

Bathing in the lap of luxury

The opulence and luxury of the bathrooms in Jakarta's top hotel, the Dharmawangsa, is just an example of the high standards of design used throughout the hotel.



Dharmawangsa Hotel in Jakarta: highly contemporary and truly Indonesian

Fifteen minutes from the middle of the crowds and the cacophony of sounds of downtown Jakarta lies an oasis of exclusivity, luxury and calm. It was meant to be that way. Nothing about the Dharmawangsa Hotel was left to chance. It was the result of a well thought out vision, meticulous planning and the work of a formidable array of talent, experience and expertise. Part of the Rosewood Hotels & Resorts group, it is now known as one of Asia's great luxury hotels.

'It is the most affluent hotel of Indonesia and is a real sanctuary,' says Luis Fernandes who served as the hotel's

managing director from the time of its opening until early 2003. 'The whole idea was to create something in the area that would be of real value – an icon,' he says of the owners' approach to the project. 'As well as wanting to create something highly contemporary, they also wanted a sense of place – something truly Indonesian in character.'

The owner has always believed that luxury involves spaciousness in all rooms but especially in relation to bathrooms. 'Of the total space in the hotel rooms, 40 per cent is given over to the bathrooms. But the desire for spaciousness



Over 40 per cent of hotel space is given over to bathrooms

is also evident in how the bathrooms have been designed – the baths are in the middle of the bathroom – a feature that is practical but also very romantic,’ says Luis. All bathrooms are fitted in marble and have two sets of vanity units. Such care in comfort, luxury and design has been carried throughout the entire hotel.

From Hollywood to the Far East

The hotel lies on a broad, shady street near Dharmawangsa Street in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta’s most prestigious residential area. ‘It’s the equivalent of Bel Air in Hollywood,’ explains Luis. The owners, Binapuri Lestari, wanted to develop the site – formerly the home of the old mint – into a luxurious apartment, hotel and club complex. Much time and effort was invested in selecting a design that would fulfil this dream.

The owners travelled extensively around the world, appraising different hotel designs to gain inspiration for the project. Two Californian hotels had a particular influence – the Peninsula Hotel in Beverley Hills, a low-rise building with many trees, and the Bel Air Hotel in Los Angeles, which

is managed by Rosewood Hotels & Resorts, the Dallas-based company that owns and manages luxury hotels and resorts worldwide, including the Carlyle, New York, Jumby Bay in Antigua and the Mansion on Turtle Creek, Dallas. The level of luxury achieved in the Bel Air, says Luis, convinced the owners to appoint Rosewood Hotels & Resorts as the manager of the new hotel.

‘What was central to the aspirations for the hotel was luxury and style,’ Luis recounts. ‘Every hotel in the Rosewood group is individual, world class and reflects the traditions of the host city. The Carlyle in New York is a classic New York property. The complex, now comprising 84 luxury apartments from 350m² to 1000m², can be bought or rented, and the hotel, which has 64 rooms and 36 suites and a spa, embodies certain key elements that the owners felt were essential for the Dharmawangsa. ‘The owners wanted to achieve luxury and understated elegance. Scale and balance had to be carefully considered. They wanted the complex and the hotel to fit in with the style and character of the area and to have a residential appeal while being distinctly Indonesian.’

Bringing in the best

To achieve this entailed an artful marrying of conceptual, architectural and artistic skills. The owners, represented by Reni Dahlan and Zulfitri and young Malaysian architect Cheong Yew Kuan, produced the concept for the hotel and the design criteria. Don Sandy from Sandy Babcock International of San Francisco and Miami was engaged to produce a master plan and architectural design. Jasin Tedjasukmana, an expert in Dutch colonial architecture, was appointed to create the final architectural product. Interior designer, Jaya Ibrahim, was engaged to blend contemporary and traditional Indonesian designs in the interiors.

With this criteria in mind, the architecture for the buildings was to be a new interpretation of the 1950s Kebayoran Baru, which was based on the style of 1920s Jakarta. But it was also to include components of Dutch colonial architecture. ‘Dutch colonial architecture flourished in Indonesia for many years. It is characterised by high ceilings, big doors and lots of windows with wooden blinds,’ explains Luis.

A central square building forms the nucleus of the hotel and is adjoined by wings on either side. An array of linked spaces makes up the hotel’s main public area. A central hall joins the front and back verandas. The Dharmawangsa does not have a lobby as such but instead a beautiful and very symmetrical corridor flanked by four lounges known as the Majapahit Temple, which was inspired by the period of maritime glory of the eighth century Sriwijayan dynasties. The front doors open in the direction of the rising sun. A small area in the corridor serves as the reception area but butlers greet guests and take them to their rooms. ‘The entrance,’ says Luis, ‘makes a deep impression on guests who feel they are entering a splendid, private Indonesian mansion.’

Many Indonesian elements are incorporated into the property – particularly the artistic traditions of the Majapahit culture. Much of the interior design is a tribute to this extraordinary Golden Age. The Surya (a Sanskrit word for the sun) is a theme used frequently by all tribes in Indonesia and the emblem of the fourteenth century East Javanese Empire of Majapahit. Symbolising the journey of the sun across the sky, it can be seen in the various decorations, furnishings and carpets of the hotel.

Doors and handles, vases, candleholders and napkin rings in patterned brass have also been inspired by designs of the Majapahit period. These can be bought by guests and have proved to be very popular with guests comments Luis. ‘The cultural and artistic traditions of three main regions of Indonesia – Sumatra, Java and Bali – were also used as design themes in the hotel and these are reflected in various colour schemes.’ Clay artefacts and many antiques pieces of museum quality are also used throughout.

Four lounges making up the Majapahit Hall lie at the heart of the hotel – the Tea Lounge, the Library, the Caviar Lounge and the Bar. The woodwork and cabinets in these areas, including delicately carved wooden panels with flowers, were inspired by Majapahit architecture. But each lounge has its own character too: the Caviar Lounge, for example, has Indonesian style furniture with Russian influences and beautiful bridal jewellery on the walls. The lounges look on to terraces while the fountains and gardens beyond and soft traditional acoustic music contribute to an atmosphere of peace and calm where guests can congregate and relax.

Beautiful designs from other periods in Indonesian history can be seen in other areas of the hotel. In the Sriwijaya Restaurant, the hotel’s premier restaurant, the eighth-century Sriwijaya Kingdom was the inspiration. Red and gold create a warm, rich atmosphere. The design of the light fittings is based on the Ming Dynasty as sea trade with China-influenced Indonesia at the time. The Jakarta Restaurant is a modern interpretation of old Jakarta and its art deco design helps create a casual upbeat atmosphere. In the Nusantara Ballroom, walls bear the traditional batik patterns of the eighteenth century. Gilded wood paneling is a modern interpretation of ancient, intricate woodcarvings.

But other touches make an impression and add to the whole ambiance. ‘There is a lot of white in the hotel,’ remarks Luis. ‘White orchids, jasmine and tuberose decorate the public areas and fill them with delicate scents.’

Rooms with a view

The penchant for luxury is keenly displayed in the guest rooms. Opening on to large private balconies, all rooms have natural light. Decorative themes from different regions have been used throughout and all amenities are of rosewood. Large four-poster beds are inspired by the royal courts of Java and all the furniture was custom made in Indonesia: ‘There is great skill locally,’ Luis comments.

There are two penthouses of 300ft², one designed in Sumatran style, the other in the East Indonesian style. In the Presidential suite, which has two bedrooms, antique Dutch furniture is mixed with antique Javanese pieces. Penthouses also have separate indoor/outdoor hot tubs. The suites and penthouses all contain cornices with ethnic patterns and silk panels of traditional regional hues.

The gardens are a great draw for people who live in the residences as well as guests in the hotel. ‘There’s a lot of water and trees around the hotel and in the centre island of the swimming pool. The pool is lined with green tiles rather than blue so it looks like a tropical lagoon and there are a lot of frangipani trees around, which have a lovely scent’ says Luis. The gardens are a lush haven of tranquility and comfort and continue the standards of the luxury found indoors.

Bimasena Club and Spa

Indonesia is famous for its puppets, which make wonderful keepsakes for visitors. The favourite character of the puppet shows is the much-loved Bimasena – the dependable guard for the royal family who is loyal, athletic and handsome. So it is particularly appropriate that the hotel’s spa and club is named after this robust, charismatic character.

The Bimasena Spa and Club’s list of facilities is impressive. Its equipment is of the latest technology and it has an indoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, squash and outdoor tennis courts.

International spa services and ethnic Indonesian treatments are also on offer. The three private suites – equipped with saunas, hot tubs, steam rooms and two massage beds – overlook the swimming pool and can be rented for a half or full day. For club members, the spa makes a tranquil, luxurious change from the typical spas and gyms housed in high-rise buildings in the downtown business district.

Local inspiration

The name of the Dharmawangsa was propitious. An eleventh century Hindu King from East Java, Dharmawangsa established the foundations of the Majapahit empire, which flourished to become the Golden Age of Java – a period of great political and cultural achievement.

The hotel, says Luis, set a style for future development in Asia. ‘Until the Dharmawangsa opened there were hotels in the region that formed part of large chains that were of a very good standard but not individual.’ He sees this hotel as a sign of the future. ‘Guests want to be inspired by a hotel’s interior design and what it symbolises and what it says about the country where it is situated. They want a strong sense of place.’

Guests are drawn from a mixture of cultures with around 50 per cent from Indonesia, and the rest from the USA, Europe and South East Asia. In achieving the vision of the owners, Luis adds, the Dharmawangsa has become a role model and is one of the great hotels of Asia. HMI