

A blend of colonial history, vintage ambiance, and luxurious hospitality

Journey back in time...



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Our fascination with history is laced within our DNA, rooted in both personal and collective psychology. It's an inescapable and lingering desire to understand ourselves, hoping to learn from past mistakes, feed our curiosity about the human story, the allure of lost worlds, and, for some, vivid escapism. We've seen enough period dramas, read historical novels, and even documentaries that continue to captivate us, only enhancing the longing to play the part of characters from the past.

However, the fantasy is still attainable for some, especially for those who've had an affinity toward heritage-rich environments, timeless charm, and a sense of nostalgia. The beauty of certain parts of the globe is that we can actually experience the essence of the old world, without having to traverse through the harrowing events of the past. How, you ask? You can pack your bags, travel to some of the most stunning locations, and book your luxury stay in one of the many colonial towns across South and Southeast Asia.

We've rounded up several enticing hotels that possess colonial-era aesthetics and feel, so you can turn back the hands of time while enjoying modern amenities of the highest quality.

INDIA



The Elgin Hotel

THE ELGIN HOTEL, DARJEELING – HERITAGE RESORT & SPA

Unsurprisingly, one of the most iconic luxury heritage hotels makes this list. Originally built in 1887, this was once the summer residence of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, and

jaw-droppingly sits in the heart of Darjeeling, 6,000 feet up in the emerald ridges of the Eastern Himalayas. Some regard it as the epitome of opulence at high altitude, with a slew of celebrities, such as **Shah Rukh Khan**, cricket legend **Kapil Dev**, and Crown Prince **Tenzing Namgyal** of Sikkim, who have walked through the halls of these heritage walls. The hotel and its surroundings are absolutely breathtaking, boasting 25 rooms and suites with Victorian décor, highly accessible spaces, and personalised experiences both in and around the property—from wellness and romantic getaways to going on adventures and exploring the timeless hill station of Darjeeling.



Wildflower Hall

WILDFLOWER HALL, AN OBEROI RESORT

One awe-inspiring destination after another, **Wildflower Hall**, in the beautiful and serene city of Shimla, which used to be the summer capital of British India in 1863, the former residence of **Lord Kitchener**, the commander-in-chief of the British army. Snow

in the winter, refreshing mountain air, and tempered climate during the summer months, the city is a popular destination for trekkers, mountain bikers, and heritage walkers. Its surroundings make it ideal for the resort's featured experiences, such as having a sun-setting dinner at the gazebo, an enhanced dining experience at **Periwinkle**—a delightful four-course dinner served in the intimacy of a private movie theatre, and a full-day colonial heritage tour near Shimla. No wonder this 5-star resort continues to rank high on some of the most prestigious travel top 10 lists over the past few years. With breathtaking views, intimate accommodations, and therapy for the mind, body, and soul, it's a romantic blend of nature and luxury.



Palais De Mahe

PALAIS DE MAHE

We drive south this time to much warmer climates of India. Located in the heart of the French Quarter of Pondicherry, close to the Bay of Bengal, **Palais de Mahe** is just a short walk away from the famous seaside promenade. This so-called “colonial nugget” is a

reflection of the city's history, fused with French and Tamil cultural elements. Its majestic courtyard, magnificently deep verandas, brightly coloured interiors and pillars, and period furniture make the breeze coming from 50 metres out seem cooler than it actually is. Staying true to its colonial French style, the architecture, accommodations, and experiences seamlessly blend the old with the new—inside and out—and into the hotel's diverse environment, filled with charming sidewalk cafes, native sari shops, and designer wear boutiques. Its colonial-to-the-core living spaces, locally sourced F&B options, and relaxing facilities provide guests with the opportunity to live the Pondicherry life like the French used to.

SRI LANKA



Amangalla

AMANGALLA

Situated within the ramparts of the **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, the 17th-century Galle Fort in Sri Lanka, **Amangalla** offers views of the fort, harbour, and the hotel's lush gardens and swimming pool. This historic structure possesses lofty-ceilinged suites, an exceptional dining experience, and the definition of a tranquil spa treatment at **Aman Spa**. While it may be placed in the premium luxury bracket, its historical charm, elegant colonial design, and near-flawless service are worth the price. The meticulously restored,

17th-century building houses beautifully decorated living spaces, attentive staff, and unique amenities, such as afternoon tea on the veranda or poolside dining. Moreover, the hotel's restaurant is praised for its traditional Sri Lankan cuisine alongside its international offerings. Overall, Amangalla elegantly slows the pace within its walls, while the bustling narrow streets of old houses, churches, boutiques, and restaurants with their Dutch and British heritage continue to thrive.



The Grand Hotel

THE GRAND HOTEL - NUWARA ELIYA

It's grand everything at **The Grand Hotel** in the tea country hills of Nuwara Eliya (also referred to as "Little England") in central Sri Lanka. Heritage meets natural splendour in this luxurious retreat that radiates elegance and refinement. With its storied past, graceful architecture, and world-class amenities, this destination is a top choice for the sophisticated traveller. The spacious suites are labelled opulent sanctuaries, and the hotel's service is regarded as unparalleled hospitality. As for the dining, the culinary journey can be enjoyed at the **Garden Room** and **Barnes Restaurant** for Western cuisine, while **Grand Indian** and **Grand Thai** for the authenticity of the rich and aromatic flavours of India and Thailand. The experience is complemented by its café, bars, and cosy lounge for innovative cocktails. And like any luxurious experience, the hotel offers a range of immersive nature-related activities such as hiking, trekking, bicycle tours, bird watching, air rifle shooting, and a golfer's paradise at the **Nuwara Eliya Golf Club**, established in 1889.

MALAYSIA



Eastern & Oriental Hotel

EASTERN & ORIENTAL HOTEL

Celebrating its 140th anniversary this year, the **Eastern & Oriental Hotel** (E&O) has been a luxurious haven for acclaimed writers and aspiring literati from the Western world of old in the heart of George Town in Penang. In its grand elegance, this remains a testament to the influence of the British colonial era, preserving the privileged lifestyle. Its restored Heritage Wing houses an impressive array of suites, each with its own characteristics yet aligned with the overall design and aesthetics, elevated by exclusive privileges. Whether it's enjoying the time-honoured tradition of afternoon tea at **Palm Court**, a wonderful buffet spread of both Malaysian and international delights at **Sarkies**, or refreshing cocktails at **Farquhar's Bar**, there is surely something for everyone's palate. As for the facilities, there are picturesque views of the Andaman Sea from the fitness centre, while others can enjoy a dedicated jeweller, alongside bespoke tailoring and hair styling services at the **Victory Annexe** arcade.

THE MAJESTIC MALACCA



The Majestic Malacca

While it's the youngest on this list, it may have the most character, as it is infused with a vibrant blend of multicultural influences, from its heritage architecture to its diverse way of life and distinctive cuisine. This timeless hotel stands as a vital piece of Malacca's past, a historic state along the southern Malay Peninsula that has been stamped with the signatures of the Dutch, Portuguese, Malacca-Portuguese, English, Chinese, Indian, and Malay cultures. The origins of the building began in 1929 as a private mansion for tycoon **Leong Long Man** and his family. Later in 1955, businessman **Lim Heng Fang** converted the building into **The Majestic Hotel**. The restored Straits Settlement mansion maintains its original porcelain tile flooring, teakwood fittings, and boasts an award-winning spa, reflecting the colonial era's luxury experience, while melding modernity and tradition. The accommodations are graced with bespoke furnishing, the dining is eclectically scrumptious, the spa redefines revitalisation, and its intimate spaces warmly welcome celebratory events.