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Few places are known to the public, particularly to the unsettled traveller, like the Villa Sarina. A classic, no less than elegant manor circa 1913, Villa Sarina today hosts guests as honorable as ambassadors and foreign dignitaries. India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi stayed here, as did her father Nehru and Ravindranath Tagore. And for everyday visitors, its fine dining offers a taste of a grandeur reminiscent of a glorious past.

The Villa Sarina, located in sea-front Asoka Gardens, is a quiet retreat from Galle Road; a restaurant, yes, but with the feeling of dropping in on a count or admiral for an intimate dinner among friends. Each of the three dining rooms, one actually a library with a stunning carved salwood headpiece behind the bar; the garden setting and upstairs terrace seat but few tables and can, of course, be reserved for private parties. The sitting room serves tea, or cocktails accompanied by piano tunes and Italian singing on Thursday. The sailing rhapsodies of a piano concerto resound from cool marble floors clear to the high Victorian ceiling. A glance out of the window at the lovely temple flowers stirred by a gentle breeze of salty ocean air recalls true time and location: a serene garden estate on Colombo's shores of the Indian Ocean.

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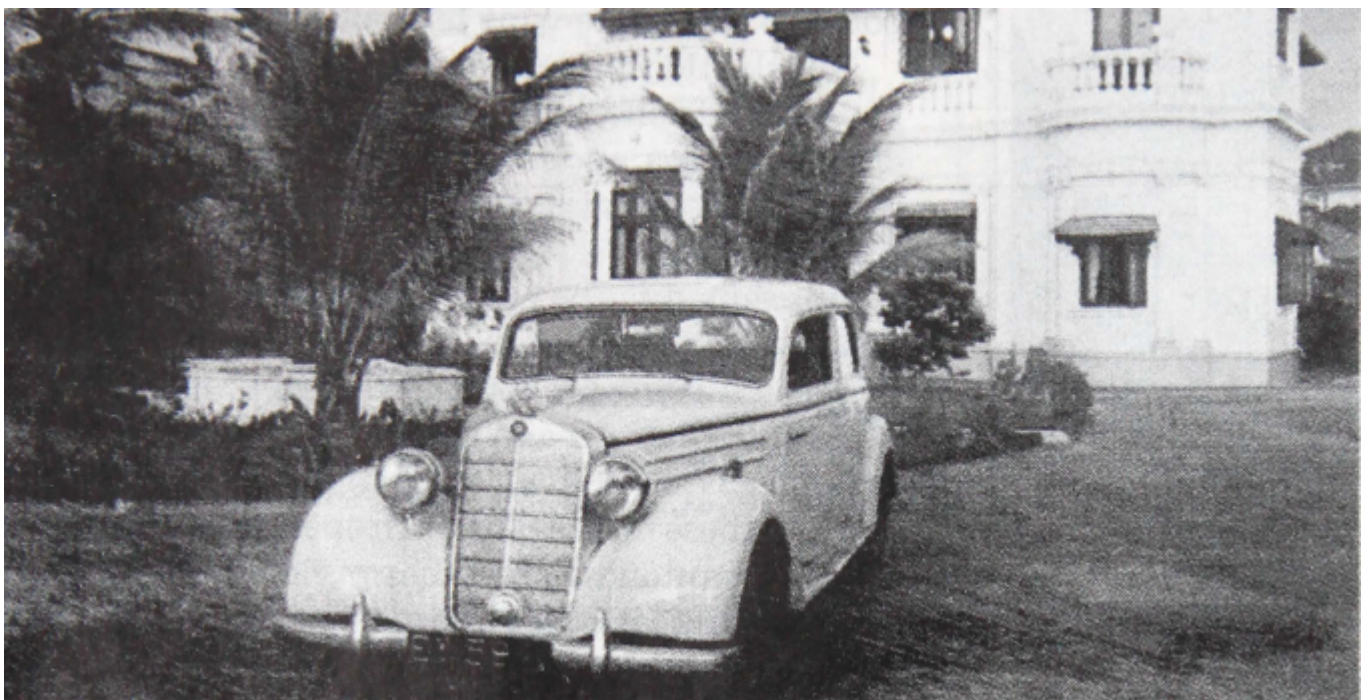
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Featuring not one but four international cuisines – Japanese, Chinese, Continental, and Sri Lankan – the Villa Sarina employs a team of chefs. All meals are prepared to order; special requests or custom seasoning (mild to spicy, for example) are graciously honored. Some of the house favorites are: a variety of crepes filled with mushrooms, coco, tuna, crab meat, or spinach and other treats; from the Chinese, fish, prawn, chicken or beef in ginger and

crisp vegetable sauces; of Continental dishes, poached fish Florentine, steak Chacatiore; and in an authentic Sri Lankan style, fish cooked in a claypot, southern style, tropical vegetable curries, and home-made pickles and sambols. Sri Lankan specialties require a day's notice to acquire the freshest ingredients, some from distant markets. Unusual fruit juices such as belli and or fresh papaya, mango, pineapple purees, and French wines are also served. And sweets, from peach melba to kahlua creme and ice cream sundaes are cool refreshers.

Dining is no ordinary affair at the Villa Sarina. It's to languish and leisure over; to discover the artistry of flavors that, like the hand-carved masterpieces which adorn this stately house, took time to create and take time to appreciate. (Bring along a camera to capture the unique architecture and lovely gardens.

Villa Sarina is open every day - breakfast from 7.30to 10.30a.m., lunch from 11.30a.m. to 2.30p.m .. and dinner from 6 to 11 p.m. Telephone to 588727 for directions or reservations. Visit the Villa Sarina for an experience you'll long savor.



Galle Face Green comes to live around sunset. Photo courtesy: Ceylon Tourist Board.