

Hidden Serenity in the City

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The Aesthetically pleasing Sri Lankan Restaurant

On the threshold of busy York Street, overlooking the scenic beauty of the Colombo Harbour, the Grand Oriental Hotel (GOH) stands out with its colonial charm and splendour. As we entered this grandiose building we were engulfed by its elegance and tranquillity.

Words Shakila Perera **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

Less than an hour's drive from the Bandaranaike International Airport through Colombo-Katunayake Expressway, Grand Oriental Hotel (GOH) is situated in the heart of the city with fast and easy access to any location.

One of the oldest hotels in Sri Lanka, with claims to a proud history, the Grand Oriental Hotel takes you back in time to the Colonial period in Colombo. This impression is heightened as the huge wooden doors open to an elegant lobby, furnished with Victorian style furniture and a grand piano.

Built in 1837 as a barrack by the British, the building was handed over to the British government after its function as a barrack was completed. In 1865, the building was converted to a hostelry, paving the way to a legendary hotel in the Island. Renowned novelist Anton Chekhov stayed in this iconic building in the 1890s and it is said that some of the initial pages of his novel "Gussev" were written here.

"Recently a lady who visited the hotel's museum, identified her father, who served as the manager in 1935, in a group photograph. On the same day, another British couple who visited the hotel showed us a document written in the 1920s to the hotel by his uncle. These are very clear examples of our history, which spans through generations," said Dulip De Alwis, General Manager.

Long hallways with striking hand drawn paintings adorned the walls, which, extended a quiet invitation to walk around the hotel and discover its hidden serenity. Creating the perfect atmosphere to sit back and relax in seclusion, the hotel has 80 rooms including two suites, 14 deluxe rooms and two semi deluxe rooms. Each room is equipped with mini bar, satellite TV and WiFi among many other facilities. The two suites, named after well-known novelist Anton Chekhov and Jose Rizal, a national hero of the Philippines, are a blend of simplicity and modern comfort. Explaining the hotel's clientele, Dulip De Alwis said, "we have had a good response from our guests and overall we have a significant Indian clientele, as well as guests from other Asian countries, Europe, North and South America."

Ideal for quiet dining, GOH accommodates two restaurants and a fast food outlet thus adding variety to its tempting cuisines. To indulge in a meal at leisure while enjoying the scenic beauty of the Colombo Port—the Harbour Room—offers not only a plethora of mouthwatering dishes but also an assortment of theme nights. This includes a candle lit dinner on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Chinese/Mongolian Night on Thursday, International Dinner Buffet with organist Gamani Mendis on Friday and Saturday, the Family Dinner Buffet and the Hotel's Signature dish, the Taprobane Mixed Grill along with music by Sam the Man on Sunday.

The view is breathtaking from the Harbour Room—dotted with beautifully illuminated ships. The azure calm waters of the Indian Ocean heightens the scenic beauty.

The Sri Lankan Restaurant offers authentic Sri Lankan food such as Hoppers, String Hoppers, and Dosa in a Mini Dinner Buffet from Thursday to Sunday and Lunch Buffet from Monday to Saturday. The theme of the restaurant is amplified by the beautifully decorated batik ceiling.

Tiffin Hut, the fast food outlet which is located at the entrance of the hotel, is open for walk-in customers as well. The B52 night club and the Stallion Pub provides a space to unwind and dance the night away.

With five Banquet Halls—Lotus Ballroom, Rainbow Ballroom, Kashyapa Room, Takshila Room, and Satin Room—the hotel provides all encompassing facilities and services for weddings and conferences.

The hotel museum displays a historical narrative depicting the journey of the hotel. The GOH also has a Spa, where therapeutic treatments are provided for a relaxing stay.

The GOH creates a tranquil space to enable a holiday that reflects a true heritage experience.

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