

Galle Face Hotel

Amidst the inexorable emphasis on modernity and minimalism, the Galle Face Hotel is a welcome change for those looking for old world charm and hospitality. Resplendent in grandeur the Galle Face Hotel, majestically situated in the heart of Colombo and overlooking the Galle Face Green on the coast of the Indian Ocean; is a pearl fit to rival that of the country's reputation.

Established in 1864 and considered the oldest purpose built hotel east of the Suez, the Galle Face Hotel has an unparalleled wealth of history. Having played host to some of the world's most iconic figures, a stay at the Galle Face Hotel is not only saturated in decadent luxury and unfaltering hospitality but is also an opportunity to walk in the shadows of, Indira Gandhi, President Richard Nixon, Harold McMillan, Emperor Hirohito – and for the James Bond fan – Roger Moore and Ursula Andress, to name a few. Few hotels too can boast having a museum dedicated to the hotel's development including an array of artefacts worthy of a curator's note (such as the first car bought by Prince Phillip in 1940, and an unexploded cannon ball which hit the building in the 1840s landing on the 'squared chuman and terra-cotta tiled floor leaving a dent where it rolled under a chair and remained').

The hotel evokes the ambiance of a bygone era, a throwback to its colonial past, with which comes a sense of opulence and charm unrivalled by any modern establishment. Its heritage in hospitality however, not only manifests itself in its commitment to excellence but also in its commitment to innovation. 2014 will mark the hotel's 150th anniversary, and having survived the hospitality industry for such an enviable time, the hotel has been acutely attuned to the need to strike a balance between retaining its historical legacy while at the same time innovatively forging ahead. The Regency Wing of the hotel, with its recent upgrade to a luxury 21st century hotel, and the Classic Wing adorned and maintained to the strictest Victorian standards of architecture, stands testament to this breath-taking juxtaposition. The Galle Face Hotel is thus uniquely positioned, offering guests the choice of both an old and new world. Regardless of one's choice, the common world is one of serene beauty, which is hard to forget as the waves of the Indian Ocean lap gently at the hotel's doorstep.

Now with 150 rooms, Galle Face Hotel was originally established to cater for the increasing number of travellers to the emerging city of Colombo. Facilities for today's guest are as abundant as ever. Hotel staff efficiently and resourcefully caters 24 hours to guests' every need and a spa and health club within the hotel ensures pampering of the highest degree. The hotel also incorporates an executive lounge, a shopping arcade

that includes a patisserie, gift shop and hair salon as well as extensive banquet facilities in the form of three grand ballrooms and a further six function rooms. High ceilings, intricate architecture and charmingly ostentatious chandeliers ensure that a banquet at the hotel is one fitting of the standards enjoyed during the times of Colonial grandeur. The hotel also has within its repertoire four restaurants and three bars. Whatever the mood, an appropriate dining ambience is on offer: whether to enjoy the fruits of the Indian Ocean in the Sea Spray seafood restaurant, watch picturesque oceanic sunset over a British style 'High Tea' at the Verandah, or experience a classical evening meal at The 1864. Either way, indulging in a drink while watching the sunset over the Indian Ocean on the popular Chequerboard is ranked as one of the '1001 things to do before you die'.

The Galle Face Hotel has continued since 1864 its historical record of excellence, and in 2011 itself, has received numerous awards including the only Sri Lanka's Presidential Award for Best Heritage Hotel, the Sri Lanka's Tourism Award for Best Heritage Hotel, and the international PATA Grand Award for Best Heritage Hotel. Moreover the hotel has performed exceptionally well as a business, and its link to the widely respected Gardiner family from the turn of the 20th century has allowed it to remain in sound financial form. Having taken over from his father, the revered late Cyril Gardiner fifteen years ago, Group Chairman Sanjeev Gardiner has been instrumental in the on-going success of the business. The Group, which aside from the prolific Galle Face, counts two further heritage hotels; the Queens Hotel and Hotel Suisse in Kandy, the more contemporary Surf Hotel in Bentota, and the Safari Hotel in Tissamaharama, in its impressive portfolio. In addition to this, a further fourteen properties, all built when Sri Lanka was still Ceylon, are owned and operated by the Group. Galle Face Hotel is currently managed by dynamic and experienced Australian General Manager Jason Cooley.

Firmly established as one of the finest hotels in Sri Lanka, the Galle Face Hotel's formidable reputation – one that it undoubtedly deserves – stretches further than the shores of the Indian Ocean. Far from being a place of exceptional hospitality, luxury and natural beauty, the hotel is also an institution, actively keeping the spirit and history of the country alive, and affording guests an opportunity to experience both the Ceylon of then and the Sri Lanka of now. Few hotels worldwide can lay claim to such an historical legacy, one that is reinforced on welcome at the Classic Wing by Kuttan – the ninety year old record-breaking doorman employed for over sixty-eight years. 'No change' he says of the hotel in his limited English, 'same before'. The enchantment, it seems, has always been... and is here to stay. ■

