Many ‘Phases’ of the Galle Face Green

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Colorful kites decorating the sky was always an attraction at Galle Face.

The strip sandwiched between the green and the vast ocean was initially constructed as a one-mile promenade. The Galle Face Green (which was first laid out by the Dutch as a means to enable their cannons to have a strategic line of fire

against the Portuguese) in 1856, under the instructions of the then Governor of British Ceylon, Sir Henry George Ward (1797–1860), to allow ladies and children to stroll and ‘take in a breath of fresh air’. The Galle Face Green and its surroundings at that time, when the promenade was completed in 1859, were a hive of other sports-related activities like horse racing, golf, and cricket, all taking place while the country was under British rule.

In later years, around the 60’ I remember accompanying my father and brother to witness the many rugger matches played at the then Army grounds, situated on the opposite side of the green, behind the Colombo Club building premises. It still exists and did operate even during the days gone by, long after which it was subsequently attached to a notable hotel premise surrounded by many commercial buildings that have sprung up during the recent development of the area. This proves the fact, as history has it on record, that the Galle Face Green premise was a much larger area in the past than the mere 5-hectare strip of land presently lying between Galle Road and the Indian Ocean. It still survives as the largest open space in Colombo.

The Galle Face Green has also remained a popular destination for children, vendors, teenagers, lovers, kite flyers, merrymakers, and all those who want to indulge in their favorite pastimes next to the sea under the open sky. Saturday and Sunday are special days for Colombo’s revelers or even the many visitors who arrive in the city for short periods to attend to their personal errands. The green gets packed with day trippers, picnickers, and food vendors selling ready-to-eat cooked crabs, prawn vadais, slices of mango, and pineapple marinated to taste with pepper and salt (Achcharu). Over time, the green has become a favorite eating place, mainly at dinner. Several wholesome meal options are available to visitors taking an evening stroll on the green. Meals such as chapattis, a variety of rotis, and naans with accompaniments like roast chicken and assorted curries are made alongside koththu roti, and other quick off-the-pan meals popular buys amongst visitors.

Looking back on its history, one can see that the Galle Face Green was nothing more than a public space that drew a large portion of its city dwellers, if not the entire population of this country, to visit it at some point in their lives.

Suppose one looks at the rapid development that has taken place in the recent past. In that case, one cannot ignore that the green itself may have played a

significant role in attracting international investors to set up businesses in its surroundings. Taking into account that at one time, there was only the Galle Face Hotel, which could be called the only commercial entity that operated in the area. As time traveled, however, in later years, it had a new neighbor standing opposite it, over across the road, the Macan Markar Building, later known as Galle Face Court 1.

In the later stages, besides the Galle Face Hotel, another hotel came to stand at the other end of the green border strip, called the Ceylon Inter- Continental. This first-ever property belonged to an international chain to open its doors to international travelers here in Colombo. But with time, we saw that it was not going to stop there, and many other star-class properties opened up, adding more luster to the skyline of that part of the city.

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The Galle Face Green has also been the natural choice of many successful governments to select it as the venue repeatedly to hold the auspicious event of Sri Lanka’s national day celebration held annually on the 4th of February. This culminates in posing us with the question – What if the Green had its say on one day of the many phases it had traveled through, standing the test of time, arriving through the shadows of yesterday, traveling through the turmoil of today to see a more glorious Colombo in the years ahead, with more people walking all over its salubrious surroundings, all in harmony, setting aside all differences of color, cast

and religion, carrying forward the message of the national flag that’s hoisted annually on February 4th, reminding us that all people are but one, steering ahead to face a new phase in harmony.



This recently built pier helps people to move beyond the green and enjoy the ocean’s view.



The Promenade still remains busy.



People enjoying the new beach space created alongside the Port City.



Short eats are galore to fill one’s heart’s content.



Toys for kids is another new attraction at Galle Face



Candy Floss Woman is at the Galle Face Green



An array of mouthwatering pickles awaits you.



The two grand dames at the far end that watched over the green and it’s going-on over the years.