Doctor Fish And Live Seafood

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Since opening its doors to guests in Negombo, Lords Restaurant is today a complex with six restaurants, serving up epicurean delights. Recently Lords complex has extended its fine dining experience that will not only tickle your taste buds but your feet as well…

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

Realising his dream of establishing a venture in the paradise isle, Martin Fullerton opened Lords Restaurant in 2004 complete with his distinct warm and friendly flair. It’s entry doorway piques one’s interest from the get go, busily embellished with signboards and posters of events, shows, and gastronomic promise.

Nestled amidst the stream of touristy outlets, the Lords is frequented by a steady

stream of customers seeking a chilled atmosphere to unwind while tucking into a hearty meal. Though hardly discernible at first glance, within are spacious confines with a total of six restaurants to accommodate the many moods and preferences of customers.

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It is evident that the running theme here is cricket, with each outlet named after some aspect of the cricketing sport. The Umpires Lounge Bar, The Bowlers Bistro and Bar, The Oval Seafood Restaurant, The Batsman, LBW Cocktail and Wine Bar and the Boundaries – Gardens serve up everything from European, to Oriental cuisine, including of course Sri Lankan dishes. Dining alongside the soothing fish ponds, sinking into a plush chair gazing at oil paintings, or out in the garden, Lords insists you find your indulgence.

The latest additions that has customers queueing up is the Fish Spa. Alongside the Bowlers Bistro and Bar, the Spa is a special and complementary offering to guests. The first of its kind in Sri Lanka, seated along the length of the foot bath guests are invited to dip their feet in the water while the swarms of Doctor Fish or *Garra rufa* do the rest. “I want guests to experience something different. We have tried to stay unique with all our endeavours at Lords,” says Martin about the latest addition. This is true right down to the design of the spa. “European countries and Thailand have small glass containers to put your feet in. What we have done is installed a water purifying system to this large tank or pond so that 10 to 12 people can sit and experience it together,” adds Martin.

These particular type of fish – as the Spa’s tagline aptly explains ‘For once you are the bait!’ – nibble the dead skin off your feet. Seeing that these fish are being exported for spas in other countries Martin saw an opportunity to utilise the readily available local resource for the same purpose in Sri Lanka. And it has certainly paid off, as customers delight in this new experience after a meal or while waiting for a meal to arrive. “Customers have gone as far as to suggest having a separate area for a whole body emersion!” says Martin of guests’ enthusiasm. Further details and benefits of the Fish Spa are displayed for guests to be adequately informed. While the Fish Spa is free of charge the only request is to make a kind donation to Martin’s charity, The Hope Animal Foundation. The charity funds the vaccination, welfare and neutering of stray dogs in Sri Lanka.

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Another novel addition that has transformed the way guests dine at Lords is the Live Seafood System – an endeavour in collaboration with Government expertise and the organisation Seafood Alive. Lords has based many of its practices and operations in support of sustainability and similarly the Live Seafood System is to support the local fisherman through aquaculture. The fish and seafood are obtained directly from the Negombo Lagoon and other parts of the Island depending on the seasons.

“Local fishermen have had a problem of selling the live seafood at the correct price in the market. Many of them have stopped doing it. We are trying to get them started again by using their harvest in outlets like ours,” explains Martin. The seafood obtained thus are harvested from aquaculture farms instead of relying on the natural resources of the oceans. The tanks on display at the Oval contain Groupers, Sea Bass, Mangrove Snappers, and varieties of crayfish and shellfish that are not typically available elsewhere. A typical meal for two is a seafood platter featuring crab, lobster, oysters and prawns picked out from the Live Seafood System and prepared at the open kitchen at the restaurant.

“Many guests are interested to know where the seafood comes from and how we do it,” says Martin and with that came the inspiration to commence educational tours of the lagoon. “Not only can guests enjoy their meals here, but the next day they can go on a prearranged boat ride to see and experience everything.”

The boat ride that takes two hours out at the Negombo Lagoon, visits the aquaculture farmers and is an insight into how they harvest their fish. Guests are also taken to Kings Island, a mangrove island where they can disembark and indulge in a spot of fishing at the artificial ponds filled with fish.

If this doesn’t complete a day out in Negombo, the Lords also hosts various entertainment programmes towards the late evening. On various days you can enjoy performances of the live jazz show, cultural show or a calypso band or for a quieter time, you can take a turn around the art gallery at the upper floor, which hosts a display of contemporary art. Whatever tickles your fancy, Lords is ready to oblige!

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