

## A Stunning Replica Complimenting the Past



The façade of Mer.chant Hotel in Galle Fort with the building housing the rooms at the rear while to the left is the old marketplace turned restaurant and the kitchen on the right.

Mer.chant Hotel inside Galle Fort stands in consonance with the Dutch bastion's hallowed heritage. Its meticulous all-encompassing design ethos fuses every aspect of luxe living and hospitality with the awe-inspiring colonial tapestry surrounded by a fortress that has preserved a centuries-old way of life with pride.

**Words** Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

The church tower stood tall in the background. Below, the frangipani tree was in bloom. From Room 201, the view inside the Galle Fort, a 16th-century bastion that cocoons a charming retreat of colonial buildings, churches, and mosques connected by narrow cobbled roads that lead from one end to another, crisscrossing through a kaleidoscope of visions in between, is history frozen in time. It's a place steeped in times past but throbbing with energy that transports anyone navigating its historic grounds into a blissful epiphany. The Galle Fort is a world tucked away from the outside and the Mer.chant Hotel in Pedlar Street embodies that extraordinary world order of old-world charm, seamlessly connecting with the locality's ebb and flow.

The Mer.chant Hotel in Galle Fort is a labor of love culminating in preserving history and celebrating a new beginning. This new beginning effortlessly connects with the individuality of the locality. Standing at the entrance, it is easy to mistake the hotel for a colonial building. The marvelous blend of open terraces, timber finishes, and the imposing Dutch roof complements the heritage building that houses the restaurant, which was once a marketplace and a government office. They look like masterworks enshrined in timeless beauty.

Mer.chant Hotel on Pedlar Street is no coincidence. The name is an ode to its past, when Galle, a buzzing seaside town, welcomed traders to its shores. The fort community would have provided a promising base for merchants to trade their wares at the marketplace and through the length and breadth of the locality. The twist to the name's spelling with a break in between resonates with the setting. Mer is the sea in French. Chant alludes to a rhythmic phrase or chorus. Indeed, the hotel and the surroundings vibrate with the ocean's sounds, the landward wind floating softly through the quaint neighborhood that is the fort.

This 14-bedroom boutique hotel is a blend of many moods. Decorated in subdued colors emphasizing white and grey, it seethes with a sophistication that merges nobility and refinedness in muted elegance. The two-storey complex at the rear of the premises opens to a reception and lounge area, from where the rooms are accessed. The rooms are located along sunlit open-air communal terraces overlooking a courtyard. The well-ordered theme follows effortlessly in décor and comfort. The interiors combine timber features with rattan accessories, from patterned wicker stools to woven wall mats, shells embedded in harmonious designs inside frames, and the simple wooden furniture that bears a totally natural look and feel, the ideal ambiance blending simplicity with comfort and luxury. Focusing on sustainable practices, utensils that hold tea and bath essentials are made of glass and ceramic, and the natural ingredients fused toiletries are a purposeful investment, just like the pursuit to preserve the past in a new social milieu.



The open reception and lobby area reserved for dining purposes.



The view from one of the rooms.





The rooms located along open-air communal terraces overlooking a courtyard.

The private balconies offer splendid views across the terrain, the tiled roofs, and the ocean peeking through. At the same time, it's the ultimate restful place to indulge in inactivity, sipping a drink while taking in the echoes of a privileged neighborhood. The good thing is that guests can enjoy privacy inside a buzzing fort at Mer.chant Hotel, as the trees at the entrance shield visitors from the road while giving them the best surrounding views. From the charming beauty of the hotel to the comfort of the rooms to lying down on the smooth beds, the experience is delightful.

The muted tones of white and accents of turquoise and rattan are carried over to 1710. The 18th-century structure that used to be a marketplace is a cozy nook, a small and exquisite space with rattan lampshades and winnowing rattan wall hangings, built-in turquoise cushioned banquettes and chairs, and with subtle lighting, the restaurant is snug, exuding intimacy and stylishness. The all-day restaurant serves an array of local and international cuisines. It would be a shame not to dip into some of the delectable dishes of the region. The veritable specialties such as the inimitable seafood fare, the Galle Biryani, influenced by the Arab settlers, and the Batticaloa Prawn Curry are a must-taste at the hotel. Dining along the corridors and in the courtyard under the shade of mature trees captures the appetite and serves a hefty dose of taste for any palette. Fresh fruit juices, milkshakes, mocktails, and

more from the juice bar adjacent to the kitchen can be enjoyed anywhere in this comfortable getaway.

The place is so chilled that there is space for celebrations of many kinds, be it for intimate dinners, an outdoor snack with friends and family, or a curated gathering for family-centered and corporate moments. Whether the celebration is intimate, cheery, or conventional, the restaurant with a 50-seating capacity with the outdoor dining area offering the same crowd space can change the mood to fit the occasion and deliver an unforgettable celebration surrounded by the best ambiance, food, and entertainment completed with impeccable service provided under the guidance of General Manager Chamika Wickramanayake.



The Premium King Bedroom combines timber features with rattan furniture.



The Superior Deluxe Bedroom exudes an old world charm that seamlessly flows through the entire property.





The interior of the Superior Deluxe Twin Bedroom.



A centuries-old spot that used to be a busy marketplace is turned into a stylish restaurant.





Adhil Fouz, Founder, Mer.chant Hotel.

Adhil Fouz is the brain and muscle behind the hotel, to whom the Mer.chant is a labor of love, a hard-won battle amid many struggles to preserve the property's antiquity value while giving life to his dream hotel. Hailing from Galle, it's a project that took him back to his roots. It was a sole endeavor for Adhil, who hails from the fifth generation of gem merchants.

Before Mer.chant, Adhil, having completed his degree and postgraduate studies in computer science in the UK, worked there and subsequently launched a software company before switching careers to build his gem and jewelry collection brand under Ayura. In 2015, he embarked on the hotel project that ended as a collaborative effort to design a structure that would be the best formula to help the past resonate in the present. His project had to embody the lifestyle, the sense of community, and the exclusivity associated with the fort.

He lauds the creative brilliance of Architect Philip Weeraratne, and his team, who captured the essence of the setting while complying with stringent official requirements to deliver architectural beauty. The hotel's reputation is more than its architecture and luxury, says Adhil, applauding the energetic team led by General Manager Chamika, who continues to overlook the management of the daily operation and has made hospitality their creed to create a home away from home inside Mer.chant Hotel. So, step in and see. You will be satisfied.

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The Church Street Townhouse is another property belonging to the hotel – a private villa ideal for a family getaway or work retreat.



The living area of the villa is a veritable representation of the Fort's old way of life with antique and period furniture.





The four poster bed is very much a southern staple influenced by the Dutch.

### **Church Street Townhouse**

*The Church Street Town House is a private residence with two suites, a duplex room, two courtyards, and a rooftop terrace with a sunset view. It's another aesthetically rich project by Adhil. As the name suggests, located on Church Street inside the Galle Fort, it's a space in sync with the area's architecture, narrow, long houses with courtyards, a small portico, and double doored entrances. Heavy on aesthetics, it is beautifully redecorated to capture a cosy atmosphere combining antique and modern furniture. The three floors allow the luxury of privacy to work or enjoy downtime. The rooftop is the ideal getaway to enjoy relative peace and quiet as the sun sets on the horizon or when dawn breaks amid the familiar sounds of a new day. There is great harmony in using color to complement the overall décor. The interior is visually pleasing, from the carpets, chandeliers, mirrors, candelabras, and wicker chairs to comfy sofas and four poster beds. Every element blends seamlessly to give a sense of comfort and sublimity. The townhouse could be the base from where one could embark on an exciting journey of exploration, from the community culture inside the fort to the surrounding ramparts to cycling through the cobbled roads or further into the hustle and bustle of Galle, its marketplace and shopping centers, while exploring more historical places or just lounging on the beach.*



Another cozy sitting area flanked by a courtyard.





The rooftop is another spot to relax or work.