The Three Hour Happy Hour

Posted on

Barfly



The bar counter at the Meridien is good for gathering with friends

There’s good news for the dedicated drinker in Colombo. With a little planning, reduced-cost drink can be obtained for three hours ever evining, in a glorious extension of the “happy hour” concept.

Happy hour is an idea from the United States that has caught on around the world. It is the time, usually one hour, when a bar cuts the prices of its drinks, often by as much as 50 percent. The custom, according to an advertisement for Northwest Airlines which appeared in a recent issue of Time magazine, “makes it easy for

business associates to get to know each other.”

The happy hour idea here makes it easy for Sri Lankans and visitors to drink in five-star hotels at something close to the price charged in pubs, if you could find an acceptable pub. That’s what so depressing for the dedicated drinker: there are very few pubs or bars where you can pop in, sit or -land at the bar counter and down he odd noggin while chatting to fellow boozers or to the bar-tender. Hotels offer the only option for
serious. convivial drinking but because price in their bar can be high. if you want to get high without bursting the budget, happy hour is the only answer.

It begins earliest in the hotels at the southern end of Galle Face Green. Both the lobby bar at the Taj Samudra and the Oasis Bar at the Holiday Inn have a 17.00 kick-off. The happy hour is a double, until 19.00. While the Taj offers a discount of 25 percent on its regular prices and the Holiday Inn a 20 percent discount the rupee cost isn’t the only consideration of good value.

Those who want to slurp back cocktails in a lively atmosphere will prefer the Taj where a “Calypso” band belts out foot-tapping numbers by the magazine rack. The Taj bar counter is what drinkers dream about: plenty of space, twelve comfortable bar stools and a brass rail to prop your feet on, canapes passed around occasionally and, if you are lucky, a barman of charm and good conversation. Being part of the lobby, but separate from it, the Taj bar lounge is as large — and sometimes as busy — as some airport bars.

More discreet is Holiday Inn’s Oasis Bar, refurbished with the glittery elegance that suits a sophisticated drinker. There are bar stools although the bar counter itself is not very long, where drinkers can sit and stare at the bottles or chat to the barman. This is an established favourite and the happy hour concept here is an old one.

The bar off the penitentiary-like quad that forms the vast lobby of the Lanka Oberoi Hotel opens its happy hour at 17 .30 with a 20 percent discount. With its rectangular, marble topped bar, padded leather elbow-cushion and 18 leather-covered stools, low lights and a decor of Club Brown, this bar is a true drinker’s habitat. If there was a personable barman performing behind the bar, it would probably be packed with regulars. A tray of canapes rests on the bar counter but you’ll have to help yourself. Happy hour here is 90 minutes long, until 19.00 hours.

The action shifts to the other side of Fort with the Ramada Renaissance and the

Colombo Hilton both offering two hours of happy drinking from 17.30. The Ramada has two happy hour outlets, its Beira Lounge and the Library with a 20 percent discount. The Library has a splendid bar but is very brightly lit and anyway. only accessible to members or hotel residents. Drinking in the Beira Lounge means sitting at a table and waiting to be served by a steward, not exactly the ideal the Lanka Oberoi Hotel opens its happy hour at 17 .30 with a 20 percent discount. With its rectangular, marble topped bar, padded leather elbow-cushion and 18 leather-covered stools, low lights and a decor of Club Brown, this bar is a true drinker's habitat. If there was a personable barman performing behind the bar, it would probably be packed with regulars. A tray of canapes rests on the bar counter but you'll have to help yourself. Happy hour here is 90 minutes long, until 19.00 hours.

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Happy hour at the Hilton takes place at the Tree Bar which means that you've got to go outside the hotel and cross by the bridge to the pool and gymnasium complex off Lotus Road. They claim a 30 percent discount but actually this is limited to "house" (imported) spirits and beers but no wine. Being somewhat spartan and devoted to fitness freaks, the bar is devoid of both Hilton comfort and drinkers' ambience.

A short stagger down Lotus Road, brings you to Le Galadari Meridian Hotel in time for a genuine happy hour of 60 minutes from 19.00 to 20.00 hours. The discount is 25 percent and the bar is blessed with the kind of manager drinkers like: a man who knows his booze and has conversation to match. The bar counter here is good for gathering around with friends, but suffers from being part of the open lobby so never really generates the right atmosphere.

A welcome innovation here is the availability of "bites" — hot snacks flambe-ed while you drink. My favourite is garlic mushrooms in period but you could also nibble jumbo prawns in white wine and beef stips in brandy. If you've lasted the course this far, you'll need something to eat.

The final word goes to Prema Fernando, Chairman of the Ceylon Tourist Board, who says happy hour drinking should be called Syncopation, which the dictionary says is “an irregular movement between bars.”



The Oasis Bar at the Holiday Inn is an established favourite.