

Beauty Of Simplicity

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Barefoot at the Dutch Hospital

Tucked into a corner of Colombo's newest shopping precinct, The Dutch Hospital area in Fort, Barefoot's latest store is a delightful discovery for the traveller on a quest for something new.

Words Ayesha Inoon

Vibrant handloom fabrics, a stunning array of clothes, linens, toys, bags and handmade stationery stimulate every visitor. In a corner is the bookshop, with its collection of hand-picked titles that range from current bestsellers to old favourites, both local and international. A chair nestled beside the shelves invites you to relax for a moment and turn the pages of a book that catches your eye.

Throughout the store are functional gifts for your home, traditional bottled pickles, herbal balms and lotions, and a selection of fine teas. “It’s a wonderful place for travellers to pick up presents,” says Nazreen Sansoni, adding that it is very exciting to see this part of Colombo come alive again and even more so to be a part of this resurgence. Her favourite new products are the Indonesian miniature percussion instruments and the reproductions of old Ceylon posters and postcards.

In Colombo 3, Barefoot’s flagship establishment remains a favourite haunt of all those in search of an experience that combines the joy of shopping, an open courtyard, good food, meeting with friends and seeing what’s on at the gallery.

In the garden café, enjoy eclectic music along with the low hum of conversation. Tall glasses of cold drinks sweat on sun-dappled table tops, covered in their signature handwoven cloth.

[It is not just a place to buy clothes and souvenirs, but a confluence of art and entertainment](#)

With sandwiches, quiches, pastas and curries there is a dish to suit every palate as well as a variety of drinks, hot tea and coffee. “Our chef, Mr. Kahagalle, has been with us since its inception,” says Dominic Sansoni, “and is always coming up with something new, which you will see on our daily blackboard menu.” With live jazz playing at Sunday lunchtime and a Wednesday night pub quiz, the café is a much sought after location for everything from informal meetings with friends to private entertaining for corporate clients after-hours and even the occasional wedding. Adjoining the courtyard is the shop, with its colourful cloth, bookshop and abundant functional gifts and the galleries with their celebrations of art.

Barefoot is always associated with its fabric – the vibrant hues and patterns of hand woven cottons and silks that are transformed into clothes, linen, bags and toys. “We also offer a design service, working with architects and interior designers to achieve

something unique for homes and offices,” says Dominic. “Fabric is the core of what we do here,” he says, “and Marie Gnanaraj, one of a large design team, is responsible for creating works of sophisticated art with the fabric.”

A stroll across the courtyard takes you to the Gallery, a space for artists, poets, musicians and film-makers to display their work, make it a venue for exhibitions, concerts, poetry readings, plays and film nights, with an exhibition of paintings by Preethi Hapuwatte taking place from June 8 – 24, 2012.

Above this is the newly established Photography Gallery, which is a studio as much as a gallery, displaying works by photographers Rukshan Jayawardene, Sebastian Posingis and Dominic Sansoni. At the heart of the gallery is Manager Rasika Dahanayake, who keeps things running smoothly, organising and scheduling to perfection.

Barefoot also has a store nestled in the historic Galle Fort in a beautifully restored building on the corner of Church Street and Pedlar Street. Stocked with all of Barefoot’s items, it adds to the charm of the area, enticing visitors to sample its wares.

“With the freeway bringing Galle closer, we now tend to think even more of Barefoot Galle and Barefoot Colombo being single entities,” says Nazreen, for now it is even easier for people around the country to attend the special events held at Barefoot, and to cater to the clientele in these different areas.

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“It’s about the beauty of simple things.” says Dominic, speaking of the philosophy that Barefoot is built on and the significance of its name. It’s a philosophy that is reflected in each of Barefoot’s products and services, whether the pure fabrics in striking hues or the relaxed and inviting ambience of the café.

A place that is comfortable in its familiarity, yet subtly different each time you visit, a place that invites you to relax, yet invigorates you with fresh ideas, a place where beauty, creativity and contentment thrive – this, indeed, is Barefoot.

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