

Anuradhapura

On land | Sri Lanka | 4th century BCE-11th century CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

A tree at Anuradhapura was planted in 288 BCE and may be the oldest human-planted tree with a known date.

Read the story

Anuradhapura was the capital of Sri Lanka's kings for about 1,400 years, from the 300s BCE until the 1000s CE. It was one of the great cities of ancient Asia.

Buddhism came to Sri Lanka around 250 BCE. A cutting from the tree in India where the Buddha found enlightenment was brought here and planted in 288 BCE. That sacred fig tree, the Sri Maha Bodhi, is still alive and cared for today.

Kings built huge dome-shaped shrines called stupas. The Jetavanaramaya, made of millions of bricks, was one of the tallest buildings in the ancient world, around 120 meters tall when it was built. The city also had giant water tanks, which were artificial lakes for farming.

How it ended

Invasions from South India weakened the kingdom, and around 1017 CE the capital moved to Polonnaruwa. Anuradhapura's buildings were overgrown by jungle until they were cleared and restored in the 1800s and 1900s.

Key words

- stupa: a dome-shaped Buddhist shrine
- reservoir: a large artificial lake used to store water
- enlightenment: in Buddhism, a deep understanding of the truth about life

Wow facts

- The Jetavanaramaya stupa was once one of the tallest buildings in the world.
- The sacred fig tree has been looked after for over 2,300 years.
- Ancient reservoirs built by the kings still water farms today.

Talk about it

1. Why do you think people have cared for one tree for over 2,000 years?

2. How did big reservoirs help an ancient city grow?

Try this

Draw a map of Anuradhapura as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. **What is the Sri Maha Bodhi?**

- A. A sacred fig tree
- B. A palace
- C. A river
- D. A boat

2. **What is a stupa?**

- A. A dome-shaped shrine
- B. A sword
- C. A type of rice
- D. A fishing net

3. **Where did the capital move to after Anuradhapura?**

- A. Polonnaruwa
- B. Delhi
- C. Bangkok
- D. Kyoto

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/anuradhapura/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. It is a sacred fig tree planted in 288 BCE.
2. A. Stupas are dome-shaped Buddhist shrines.
3. A. Kings moved the capital to Polonnaruwa in the 1000s.