

ESALA PERAHERA

On the night of the full moon in August, the Buddhist festival of *Esala Perahera* celebrated in Kandy the capital of Sri Lanka. Central to the celebrations is the country's most sacred possession, the Tooth of the Lord Buddha, a replica of which is paraded through the city on the back of a grand elephant in a golden casket. This sacred tooth is housed in *Dalada Maligawa* a temple built especially for this purpose. The festival lasts for ten nights, reaching the climax on the night of the full moon. On the sixth night *peraheras* or processions set out from the shrines, dedicated to the gods who protect Sri Lanka, to the Temple of the Tooth

The temple elephant or *Maligawa Tusker* leads the procession on the night of the full moon with a replica of the tooth in a golden casket on its back. Many elephants take part in the procession wearing different costumes decorated with tiny electric bulbs. Crowds line the route with fire-eaters, dancers and drummers

Most important of the dancers are the *Ves* dancers. They wear elaborate costumes of heavy silver headdresses, beaded breastplates. Carved silver belts and huge ankle bells. The costumes of these acrobatic dancers are said to be modeled on those of the gods. Other dancers are the *panthera* (tamborine) dancers and the *savarana* (pom pom) dancers who shake the *savarana* from the side, to left and right, and then above the head and dance to the rhythm of the drums

Esala Perahera takes place during the rainy season and tropical fruits are readily available. Snacks are sold by street sellers to the crowds who come from all over Sri Lanka to see the procession.

Activities

Dress as the different dancers in the procession

1. VES dancers are the most important with elaborate costumes of silver headdresses, belts and beaded breastplates and huge ankle bells
2. PANTHERU dancers dance with the tambourine
3. SAVARAN dancers are the Low Country dancers who dance with pom-poms. The pom-poms are attached to both ends of a stick and dancers shake them to the beat of the drums, first at the side then to the right, then to the left. Finally they cross them over their head and start all over again.

Make snack foods to enjoy while watching the parade and try some tropical fruits eg. Paw Paw

