

THE LIBRARY THE TOP-RUNG CLUB ON THE CORPORATE LADDER

Angeline K'Singam



Photography: Rohan Herath

Corporate takeovers and mergers are planned over a pleasant drink in its wood panelled atmosphere. Business deals are closed and clients toasted in champagne under the muted lights. Its list of members reads like the Who's Who of the business world. If the walls could speak at 'The Library' a bestseller on the intrigues of the corporate world might be on the cards.

The Library at the Trans Asia Hotel is a 'one-of-a-kind' in the five-star whirligig of Colombo. It is also fairly unique in its concept world-wide. It is no mundane executive club, but an exclusive, high profile retreat for the man-at-the-top. It is sophistication at its best; service at its most unobtrusive, decor at its most understated and versatility in its multi-faceted form, sans the hyperbole.

The hotel brochure describes The Library as an 'Executive Lounge and Music Room.' Definitely sacrilegious, when one sees the array of entertainment on offer. A pool-table, Chess, Monopoly, even Scrabble is available, books ranging from a collector's version of the History of World War II to pulpy Harold Robbins grace the shelves and a connoisseur's choice of music that has given a happy requiem to the modern day Rapper is there to be enjoyed in the comfort of The Library.

Through an unobtrusive doorway, located beyond the main lobby, you enter the inner sanctum of this sybarite's paradise nine cosy private lounges nestling around a bar and an intimate little dance floor.

The Library concept was launched in 1986 by the then Ramada management. Harpo Goonaratne, the Library Manager has been associated with it since inception. One of the pioneers of discotheques in the country and the first name in DJ music, Harpo was originally hired to handle the music at The Library, but has stayed on to oversee the entire gamut of entertainment on offer.

MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

He guards the exclusivity of The Library jealously and makes it a point to know all the members personally. The Library now has a membership that stands at around 650, most of whom are in top management or are leading personalities on the social scene. A membership committee carefully vets each application and those who pass the test are issued the membership within a week. Harpo stresses that they are extremely selective in their membership criteria "because the objective of The Library would be lost if we just opened it to anyone and everyone who can afford the membership fee." Notice that The Library is never advertised, it speaks for itself, and ten to fifteen applications are received on a monthly basis.

At Rs. 25,000 a year, the membership fee acts as a selective device of sorts, but

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the perks that go beyond the fee are a powerful draw. The membership fee covers the family and entitles them to use not only the facilities of The Library, but the Gymnasium, the Swimming Pool, the Health Club and the Business Centre. It also entitles members to a whopping 20% discount at all the hotel restaurants. A member is entitled to bring in a maximum of two guests free on his/her membership. Any additional guests can be brought in at a fee of Rs. 500 per guest.

Harpo points out that it is a status symbol to be a member. "To say you are a member of The Library is to say you are part of an elite fraternity in the corporate circles. It is a place where people want to be seen and certainly where they would like to entertain guests in a special way."

Happily corporate membership is also accepted and there is a three tiered membership fee structure based on the number of nominees from each company. House guests are provided temporary membership during their stay but this does not entitle them to any of the other concessionary facilities.

FACILITIES ON OFFER

The Library is open from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m. or until the last guest leaves, says Harpo. It can accommodate upto 130 guests at a time, but the most popular times are generally evenings at the weekend. "But..." assures the Manager, "...it never gets overcrowded." The Library has, a dedicated staff of fifteen. A dress code applies and if you are haunted by the thought of tie and tails... don't be, it's not too demanding 'smart casual attire' can get you by and happily there are no bouncers at the door. A deliberate device says Harpo who says it is not only disconcerting to guests but detracts from the image of The Library. In fact, he stresses that he requests guests who bring their security men along to leave them outside the environs of the Library.

Breakfast, lunch, high tea or dinner, The Library offers a range of menus that are guaranteed to titillate even the most jaded. appetite. Supplementing this is a cellar that the patrons describe as 'absolutely inspirational.'



Manager Harpo Goonaratne

Members have their own private lockers that enable them to leave the bottles of

wine or liquor until their next visit. Hey presto, if you want to impress your guests, a snap of the fingers and the waiter/waitress will wheel out your personalized trolley with the drinks on them. Current newspapers and magazines from across the globe provide more than coffee table conversational material. And in the privacy of The Library one can dictate letters, have documents faxed, check the latest Reuters reports, watch the fare on satellite TV or send out an E-mail message overseas effortlessly. All the trappings of state-of-the-art communication are within easy reach.

Yes, The Library makes communication a fine art. It ensures that even the most subdued conversation can be held at the worst or best of times. During the day the quiet atmosphere encourages the busy CEO to step in for a laid back breakfast meeting, write up a speech using the Business Centre facilities or merely enjoy a quiet



coffee. The afternoons are equally tranquil and a private business lunch can be just that 'private.' The nights come alive to the music of a DJ, but strangely the noise doesn't bombard the unwary. The brochure on The Library stresses that "once you step off the dance floor, you step back into a world of audible conversation"... breathe a sigh of relief, sanity prevails! With diffused lights, drinks at your fingertips, comfortable chairs to sink into and muted music in the background, you are the master of all you survey. Trust me, I experienced it first hand!

ADDED FRILLS

If that's not enough, The Library hosts some spectacular promotions, Elizabeth Arden and Givenchy among the most recent. Fashion shows, coffee evenings and theme parties are a hot favourite with the ladies.

A Happy Hour from 2.30 to 3.30pm and from 6.30 to 7.30pm features live entertainment and of course the canned stuff on occasion. The most personalized touch that The Library members enjoy or probably revel in, is the celebration cake, flowers and cards sent out by the club on anniversaries, birthdays and other occasions. The comprehensive data-base built up on each member gives The Library the advantage of providing that special touch for any significant occasion, including an instant birthday bash if a member drops in at The Library: on his birthday.

Harpo stresses that the most important facet of The Library is its ambiance. "At The Library you can find the perfect atmosphere for both business and pleasure and there is no anonymous mass of patrons, only people we know personally and with whom we have built up a rapport over the years." That's the way the Library has built up its image of exclusivity it seems as a selective club for the blue-chip clientele and that's the way it intends keeping it!