

Old World Elegance at the Incredible Strand Hotel in Yangon

By Matt Long



When talking about not only the world's great hotels but also the most remarkable travel experiences, they fall into a variety of different camps. Among the standouts though are those who have not only proven the test of time, but whose service and refinement has become the stuff of legends. The Mandarin Oriental in Bangkok, Raffles in Singapore and yes, The Strand Hotel in Yangon are all members of this exclusive group of leading hotels. I had the great opportunity to be the guest of [The Strand Hotel in Yangon](#) recently, as well as sail aboard their new luxury cruise ship on the Ayeyarwady River. My time in Myanmar was phenomenal in no small part due to the service and standards of The Strand Hotel, all the way from Yangon to Bagan and onwards to Mandalay. At the bedrock of those experiences though is the original hotel itself, and today I want to share the unique qualities that make it so much more than just a hotel, but an integral aspect of an immersive travel experience in Yangon.



History

I think why I love the Grande Dame luxury hotels so much is that they provide not only a window to the past, but an opportunity to step into a different way of life. They allow us to pretend we're on that epic tour of the world with six-months of steamer trunks and valets tagging along. The Strand Hotel certainly belongs to that era, a time when the customs of Downton Abbey were still alive and well. The Strand first opened its doors in 1901 and was later acquired by the Sarkies brothers, famous for their luxury hotels around Asia, like the Raffles in Singapore. It was, and still is really, at the geographic center of cultural life in Yangon, and although it's changed hands many times over the years, it still stands. Through wars, neglect and political upheaval, The Strand has always remained at 92 Strand Road and now, thanks to a massive remodel last year, it's been returned to its former glory but with all the modern conveniences.



New Renovations

In 2016, The Strand closed for six-months to undergo some much needed renovations. Not from a structural aspect, but inside the property itself, from the airy public spaces to those near-perfect rooms and suites. The remodel thankfully preserved the colonial era elegance for which it's so well known, adding in modern conveniences and styles that appeal to the 21st century traveler. The hotel's 31 rooms and suites have been painstakingly remodeled, keeping that gorgeous teak paneling but combining it with textiles and colors that seem elegant and not stuffy, relaxed but dignified. Local artisans meticulously restored every original architectural detail of The Strand Yangon, from the antique bedsteads to traditional Myanmar lacquer ware and marble flooring, while giving the hotel a complete upgrade and contemporary twist through the latest technology, a refreshed color palette and subtle decorative details.



Service

For me, service is at the heart of any outstanding luxury travel experience. Thankfully, at legendary properties such as The Strand, service is the foundation on which the property is built. It is a part of the hotel's DNA; something so basic and critical to their functioning that they couldn't imagine life without it. Service is not just a word here, it is a way of life, and as a guest I felt that at every step of the way, from beginning to end. As a very picky traveler I usually can find some fault with just about any hotel I visit, even the best in the world, but not so with The Strand. Over two days the service, the amenities, the comfort, everything was absolutely perfect and formed the ideal introduction to both Myanmar and the city of Yangon. That's important because, for as nice as The Strand is, I wasn't only there to stay in a nice hotel, I was there to explore Myanmar for the first time and The Strand helped me along the way in a number of important ways.



Immersive Travel

With only a few exceptions around the world, we travel to see and experience new places and hotels are not usually the first step in this decision making process. However, they quickly become important actors in our travel experiences. It matters a great deal where one decides to spend the night, where to place the trust of a fun and engaging getaway. Great hotels aren't silent partners, they will facilitate our greater understanding of the locales, helping us get closer to the destination in a way that would be hard if not difficult to replicate on our own. The location of The Strand Hotel in Yangon is ideal; no surprise really since it's been at the core of Yangon cultural life for generations. That prime location also provided me with many opportunities to get out and explore the city.

Yangon is a curious mix of people, styles and eras, all thrown together in a way that at first may seem a little confusing, but ultimately makes sense. It's also a much more orderly city than I had anticipated, motorcycles aren't allowed downtown so there's not the same madness and crush of vehicles as is common in cities like Bangkok. No, Yangon seemed more polite, more dignified and even easier to explore. Since I was short on time, I hired a guide for a few hours who, along with the advice from The Strand's local staff, helped me experience the best of Yangon in just a couple of days. But it's also important to note that in many ways The Strand is Yangon. From the colonial era through to today, it has mirrored the ups and downs of the country in a way no other business has. Over those generations, it has woven itself into the fabric of the city, an unlikely outsider welcomed with open arms.



Visiting Myanmar for the first time was important personally. I was excited in a way I haven't been for a very long time, not just for the promise of some much needed time off, but also to explore what still is one of the most mysterious countries in the world. I couldn't have hoped for a better hospitality partner than [The Strand Hotel](#), not just in Yangon but also as I sailed along the Ayeyarwady River into the heart of the country. Given their incredible history in the country, they are perhaps best positioned to help visitors learn and experience Myanmar in a way no one else can do. It's a unique position and when added to the incomparable luxury and service offered both on land and water, makes The Strand experience just that, an experience. They've transcended being a simple hotel and have launched themselves into being something so much more, something so much more impactful for their guests creating not only nice trips in the process, but travel experiences that surely will never be forgotten.

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