

OUT OF THE PAST



The Strand in Yangon captures the city's colonial grandeur more vividly than any other hotel in Myanmar's former capital

By **Holly Robertson**



THE Strand in Yangon has borne witness to so much of its city's history that, on entering the impeccably restored colonial-era building, it appears to have become a tourist site in its own right. Built in 1901, a stone's throw from the Yangon River, the marble-floored lobby provides a graceful welcome to a hotel that has matured into one of the top heritage lodgings in Southeast Asia.

And the hotel certainly lives up to its standing. The Strand Bar's teak-panelled walls have absorbed the conversations of famous guests from George Orwell to Rudyard Kipling, but it is not just colonial times that have made their mark on this establishment. During the occupation of what was then known as Burma in World War II, the Japanese reportedly turned the famous bar into horse stables, while, more recently, the hotel has hosted modern-day luminaries such as Mick Jagger and Oliver Stone.

Guests will find that each of the 31 rooms spread over two storeys in the

Strand is, in fact, a generously sized suite. Even the smallest, the Superior Suite, boasts a separate sitting area, large bathroom with double sinks and deep-soak bathtub, and mahogany-framed bed. The suite features polished teakwood floors, freshly cut flowers and intricately patterned Burmese lacquerware, along with antiques artfully dotted around the room. It's this emphasis on fine adornments, apparent in every aspect of the hotel, that elevates the Strand to the pinnacle of Yangon's accommodation options.

A 24-hour butler service is also available, with the affable men in black stationed on every floor and willing to deliver almost anything one may require. Relaxing on the soothing sofa with a pot of tea and biscuits served on fine china, bathed in soft light streaming in from the tall windows, is a fine way to absorb one's restful surrounds. The Strand is a genteel haven of old-world charm that provides an antidote to an afternoon spent exploring Yangon's dynamic city streets. ■

WALKING THROUGH TIME

The downtown area of Yangon is dotted with crumbling colonial buildings that have stood up to Myanmar's turbulent history, although a little wearily in many cases. Despite the ravages of time, the colonial architecture is a delight, particularly when experienced on a walking tour with Yangon Heritage Trust. Established in 2012 to preserve magnificent historic buildings in the face of swelling development, visitors to the city can now join a fascinating 2.5-hour tour that reveals the stories behind the façades.

TIME FOR A TIPPLE

The tea house is a staple of Myanmar, with these little shops that serve up conversation and a milky brew found on nearly every corner in Yangon. But Rangoon Tea House, situated on the first floor of a colonial building on Pansodan Road, offers an upscale take on traditional Myanmar fare. With everything from colour-coded tea charts to help diners select their perfect blend, to gourmet mohingya (a fish-based broth that is the country's national dish) and samosas filled with chocolate, this establishment is a fine way for visitors to ease into tasting local dishes.

GORGEOUS GIFTS

Many tourist-oriented markets in Southeast Asia are stuffed with unappealing tat that shouldn't make it into any homeward-bound suitcase. That's why Pomelo, a social enterprise supporting disadvantaged people and located a few blocks from the Strand on Thein Phyu Road, is a much more enticing option. Its colourful shelves are stuffed with stand-out-from-the-crowd bags, handcrafted sustainable jewellery, and vibrant homewares, all of which make excellent souvenirs or gifts. Plus, the adorable papier mâché animals dotted around the shop are sure to captivate young children.

ESSENTIALS

Tel: +951 243 377. Address: 92 Strand Road, Yangon. Website: hotelthestrang.com. Email: reservations@hotelthestrang.com. Rooms: guests can choose from 55-square-metre Superior Suites right up to the 200-square-metre Strand Suite. Suggested accommodation: all of the rooms are large by regular standards, but the Strand Suite easily surpasses them and pretty much every other hotel room in Yangon. Boasting a sprawling living room, formal dining room, study and more, the suite has a price tag to match its size.



ARCHITECTURE



INTERIOR DESIGN



INTERIOR DESIGN



CONSULTANT



CONSTRUCTION



ID FIT OUT



RENOVATION



PROJECT MANAGEMENT