

WITHIN ITS COMPACT SIZE, SRI LANKA possesses an array of masterpieces of well-designed, historically-influenced architecture. Hotel rooms, which have been dubbed by *Condé Nast Traveller* as 'the most beautiful rooms in the world', a design pedigree harking back to the country's pre-independence architect, Geoffrey Bawa as well as the new offerings of Colombo's fashionable boutique hotels. Yet, travelling further south also reveals the devastation of the tsunami and the reconstruction efforts post-tsunami, of which the local hotel industry had actively been a part.

Three of Colombo's top hotels – the Casa Colombo, The Taj and the Park Street Hotel would appeal to the discerning solo guests. The hip Casa Colombo has been celebrated in international publications as diverse as *Wallpaper* and *Condé Nast* and it features the famously pink swimming pool, the mural in its in-house restaurant HVN depicting a number of deities in Warholian pop-art style, the rooms a mix of original mosaic tiling, rustic chic doors and the design accoutrements you'd find in the most avant-garde of design hotels. Yet, to quote an almost clichéd Mission saying, "God is in the details", and it is in the details that you'd understand the kind of attention and love that had gone into the redesign of the hotel. The flow of water for the rainshower comes unexpectedly from a slim stainless steel slit connected to the pipes at the shower stall. True to the ethos of a design hotel, function is re-imagined to suit the form – electrical outlets are neatly tucked away inside the drawers, switches to the hotels all neatly placed in a compact mini stand by the bedside.



# Sultry Sri Lanka

The lures of Sri Lanka's holiday villas- its languid, laidback charms, the excellent service standards and an aesthetic unique to Sri Lankan design and architecture - has attracted a steady stream of tourists who appreciate its rustic charms

The  
Facade of Casa Colombo

Right: Casa Colombo Sri Lanka  
Left: The Park Street Hotel  
Middle: The Park Street Hotel  
Bottom: The Park Street Hotel



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Opposite: from top left: The new lobby at Park Street Hotel, The Fort Primers, One of the interiors of The Fortresses.



## CHIC IN COLOMBO

The newest addition to the luxury hotel scene in Colombo is Tintagel. Owned and designed by Seth Fernando, Sri Lanka's top name in interior design whose art gallery now occupies what used to be Geoffrey Bawa's office, Tintagel is synonymous in chic in Colombo. Leather club-chairs, black and white photographs in dark wooden frames and a sophisticated colour palette of browns and blacks give off the impression of a gentleman's club.

The pool area exudes an haute residential vibe, the rooms (some of them with private pools) demonstrate commitment in the relentless pursuit of quality and luxury and the restaurant provides an innovative menu with an immaculate, informed service. Yet, it is the history behind this hotel that appealed most to us. Tintagel has been leased from the Bastarotta family, a name that has become historically intertwined with Sri Lanka's politics. It was on the verandah of Tintagel (now the Bastarotta's family home) that S.D.R.M. Bastarotta, then Sri Lanka's Prime Minister, was shot in 1999. The hotel, which long served as the residence of

Lanka's first female (and longest-serving) Prime Minister and President respectively. The best hotels in Colombo and Galle are mostly conversions of old, historic mansions, but none with a history as deeply entrenched in Sri Lankan politics as Tintagel.

The Park Street Colombo is a veritable mainstay in the luxury hotel scene in Colombo. A boutique hotel converted from a historic colonial mansion, staying at the Park Street Colombo is akin to staying in the home of a (very rich) friend. The paintings on display are the works of the original owners of the home, the furnishings, metal and brass vases and the expansive views and luxury of space of the individual rooms being a feature you'd be unlikely to find anywhere else in Colombo. The whole hotel centres on an open-air courtyard, where a pool and an afternoon dining area are situated, with the latter being part of a restaurant that is justifiably synonymous with fine dining in Colombo.

## BOHO BOUTIQUES

Travelling to Galle, one immediately notices the change in trend to a more bohemian,

creative vibe. Here you'd find independent little boutiques selling everything from homeware to elaborately beaded kalfates. Galle plays host to the Galle Literary Festival, which sees headline attendees like Gary Vidi and Vikrama Sethi.

Galle, a World Heritage Site, is a fortified town built by the Dutch East India Company and is a museum for the general war of Sri Lanka. Considering the conglomerate of elite, independent boutique hotels in Galle Fort, it is no surprise Galle's popularity as a tourist spot. The Armingalls, one of the best Art Deco installations in Sri Lanka is a hotel evincing the contemporary colonial elite of Galle. Seemingly one characteristic of Kerry Hill's works - whose other work includes the contemporary, minimalist planes of what used to be Prince Norodom Sihanouk's guest villa, now housing its reconstruction in the Amanassa in Bent Rep - the Armingalls is all about huge four poster beds, plaster chairs, black and white colour schemes and parquet flooring, with soaring ceilings.

The Fort Primers is a hip hotel in Galle Fort, with a design aesthetic being a mix of bohemian chic and an eclectic, individual

style that has become a defining trait of design hotels. Roomers called Beachcomber's Suite overlooking the pool. The Prefect's room or alternatively named after subjects like Geography, History and Art.

Galle Fort Hotel, on the other hand, is a beautiful property located in the same vicinity as the other two with a casual, relaxed vibe matching Galle's own literary boboism air. The restaurant, which I did not manage to try, is separately excellent.

## OUTSIDE OF GALLE

Yes, not everybody would like to stay within the ramparts of Galle, and new luxury accommodation options outside of Galle reflect this. Two newly opened luxury accommodation options, conveniently located within a five-minute drive to Galle, yet affording the kind of luxury and amenities not found within the hotels in Galle are The Grand Hill and The Fortress. Each built with a different demographic in mind, the The Grand Hill is an impressive property close to Galle. With a beautiful residential extension, a perfectly manicured garden

and a photogenic yet unassuming dining area, this colonial house conversion has an infinity pool overlooking an inspiring vista of lush greenery.

The Fortress Hotel, also conveniently located within a few minutes' drive from Galle, is a conversion from an old hotel with a colonial aesthetic, fused with the most contemporary design in the rooms and common areas. The Fortress is the only place to stay if you're looking for a social atmosphere and the amenities of a five-star hotel. Everybody (and everything) is friendly—from the tiny squirrels that find their way to your breakfast table to the elegantly clad hotel staff. The amenities are setup to facilitate social interaction: infinity pools overlooking the ocean, a trendy bar area and a private dining room even wine cellar when you need some quality private time with family and friends. They're also interestingly designed—the spa comes with an outdoor bucket bath that lets you pour the water over your head once it's suitably filled, the baby chairs at the restaurant are a take on Eero Aarnio's capsule chairs and the

private dining room even wine cellar comes with a beering of wood, creating a feeling of a family being on the beach.

From the rooms, you'll be able to see old-fashioned in stock, a lot of old-fashioned things to Sri Lanka and to be quite a scenic of beachside Sri Lanka. Some of the rooms come with private pools, some with an outdoor tub all showing contemporary, fashionable aesthetic in keeping with the social, outgoing atmosphere at this resort.

The hotels in Colombo and Galle, being the top spots on the general tourist map, illustrate what Sri Lanka has to offer in terms of luxury accommodation. Colombo, especially, shows the most internationally diverse style and amenities. Galle, whose charms have appealed to foreigners, also acts as a case study of postwar reconstruction. Big names in the hospitality industry, instrumental in the fundraising for war-torn sectors and immediate reconstruction efforts were on to host events in Galle that ranged from an elephant polo tournament to the Galle literary festival in an effort to elevate Sri Lanka as a holiday destination. **T**

## EVEN A SWISS WATCHMAKER WOULD HAVE MARVELED AT THE PRECISION OF THE EVENT PLANNER.

A traveller on a mission, my three-day schedule was packed to the brim with events organised around the hotel's 26 event venues. I walked from the convention in the modern **Ballroom** to power point presentations in sophisticated **Meeting Suites** overlooking the harbour. With some of the best restaurants in the city under one roof, I tasted cuisines from around the globe without leaving the hotel. Best of all, our efficient **MeetingOne** butler took care of the finer details while we focused on the business of meeting, made easy with the latest audio-visual equipment.



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Luxury commodes in Colombo and Galle.

The lures of Sri Lanka's holiday villas- its languid, laidback charms, the excellent service standards and an aesthetic unique to Sri Lankan design and architecture has attracted a steady stream of tourists who appreciate its rustic charms.

The particular brand of Sri Lankan architecture and aesthetic, articulated most prominently by Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka's pre-eminent architect, whose take on contemporary tropical architecture we still find channeled in the works of top architects.

Travelling around the East Coast of Sri Lanka, I'd visited the most exciting design hotels in Colombo, each with a beautifully tortured history, private villas exuding rustic chic and colonial homes converted into elegant boutique hotels evincing a *luxe, calme et volupte*.

Sri Lanka packs an amazing, almost disproportionate number, of well-designed holiday accommodation options within its compact size. Hotel rooms which have been dubbed by Conde Nast Traveller as 'the most beautiful room in the world', a design pedigree tracing back to the country's pre-eminent architect, Geoffrey Bawa as well as the new offerings of Colombo's fashionable boutique hoteliers. Yet, travelling further south also reveals the devastation of the tsunami and the reconstruction efforts post-tsunami, of which the local hotel industry had actively been a part of.

In Colombo, the stylish guest would reckon with three of the city's top hotels- the Casa Colombo, Tintagel and the Park Street Hotel. The Casa Colombo, a hip design hotel celebrated in international publications as diverse as Wallpaper and Conde Nast. The famously pink swimming pool, the mural in its in-house restaurant HVN depicting a number of deities in Warholian pop-art style, the rooms a mix of original mosaic tiling, rustic chic doors and the design accoutrements you'd find in the most avant-garde of design hotels. Yet, to quote an almost clichéd Miesian saying, 'God is in the details' and it is in the details that you'd understand the kind of attention and love that had gone into the re-design of the hotel. The flow of water for the rainshower comes unexpectedly from a slim stainless steel slat connected to the pipes in the shower stall. True to the ethos of a design hotel, function is reconfigured to suit the form (this is to be distinguished from 'form over function', where function is sacrificed for form. In this case, 'function' has merely been creatively re-configured in order to be aligned to the 'form')- electrical outlets are neatly tucked away inside the drawers, switches to the hotels all neatly placed in a compact mini stand by the bedside. Each guest is assigned a 'domo', the hotel's version of a butler.

The newest addition to the luxury hotel scene in Colombo is Tintagel. Owned and designed by Seth Fernando, Sri Lanka's top name in interior design whose art gallery now occupies what used to be Geoffrey Bawa's office- perhaps seen as a transfer of guard of sorts, Tintagel is the last word in chic in Colombo. Leather club chairs, black and white photographs framed in dark wooden frames and a sophisticated colour palette of browns and blacks give off the impression of a gentleman's club.

The pool area exudes a haute-monastic vibe, the rooms (some of them with private pools) demonstrate a continuity in the relentless pursuit of quality and luxury and the restaurant provides an interesting, innovative menu with immaculate, informed service. Yet, it is the history behind this hotel that appealed most to me. Tintagel has been leased from the Bandaranaike family, a name that has become inextricably intertwined with Sri Lankan politics. It was on the verandah of Tintagel (then the Bandaranaike's family home) that S.D.R.W Bandaranaike, then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, was shot in 1959. His widow and daughter went on to become Sri Lanka's first female (and longest-serving) Prime Minister and President respectively. The best hotels in Colombo and Galle are mostly conversions of old, historic mansions, but none with a history and place in Sri Lankan politics as Tintagel.

The Park Street Colombo is a veritable mainstay in the luxury hotel scene in Colombo. A boutique hotel converted from a historic colonial mansion, staying at the Park Street Colombo is akin to staying in the house of a (very rich) tasteful friend. The paintings you'd find on display are the works of the original owners of the home, the furnishings tasteful and immaculate and the expansiveness and luxury of space of the individual rooms being a feature you'd be unlikely to find anywhere else in Colombo. The whole hotel centers around an open-air courtyard, where a pool and alfresco dining area is situated. With a restaurant that is justifiably synonymous with fine dining in Colombo.

Travelling to Galle, one immediately notices the change in tenor to a more bohemian, creative vibe. Here you'd find independent little boutiques selling everything from homeware to elaborately beaded kaftans. Galle plays host to the Galle Literary Festival, with headliner attendees like Gore Vidal and Vikram Seth.

Galle, a World Heritage Site, is a fortified town built by the Dutch East India Company and is a must-visit for the general tour of Sri Lanka. That Galle is a popular tourist spot is also apparent given the conglomeration of elite, independent boutique hotels, located so close to each other, in Galle Fort. The Amangalla, one of the two Aman installations in Sri Lanka is a hotel evincing the contemporary-colonial chic of Galle. Seemingly uncharacteristic of Kerry Hill's works, whose other work includes the contemporary, minimalist planes of what used to be Prince Norodom Sihanouk's guest villa, now finding its reincarnation as the Amansara in Siem Reap, the Amangalla, is on the other hand, is about huge four poster beds, planter's chairs, black-and-white colour schemes and parquet flooring, with soaring ceilings.

The Fort Printers is a hip hotel in Galle fort, with a design aesthetic fusing chinoiserie chic and an eclectic, individual style that has become a defining trait of design hotels. Rooms are called Headmaster's Suite (overlooking the pool), The Prefect's room or alternately after subjects like Geography, History and Art.

Galle Fort Hotel, on the other hand, is a beautiful property located in the same vicinity as the other two with a casual, relaxed vibe matching Galle's own literary, bohemian air. The restaurant, which I did not manage to try, is reputedly excellent.

Yet, not everybody would like to stay within the ramparts of Galle- and new luxury accommodation options outside of Galle reflect this. Two newly opened luxury accommodation options, conveniently located within a 5 minute drive to Galle, yet affording the kind of luxury and amenities not found within the hotels in Galle are Tamarind Hill and The Fortress. Each built with a different demographic in mind, the Tamarind Hill is an impressive property close to Galle. With a beautiful roundabout entryway, a perfectly manicured garden and a photogenic yet unassuming dining area, this colonial house conversion has an infinity pool overlooking an inspiring vista of lush greenery.

The Fortress Hotel, also conveniently located within a few minutes' drive from Galle, is a conversion from an old hotel with a colonial aesthetic, fused with the most contemporary design in the rooms and common areas. The Fortress is the only place to stay if you're looking for a social atmosphere and the amenities of a five-star hotel. Everybody (and everything) are friendly- from the tiny squirrels that find your way to your breakfast table during breakfast time to the elegantly-clad hotel staff. The amenities are set up to facilitate social interaction- infinity pools overlooking the ocean, a trendy bar area and a private dining room cum wine cellar when you need some quality private time with family and friends. They're also interestingly designed- the spa comes with an outdoor bucket bath that tilts to pour the water over your head once it's suitably filled, the baby chairs at the restaurant are a take on Eero Arnio's capsule chairs and the private dining room cum wines cellar comes with a flooring of sand creating a feeling of actually being on the beach.

From the rooms, you'd be able to see still fishermen at work, a method of fishing unique to Sri Lanka and has become so iconic of beachside Sri Lanka. Some of the rooms come with private pools, some with an outdoor bath- all evincing a contemporary, fashionable aesthetic in keeping with the social, outgoing atmosphere at this resort.

The hotels in Colombo and Galle, being the top spots on the general tourist map, are indicative of what Sri Lanka has to offer in terms of its luxury accommodation. Colombo, especially, evinces the most internationally diverse style and amenities. Galle, long a favourite with foreigners drawn to its historical charm and affordable real estate (word has it that, in a pre-tsunami Sri Lanka, 'touting' involved solicitations to purchase real estate in the area) also acts as a case study of post-tsunami reconstruction. Big names in the hospitality industry, instrumental in the fundraising for tsunami victims and immediate reconstruction efforts went on to host events in Galle that ranged from an elephant polo tournament to the Galle literary festival in an effort to elevate Sri Lanka as a holiday destination.- Hajar Ali

The writer is the founder of Urbane Nomads, a niche travel agency based in Singapore. Believing that finding the right accommodation suitably enhances a holiday experience, Urbane Nomads will make accommodation recommendations based on your preferences, personality and holiday style. Urbane Nomads is able to organize tailored retreats to Sri Lanka, from a holistic Ayurvedic retreat to puppet theatre on court lawns, a quiet, relaxed retreat in a secluded destination resort to an action-packed holiday covering much of the country, horse-riding through tea country and surfing on the Serendip Riviera. (<http://www.urbanenomads.com>)