Mandara Rosen: At The Foot Of The Sacred Mountain

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The entrance to Mandara Rosen

The noonday sun beat relentlessly down on the Sacred City of Kataragama. A short distance away however, Mandara Rosen serves as an oasis of comfort.

Words Haseena Razak

The cool blast of air is a refreshing change as guests step out of the sunshine and into the elegantly decorated lobby of the four star hotel. Large glass doors and window panes allow ample sunlight into the room and impress a sense of spaciousness. Mandara Rosen is a coupling of two carefully selected words of the Sanskrit and German languages. Mandara, meaning Sacred Mountain in Sanskrit, reflects the significant location of the hotel. The mountain referred to, is none other than the *Vedahiti Kanda*, at the foot of which the hotel is located. Rosen, meaning

Rose in German, is a recurring theme throughout the hotel. The main restaurant, coffee shop and bar are named Petal, Bud and Stem respectively.

While Petal serves up some of the most mouthwatering fare typical of the region such as fried lake fish, *nelum ala* and *kithul piti kenda*, the restaurant also features international dishes on its menu. There is also a corner exclusively for vegetarians, as many pilgrims stay at the hotel. The hotel's coffee shop, Bud, presents a relaxing aura and a menu to satisfy lesser hunger pangs that may strike between meals. Stem provides the opportunity for a game of pool or a session of lively singing at the karaoke machine.

The tropical climate of Kataragama renders the large swimming pool a popular attraction among guests. As children splash and frolic, adults float in languid complacency. The pool at Mandara Rosen however, is extraordinary: it features underwater music. A novelty in Sri Lanka, the music heard with perfect clarity underwater is a source of fascination and amusement for most of the hotel's guests.

Taking a leisurely stroll through the hotel is possibly the best way to appreciate the predominantly Dutch characteristics in the architecture of the building. Two long corridors of bedrooms on either side of a central courtyard create a symmetrical pattern out of the masonry and woodwork. Softened by the green patch of grass in the courtyard, the corridors make a pleasing impression on the eye. The rooms themselves are remarkably spacious and airy with doors leading to a patio at the rear. All 52 rooms feature either king or queen sized beds, satellite TV and several other amenities. Mandara Rosen also boasts two suites. Some of the hotel's more celebrated guests have been the Sri Lankan and Australian cricket teams.

An irresistible attraction that the hotel offers for wildlife enthusiasts is a safari beginning at the recently reopened rear entrance of the Yala National Park in Katagamuwa. Having been closed for quite some time, there are fewer safari jeeps in the area and therefore animals are easier to spot. According to Sagara Palihawadana, Chairman/Managing Director of Mandara Hotels and Resorts and Rosen Tours, the chances of catching a glimpse of the ever-elusive Sri Lankan Leopard in this area of the National Park are remarkably high. Moreover, the 20-minute drive from the hotel to the Katagamuwa entrance is far more convenient than the much longer drive to Block I of the Yala National Park.

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While the hotel arranges tours to other nature reserves in the area such as Bundala, Udawalawe and Kumana, its staff also accompanies guests to culturally significant sites including Sella Kataragama, Situlpawwa and Maligawila.

After an exhausting day full of travel and sightseeing, settling down to relax at one of the sitting areas along the verandahs of the hotel would probably be the most satisfying end to a day well-spent.

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