantly designed kites were allowed to compete, to select the best kites at the completion during the festival.