Open Your Eyes To Colombo

Posted on

Galle Face Green

There was a time when the beauty of Colombo was hidden from the naked eye. We reminisce about the days when the city was green, the lakes were clear and the ornate architecture of the buildings could be appreciated.Venturing along the many roads of Colombo it is apparent that the days of old are back again and we no longer have to look back nostalgically. It is time to Open Your Eyes to Colombo!

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe Photographs Menaka Aravinda

Suspended in Time…

Calm and quiet…well…that is how I felt as I walked along the footpath that ran along the Beira Lake towards Sri Uttarananda Mawatha. The well manicured lawns and the green foliage of the surrounding trees provided the ideal location for an afternoon stroll. The sound of vehicles on the road was just a murmur in the background. A true sense of freedom and peace could be felt amidst the hectic blur of city life.

Stone benches and sitting areas have been provided for those who wish to take a moment's respite. Suddenly it was as if the flood gates had been opened, a stream of people started walking out of their offices, many of them heading towards the Kompannaveediya train station. Over the railway tracks they went hastening their steps to catch the train. A toot of horns was heard as two trains going in the opposite directions passed each other. For a moment I was suspended in time, indecisive whether to reflect on the past – I open my eyes – there was no need to, the beauty of Colombo was right in front of me.

Fort…

The Dutch Hospital, a remnant from our colonial past has shed its dilapidated look to emerge refreshed. Its characteristic architecture has been maintained with spacious interiors, massive doors, windows and arches. It blends perfectly with the more modern surroundings of the World Trade Centre. The wide pavements with street lamps and green plants have opened up the space. With the road opened from both sides there is a clear flow of energy.

We headed on to Olcott Mawatha, here too the pavements had been redone with street lamps adorning the sidewalks. With the facades of the buildings such as Millers and others from our colonial heritage visible to the naked eye it was truly enjoyable to appreciate the brilliant architecture.

Walking along the length of Janadhipathi Mawatha, the sky opened up with a drizzle of rain. The tower, which is said to be both a lighthouse and clock tower loomed above with the Central Bank of Ceylon giving a stately appearance to the area. At the corner of Chatham Street and Janadhipathi Mawatha is a building with Roman style architecture. At one time this had been the Pensions Department. With renovation work happening around the area, this building too will relive its glory.

The tower, which is said to be both a lighthouse and clock tower loomed above.

Galle Face…

The Galle Face Green is truly green… and is again a place for relaxation and leisure. Early morning joggers go about their daily routine, while those rushing off to work walk briskly along the pavement. Walls and fences have come down and a sense of openness prevails.

The Presidential Secretariat stands tall amidst the hype of modernity as a reminder of our regal past. Yet there is a present and a future merged with the past, unique in its persona, it just takes a moment to open your eyes and look at Colombo… the change is right in front of you.

Driving along the Galle Road, one would be able to see a clear transformation of this busy road, which is like the artery of Colombo with new pavements with green foliage and clear signboards. At night the Galle Road is a festival of lights with the colour lights flickering in the distance.

Independence Avenue and its vicinity…

Independence Avenue is seeing a new look, the walls once covering the National Archives as well as the adjoining buildings have come down. Furthermore a walking path is currently being constructed for the daily fitness enthusiasts, from Independence Avenue along Reid Avenue, then turning inwards at the Race Course. The Race Course too is getting a facelift and as such its beautiful brick structure and intricate design is visible as the reconstruction work progresses.

In the heart of Colombo a massive structure can be seen. Its exuberance dominates the somewhat laid back environment of the Vihara Maha Devi Park and other buildings in the vicinity. The National Performing Arts Theatre with has an auditorium with a capacity of 1288 is yet another symbol of modernity and progress – the new intermingling with the old – a confluence that makes Colombo what it is.

Diyawanna Oya…

In the outskirts of Colombo on the way to the Parliament at Sri Jayawardenapura, a transformation can be seen. The walking paths along the Diyawanna Oya have been laid while maintaing the greenery of its surroundings. With the traffic buzzing in the vicinity, it takes a while to realise that you are on a busy road. The roundabout and the islands in the middle of the road have been landscaped beautifully in line with the environment.

What more is there to say? Open Your Eyes To Colombo!

The City is Blossoming Right in Front of You!

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