

TRAVEL INTEL • HOTELS

In Yangon, the Strand Hotel Starts a New Chapter

by Hanya Yanagihara • February 6, 2017



Courtesy The Strand
The hotel's Strand Café.

Originally opened in 1901, the storied hotel has shown its true staying power.

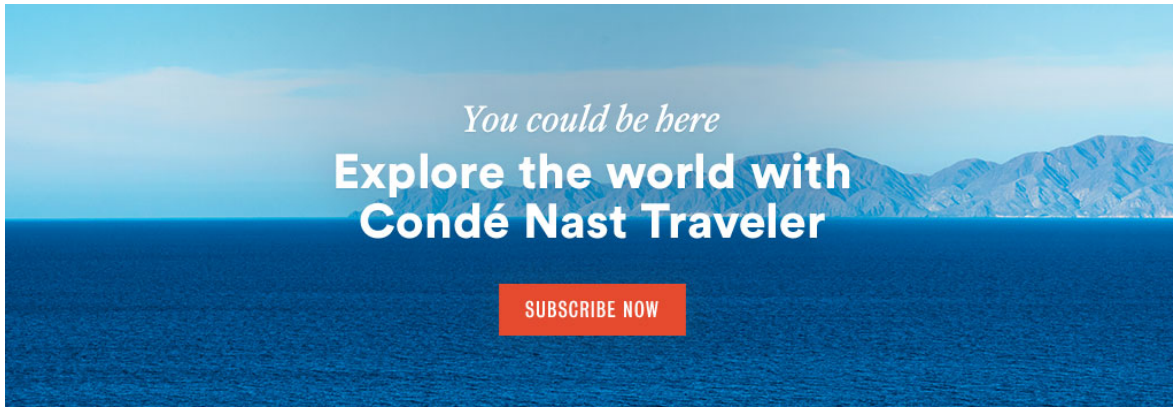
There is something uniquely stirring about staying in old hotels in [Southeast Asia](#). First, there's the fact of their physical presence: Usually stately, often Art Deco, they project an unquestionable sense of authority. But the other thing that makes these hotels special is less tangible—the knowledge that they have remained, and remained open, through some especially tumultuous decades in which Indochina moved from colonialism to independence to years of great oppression. Even a casual visitor to [Phnom Penh](#) or [Hanoi](#) cannot help but feel the ghosts that permeate these now-bustling cities.

This is particularly true of Yangon. [Myanmar](#) gained independence from the British in 1948, only to fall to a totalitarian military regime following a 1962 coup. Since 2010, however, the country has been nominally democratic, and Yangon, once a pariah town, has changed dramatically, with ugly skyscrapers climbing upwards on seemingly every corner.

But thankfully, such rapid development is also being accompanied by a heightened interest in architectural preservation—manifested, most recently, in the refurbishment of the [Strand Hotel](#), the most significant of Yangon's Victorian-era buildings. The three-story hotel opened in 1901 not far from the Yangon River docks, where you can still watch the daily theater—longboats being loaded with baskets of fruit; impromptu cooks squatting over hissing cauldrons of oil—that defines this river town. Inside, the 31-suite property, which reopened in November after a six-month renovation, evokes a '30s-inspired cosmopolitanism, with black-and-white-striped faille curtains in the guest

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rooms and, more playfully, lipstick-red Myanmar rattan chairs in the café. It's an example of how, sometimes, change brings you closer than ever to what you once were: a good reminder for hotels, of course—and, maybe, cities as well.



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