

LIFESTYLE

Sri Lanka's iconic Galle Fort Hotel opens after a two-year-long restoration project

Located inside a UNESCO World Heritage site, Sri Lanka's Galle Fort Hotel received its much awaited face lift with contributions from icons like Channa Daswatte.

By Fareeda Kanga

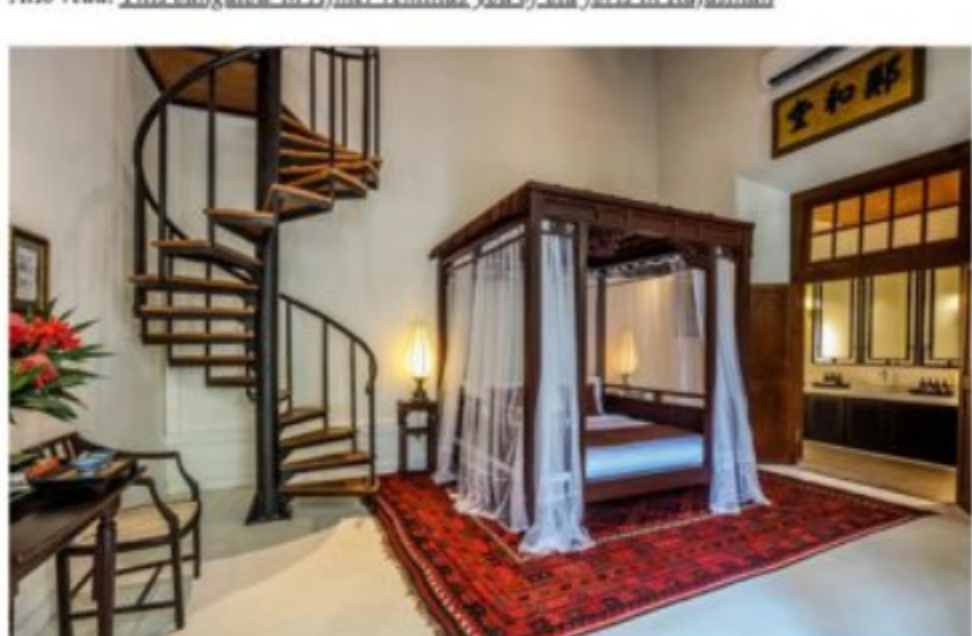
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A former warehouse and residence of renowned gem merchants during the British era, [Sri Lanka's](#) most iconic heritage hotel, the Galle Fort Hotel, reopened on 23 February 2022, after completing an extensive two-year restoration.

Located inside the UNESCO World Heritage site Galle Fort, this sumptuous boutique hotel is housed in a Dutch [mansion](#) that dates back 300 years. The heritage restoration of the Galle Fort Hotel was done in partnership with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Archaeology to ensure that the building's 300-year-old Dutch walls and facade were retained, maintaining the architectural integrity.

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"We wanted to refresh and give a new look to this historic building, which already plays such an important part in Sri Lanka's heritage. The design brief was to give a

amenities," says Amrit Rajaratman, founder of Maitland & Knox Heritage Hotels.

"The Dutch first set foot on Ceylon with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the 17th century. What remains today of the Dutch period is a shared heritage as seen in cuisine, culture, design and decor. Inspired by these influences, we have paid homage to a classical Dutch colonial look and mood, while still upgrading the amenities for the modern traveller."

In its new avatar, The Galle Fort Hotel features 11 luxurious suites each unique in style and decor. "The rooms are grand and spacious, designed to transport guests to a bygone era. Each room has its own distinctive theme. From a lavish garden suite, adorned with botanical prints, chinoiserie fabrics and a luxurious tub, to a [library](#) room filled with rare editions, artworks of vintage covers and an antique writer's desk," says interior decorator Eranga Tennakoon. The 11 rooms have rare pieces of antique furniture from the Dutch colonial period. "From vintage [wallpaper](#) drawn by local artists evoking the tropics, to furniture handcrafted by master artisans using age-old techniques preserved across the centuries. Each and every piece lends itself to the harmony and balance of the hotel interior," Tennakoon adds.



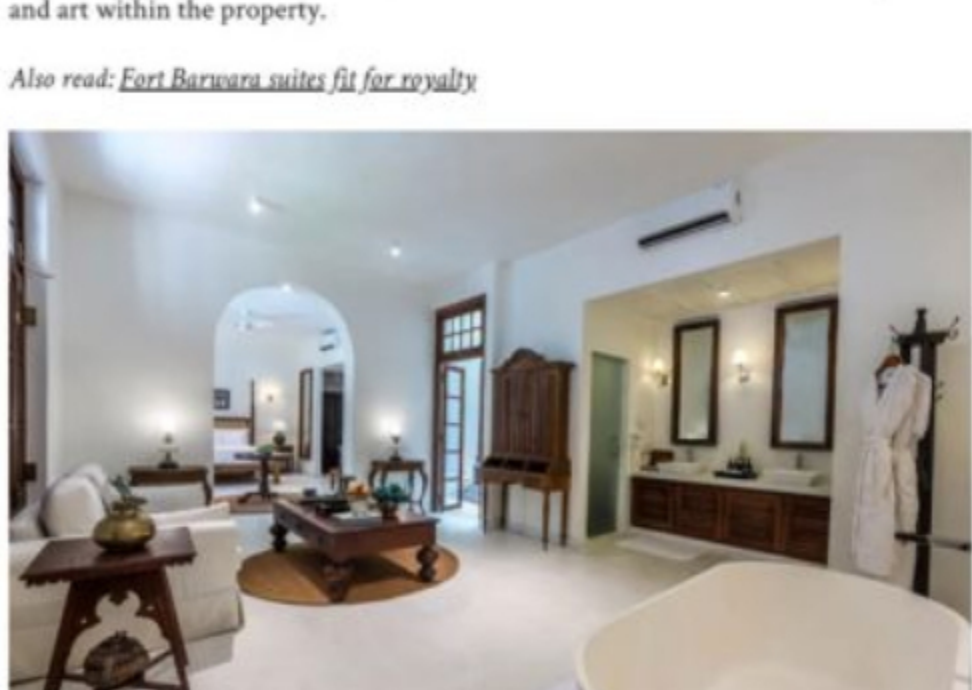
All the loft suites open out onto a generous veranda that offers beautiful views of our open-to-sky courtyard, pool and graceful colonnade. Perfect to sit down and relax with a cup of coffee or choice of spirit.

A few new additions, such as reworked floors and fresh hand-painted murals commissioned to local artisans add an element of surprise. Rajaratnam personally oversaw the curation process for every piece of furniture in the space, whilst expert restorers were brought in to work with the [antiques](#), which are seen across the hotel and suites.

One of the structural highlights of this property is the stunning Palladian colonnade veranda, which houses the Galle Fort Hotel Bar, with its [exclusive](#) selection of gins from across the globe. The adjoining gourmet restaurant is one of the best in the Galle Fort, and serves western fusion cuisine.\

The architect who has contributed to the different stages of this building's history is Sri Lankan icon Channa Daswatte, while Tennakoon curated the [decor](#), antiques and art within the property.

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The Garden Suite is adorned with botanical prints, chinoiserie fabrics and a custom-made king size cane bed.

Like any [heritage](#) structure, the restoration process came with its share of challenges. Working with a 300-year-old building meant that everything needed to be approved by the heritage authorities, especially since this is in a UNESCO world heritage site.

Moreover, the pandemic and the subsequent waves in the region posed some problems for the team but thankfully got sorted out in due course.

"When guests enter the property, we want them to get a taste of Sri Lankan [boutique](#) hospitality, immersive, experiential luxury that we are known for. Sri Lanka has always been lauded as a very design-forward destination, with the school of tropical [minimalism](#). We want that to be showcased in our spaces. We are happy that Galle has once again got its iconic address back," Rajaratnam signs off.



The open living room features easy access to the inside and outside of the hotel. Boasting a wall of hand-painted wallpaper that depicts life in Galle, each and every piece in this space lends itself to the harmony and balance of the hotel interior.

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