

Bee attack at Ella Bridge. True accounts.

For those of you who have been to Ella, Sri Lanka in 2023 may have heard of the bee attack at 9 Arch Bridge in all the tabloids. I was there. This is my story.

I lie there, calmly looking at geckos swirling around on the ceiling wishing for the night to pass peacefully, just then my stomach cramped to ridiculous levels, my mouth watered and I rushed to the bathroom for the umpteenth time that night. With my head resting on my hands I wondered "when is this going to pass" and "what the bloody 'ell got those bees so worked up". Well, it may have been me!

Ella Bridge

The Ella Bridge, or 'Nine Arch Bridge' as it is humbly referred to, is a magnificent view to behold being surrounded by tea fields and lush vegetation. A bridge that's worth coming at the right times as it attracts a daily swathe of tourists, ambling across the bridge, aiming to grab a shot of old chugging trains as they pass over while two dozen tourists are precariously hanging out of the train for selfie moments. An act that has resulted in over 200 deaths globally* (see photos below).

If you know me at all, you will know that I love a pretty natural surrounding, though you would also know that I am adverse to mass tourism. So after a few photo opportunities of my own I have merely been using the bridge as a pretty passage to and fro my walks on the now famous 'Peko Trail'. (*I have hiked sections 12-16 of the Pekoe trail by the way, more of that to come*). This was one of those moments after a very tiring hike, I limped across the bridge on the railway tracks watching that I don't trip over the ballasts like a 'toon. I then happened to notice an attractive young couple carrying expensive looking camera equipment, 'influencers?' I wondered. The gentleman broke my thought process as he started yelling "don't do that" in increased volume. After noticing the lady waving her arms about her, it didn't take long to realise what was going

on, bees the size of falafel swarming around me. Without a moments hesitation my instinct was to RUN.

The Bees

Immediately I slipped like the 'toon I was hoping not to be, as out of nowhere the number of bees intensified to a number that would've caused 'Baloo' from the Jungle Book to run for the closest river, I wish I had such luxury. Instead I ran to a group of people huddled around a smoking pot, "Yes" I thought, "make them drowsy.". But something was dreadfully wrong, they weren't calming down at all! Instead they seemed to be ignoring other poor tourists and were solely stinging me! Time and time again no matter how much smoke I waved over, as if they had a grudge against me for some reason.

So I gave up and ran for the hills, ran as fast as my already tired legs could possibly take me. My science teacher once said "you could never outrun an angry bee", this very specific scenario definitely answered that one, there was no outrunning them.

I ran over hills, jumped corners, sprinted past confused tourists who were on their way to the bridge. No time to explain! After a few minutes of constant running I was finally left with just a few bees with their piercing bums stuck in my skin. I gently pulled them off, as gentle as can be with shaking hands after a marathon. Luckily a kind local came to my aid to pull away the many stingers that were left in my skin all over, we counted over 30. "Bro you need medicine" he said.

Normally when travelling Asia It's not the best experience to be surrounded by eager drivers pulling you over for your custom. This time though I was relishing at the idea of a line of tuk tuk drivers eager to take me to the nearest doctor. Just my luck when I saw zero, absolutely nothing at the busiest hot spot in town. The last thing I wanted to do right now was to hike home, so I signalled and waved frantically to get a tuk tuk to come my way.

The pharmacy was closed, there is no doctor in town. I patiently waited in the queue at the local shop to buy my little bottle of anti-septic as my body pulsated with stinging sensations all over.

By the time I washed and doused myself in a pleasant smelling anti-septic fury, I found a load more stingers that had been left on my skin, one directly on my forehead that I accidentally squeezed when trying to gently pull it out. I then proceeded with a long feverish night of rest, drinking water and puking my guts out, but this gave me time to think. What an earth got those bees so buzzed off? They were of course, already swarming by the time I had arrived, but then it hit me. I had unwittingly landed on a nest when I slipped like a 'toon on the tracks.

It may or may not have been the cause but what an insane story to tell from travelling Sri Lanka along with a small scar from a bee on my arm to prove it, and lucky enough to be left with just one small scar. Sometimes you have to go through the worst only to come out with rich (if bizarre) experiences to last a lifetime.

*<https://www.smh.com.au/traveller/travel-news/nine-arches-bridge-sri-lanka-travel-bloggers-slammed-for-hanging-from-moving-train-for-instagram-snapshot-20190306-h1c2po.html>