

Go Fly A Kite



The pulse of freedom

Isso vades, lovers, and ice cream abound at Galle Face green. Set against a backdrop of the most cosmopolitan part of Colombo - with high rise buildings, five-star hotels, and the wide open sky, Galle Face Green stretches on endlessly overlooking the breathtaking Indian Ocean and embraces people of all ages and walks of life.

Words Imara De Chickera Photographs Indika De Silva

The world seems to have slowed down to match the languid undulation of the countless brightly-hued snake kites, streaking the overcast sky with colour. Barefooted children run unhindered across the grass; iridescent bubbles float in the air; joggers sprint by with headphones and iPods and the tinkling of the various ice cream vendors melt into the roar of the boldly crashing blue sea. It's a lazy Saturday evening and I am standing at Galle Face Green, pleasantly surprised and captivated by everything that's going on around me. All my senses have been taken hostage by the plethora of sights, sounds and smells, as I savour the breeze whipping around me playfully.

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What instantly catches my attention is the rich mixture of ethnicities dotting the place. I see young tourists of African descent playing cricket, I see two British couples sitting and enjoying ice creams and achchaaru, and the wild waves. I see a white haired Iranian lady and gentleman sitting in companionable silence while a Chinese priest meditates pensively on a bench.

Parents are enjoying the evening with their children and clusters of teenagers are just hanging out. And of course I would be amiss if I don't mention the numerous love-struck couples with their arms around each other gazing into each other's eyes oblivious to the hustle and bustle around them. Galle Face Green seems to have drawn in people from all walks of life with its simple appeal.

It's been a long time since I have visited Galle Face Green, and I am truly amazed at how clean, organised and 'happening' it has now become. All the little kades (tiny shops) are in a row on the walkway along the sea. And when the sun goes down, the entire stretch of neatly placed shops lights up and creates a warm and festive air. Cement benches invite you to just sit and enjoy the spectacle of the sea. There are lifeguards near the pier keeping an eye out for the safety of the crowds. Hundreds of plastic blow-up toys add splashes of colour to the green expanse and attract little children like bees to honey.

One of the things that hits you first is the delicious aromas infusing the heavy salty sea breeze. Delicious mouthwatering fragrances of pineapples and deep fried goodies bubbling in oil fill your senses. Two food outlets catch my eye, there is Rauff Nana's and Nana's Tonyas. The latter has a blinking neon sign board, where sarong clad waiters wave their menus at anyone passing by. The food that the vendors display seem tasteful and the *isso vade* (prawns deep fried on a crispy batter) and *achcharu* (pickle made out of mangoes and pineapple) vendors have their wares neatly displayed in a systematic manner. At most outlets the preparation of the food is part of the attraction where you can watch the chopping, cutting and dicing of soft mangoes or onions. The incessant tune of the ice cream carts, vans and trucks signal the copious amounts of ice cream available, for those who prefer a cooler treat.

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Some are frequent visitors who come to spend their Saturday evenings at Galle Face Green. For them it's a leisurely outing with friends and even family to hang out, chat and enjoy the food. Even birthdays are celebrated here for a special evening flying kites and indulging in ice creams.

Friends, family, the beautiful sea, the green grass, the wind in your hair and laughing children, all remind me that the best things in life are still free

I see a congregation of people and walk towards them along the wooden pier and glimpse through the gaps the sea slipping and sliding over the sand right under me. I reach the railing, and suddenly time stands still as I stand face to face with the wildly rushing, roaring sea. The enormous white tipped waves crash over each other boldly and the majesty of it all, makes me catch my breath. The pounding of the waves drowns out all the friendly chattering voices and the laughter and squeals of little children. The crowds melt away and I am enveloped completely by the strong wind and the roar of the sea. And I am strangely comforted by it all. Transfixed, I stand rooted to the spot; I don't want to leave, and when I must, I have to pull myself away, but leave a tiny piece of my soul, behind.

In this day and age where everything comes with a hefty price tag attached, it is heartwarming to stumble upon a place that allows you to enjoy all the simple pleasures of life with no strings attached. Friends, family, the beautiful sea, the green grass, the wind in your hair and laughing children, all remind me that the best things in life are still free. So if you want to 'go fly a kite', share an ice cream and enjoy a chat with your best buddies, or just let the wind caress you while you let the majesty of the ocean mesmerise you with its magic spell, head on over to Galle Face Green. It truly knows no boundaries.

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