

The Grand Oriental Hotel

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Adjacent to the Colombo Harbour, lies the stately Grand Oriental Hotel. Witness to a history of close to 200 years, it caters a unique aura of a resplendent past intermingled with the best of modern luxuries.

Words Dinali Sugathadasa Photographs Mahesh Prasantha

The story of the Hotel begins as a British military barrack constructed in 1837. Gradually the barracks were converted into hostels for soldiers and later in 1875 refurbished as the well-equipped, luxurious Grand Oriental Hotel. It was the first European owned, fully equipped hotel in the East, and the first in Ceylon to install an electrically operated lift.

Through time the Hotel gained a reputation worldwide with its plush service offerings at a central location on the Indian sea route, becoming the choice of many illustrious patrons. Dr Jose Mercado Rizal Y Alonzo, a national hero of the Philippines visited the Grand Oriental

Hotel four times and famous Russian author Anton Chekov aboded at the Hotel where he commenced writing his novel "Gusev." In the early 1950s, during the stay of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Kent, at the Queen's House in Colombo, it was the Grand Oriental Hotel that was chosen to provide catering.

Known as the GOH amongst its guests then and now, the Hotel offers coveted indulgences. The Harbour Room restaurant of the Grand Oriental Hotel furnishes a breathtaking view of the Colombo Harbour below and takes pride in being the only restaurant in the country with a harbour view. Whether sipping a drink at the bar, playing a game of pool or seated for a meal, the panorama of the Harbour Room is a sight yet to be rivalled.

The exotic (Sri) Lankan Restaurant of the GOH serves authentic local cuisine in the backdrop of an interior decorated with the vibrant styles and hues of indigenous art. The Hotel is home to the famed Blue Leopard nightclub – the oldest in Colombo. Recently refurbished under a new concept it has proved very popular amongst the youngsters. GOH Tap Bar accessible from the exterior of the Hotel too has lately been given a facelift and the Tiffin Hut is always ready to gratify those miniature cravings with its mouthwatering array of pastries and sweets.

Inclusive of 74 rooms including two suites named after Anton Chekov and Jose Rizal, and 12 semi deluxe rooms, it has five banquet halls at hand for grand celebrations. The GOH also offers the guests an excellent opportunity of pampering themselves with their in-house spa and salon.

Nihal Jayawardena, General Manager of Grand Oriental Hotel informs of how business is flourishing in the postwar tourism boom and goes on to mention how a recreation of the past glory of GOH is underway. "My able team created innovative events and promotions to attract customers. We have Hotel events; the weekly York Street, Street Food Festival, the Sri Lankan Theme Night in Harbour Room, the Shopper's Lunch at the Sri Lankan Restaurant and the Mixed Grill, a signature 70's dish that has been re-introduced." The Grand Oriental Hotel has withstood the transition of time and witnessed the evolution of a nation. The colonial architecture and memoirs of long-ago found along each corridor, nook and cranny enwrap guests in the grandeur of the past. Yet the Grand Oriental Hotel remains young at heart offering the best of modern comforts and indulgences for the visitor.

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