



The outdoor ambience at the Independence Arcade

Colombo, a city alive with frenetic activity at any given moment. Even so, there are places a stone's throw away from the busy streets, to stop for a breather and maybe even lose the concept of time.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara **Photographs** Isuru Upesha

A charming cul-de-sac off Park Street plays host to a few inviting places urging leisure seekers to stay their feet a little longer. The alleyway's cobble stone paving is enough appeal, and paints an enticing picture to passersby with its row of venues and cafés.

Among them is the Park Street Mews, a warehouse style restaurant and café complete with a light and easy atmosphere that allows you linger till the day mellows out. Exposed brick walls characteristic of warehouses, plush sofas and chairs, and bamboo centre pieces contribute to a chic and casual interior. Outdoor seating for dining along the cobble stone paving beneath the night sky all but add to the charm at the Mews. You can drink in the atmosphere while relishing specials such as home made ice cream or coffee sorbets or take your pick from the snack and a la carte menus. Adjacent to Mews is its tapas bar, the Curve to unwind with live music. The subtle purple hues, ambient lighting and curve themed interior convey a psychedelic touch while offering plush comfort. To accompany the many hours through the evening there are hot and cold tapas to choose from as well as smoothies, milkshakes and cappuccino.

Just opposite the Mews is Café Français, a French restaurant with a bar and lounge geared for comfort and ease. Stylish French chairs and sofas to ease into and outdoor seating to enjoy an alfresco experience are part of its features of comfort in classic style, but not without a warm and friendly atmosphere. Tapas is offered at the lounge as well as an a la carte menu and diners can move to the more private interior dining spaces complemented by a warm and rich ambience. Whatever your heart's desire, be it a cup of tea or coffee, a prawn ravioli or chocolate fondant the café lends itself for a few hours of light indulgence.

One of the more recent and popular haunts is the Independence Arcade flanked by the Baudhaloka Mawatha and the Independence Square. While the expanse offers ample space to walk at leisure and corridors to explore the building, there are many spaces to sit down and spend a few quiet moments in the open. If you wish to make a quick stop without wandering too far away, you can find a spot, out in the open beside the food court nearby the roadside access. You could sit at one of the many tables with a snack from the food

court, that offer among its choices fresh fruit juice, coffee, ice cream, Indian and Thai cuisine and more. You can venture inside the food court as well and take some time out from the long walks about the premises and ease down on the benches as you wait for your snack and make a quick meal before heading out.

There are several other spots around the Arcade ornamented with garden chairs amidst the pleasing surroundings of trim lawns and promenades. The popular glass topped fish tank embedded in the floor further towards the interior of the premises is a hot spot for visitors and here too you can catch a few quiet moments seated along the many bench chairs surrounding the tank. There are many restaurants, from fast food, Japanese to Sri Lankan to dine out at, if your jaunt to the arcade is a day-out with family or friends. A similar venue a short distance away, though to a far less scale, is the racecourse pavilion with its boutique stores, and restaurants. There's open air seats at the entrance to the car park where you could sit down with a snack or simply take a breather. If you are lucky you can catch a match of rugby underway at the Race Course Grounds and allow yourself a seat along the pavilion steps to enjoy the action.

If you are in the vicinity of the Galle Face Green you could head further towards the Dutch Hospital. After a long walk you can easily access the first courtyard opposite the World Trade Centre and sit at leisure as the city goes by. If you want to be sheltered from the busy streets, you can venture further inside, where there are two more courtyard spaces surrounded by the building's corridors and spaces. Even if you are not up for traversing the corridors, these courtyards furnished with fixed tables and chair stools, offer a novel atmosphere of ease, comfort and nostalgia that seeps from the colonial architecture. By evening the ambience is mellow, the cool breezes fan across, and whether or not the souvenir shops, cafes, clothing boutiques and fine dining restaurants take your fancy, it's a place to simply escape to in the amber lights of the evening. Amidst the buzz of light conversation, you can get pleasantly acquainted with its chilled atmosphere, no strings attached.

Hangout In The City

