



# Strand Hotel

THE BEST HOTEL EAST OF SUEZ

Built by the British entrepreneur John Darwood but later acquired by the Sarkies brothers, who owned a number of luxury hotels in the Far East, the Strand Hotel is one of the most famous hotels in Yangon and Southeast Asia. Opened in 1901, and facing the Hlaing – Yangon – River to its south, it was one of the most luxurious hotels in the British Empire and is today listed on the Yangon City Heritage List.

Carol Wright



**THE STRAND HOTEL BASED IN YANGON WAS DECLARED 'THE FINEST HOSTELRY EAST OF SUEZ' IN JOHN MURRAY'S 1911 HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLERS IN INDIA, BURMA AND CEYLON.**

The Strand, located in the eponymous road alongside the busy river port, is centred in Yangon's walkable Old Town with its embassies and nineteenth century colonial buildings. It opened in 1901 and was developed by the Sarkies brothers, the creators of the Raffles hotels.

Early on the Strand hosted Rudyard Kipling, Noel Coward and Orson Welles though not the ubiquitous traveller Somerset Maugham, probably because he visited Yangon when the Strand had suffered one of its two bad fires.

After World War 2 and Japanese occupation, the Strand was nationalised in 1963 and slowly sank into disrepair. Rats ran round the ballroom and the bar which remained popular. In 1991, a company under Adrian Secha, founder of Aman resorts, began a \$12million restoration programme. The hotel reopened in 1993 offering 32 suites and is now operated by General Hotel Management. A further renovation involving 185 local craftsmen was completed in November 2017.

The Strand stands out with a creamy-white colonnaded exterior, quite modest in size, among the large surrounding colonial buildings. The entrance doors open onto a



spacious area combining lobby, reception and lounge where each morning and afternoon a musician plays traditional harp and xylophone instruments. Wide stairs as well as lifts lead up to the suites. The decor is in muted shades with a decorative accent of black and white, dramatically displayed in long striped drapes and cushions.

The public areas open off the corners of the lobby. An all day focal point is the Strand Cafe with wrap round indoor veranda that has retained its traditional decor of black lacquered ceiling fans and scarlet rattan chairs, colours echoed in the longyi (wraparound skirts) patterns worn by the staff.



While the hotel was renovated Chef Christian Martena travelled through Myanmar collecting local recipes recreated at the Strand with the help of two female sous-chefs who have been at the Strand since 1993. Menus include Mohingha, the national dish of fish soup with rice noodles topped with crispy fritters and boiled egg. In the afternoon, the Strand Cafe's High Tea includes local dishes like tealeaf salad, wontons with shrimps, and sticky rice balls with brown bean paste served in lacquered boxes. Many of the cafe's dishes are also available on room service.

The elegant Strand Restaurant, open for dinner only from Wednesday to Saturday but bookable in the daytime for meetings and seminars, seats 45 with 10 in a private dining area backed by black and gold lacquered paintings from the ancient capital of Bagan. Under Executive Chef Patrick Périé, the a la carte menu features Mediterranean cuisine based on imported and local ingredients.

The bar, named after the Sarkies Brothers, has a billiards table area and is the place to try the Strand Sour, which blends Mandalay

rum, lime juice, and Angostura bitters or one of the 50-plus single malt whiskies perhaps with a cigar as smoking areas are permitted here. Tall plaid upholstered stools line the bar and there are comfortable low tables and chairs around the window areas.

In the 2017 upgrading, new areas were added at the rear of the hotel linked to the lobby by a snort corridor containing a local craft boutique, jeweller's shops – Myanmar is famed for its rubies, sapphires and jade – business services including a 24-hour business centre and small private meeting room.

The newly added areas are an 800-sq mtr garden including a 18x8 metre swimming pool for residents use only. Drinks and light meals are served poolside or in curtained private cabanas. Opening onto the pool is a gym and spa with two therapy rooms where traditional Myanmar massages and therapies are available mixing acupressure and aromatherapy techniques.

In a separate building facing the pool garden is the Strand Hall, an imposing building with a 602sq mtr ballroom reached

by a carved teak staircase that takes 600-700 people seated or 1,000 standing. It has polished teak floors, 25-feet high ceilings, and partitions for smaller events.

The 35 suites are spacious havens from the city's bustle and heat. Decor embraces potted palms, bedside lamps made from decorated jars, lacquerware, prints of old Yangon, circular mirrors over the beds, silk cushioned sofas and polished wood floors. There is a walk-in dressing area, wifi, TV and charger points above a spacious desk. Local fruits are presented each day and little jasmine garlands perfume turn down service.

Every suite has 24-hour butler service with free teas and coffee, packing and unpacking services. The three-suite grades have similar decor but vary in size. All have bathroom with large tub, double vanities, and separate shower and toilet cubicles. The Strand Suite at 200-sq mtrs – the largest in Yangon – features a hand-carved four poster bed, antique furniture, study, sitting room with lacquered cane chairs and formal dining room seating up to 10.

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