

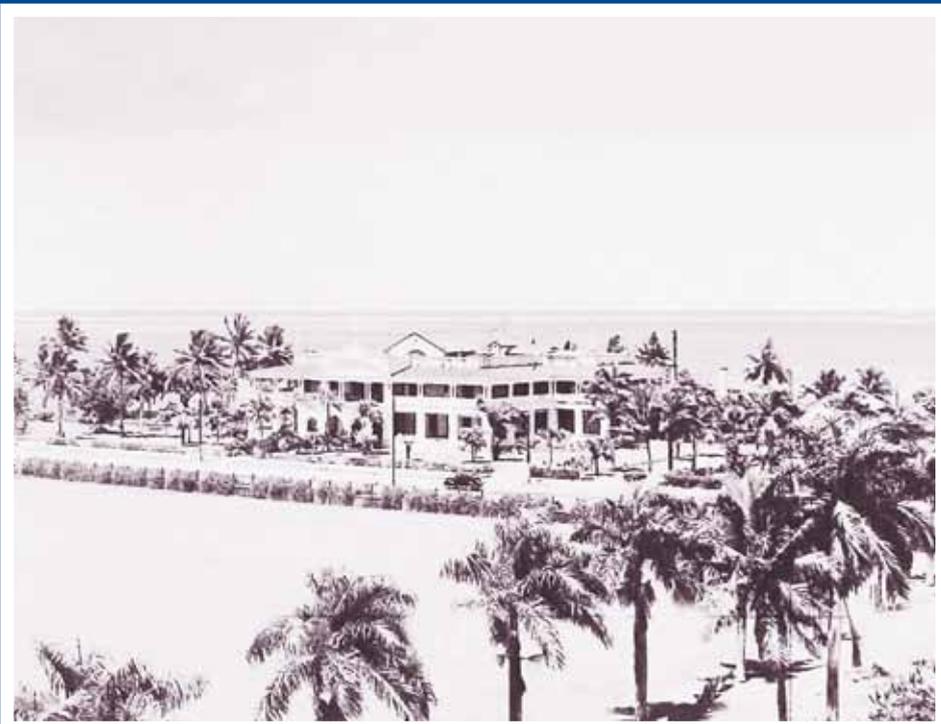
# 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY



## *The Grand Old Lady*

A night scene of the elegant refurbished Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: The Fiji Times/JONE LUVENTOGA



FILE PHOTO



FILE PHOTO

# How it all began

THE FIJI TIMES extract: 1914

THE fact that the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand Ltd is spending a large sum of money in the construction of the Grand Pacific Hotel, is a good augury to the future of Suva as a tourist resort as it is well known that the company in question is controlled by the most astute of businessmen, who are not likely to invest money in a white elephant.

Anyone who takes the trouble to ascend the staircase to where the first floor of the new hotel will shortly be, and to look around on the perfectly glorious view which presents itself, will descend wondering why Suva was not a first-class tourist resort years ago.

Looking seaward, one observes Beqa, imposing and stately. Turning to the right, one sees the fertile district of Navua, and still further to the right the magnificent hills which are dear to all who have ever spent even a few weeks in our midst.

The view of Suva itself, seen from the hotel is charming and indeed, to make this place an ideal place of residence, all that is needed is the beautification of our city from within.

Stop your wrangling and look to it, fathers of our city!

There are many in Suva who pass the embryo Grand Pacific Hotel with a smile and some who even sneer and say in a distant sort of way, "It will never be finished".

To them we can only say — "Go to Mr Morgan, get him to intro-

duce you to Mr Diamond, who is in charge of the work and ask him to show what has been done and to explain to you the difficulties under which it had been done," and then well, change your opinion.

The new hotel is being constructed on a floating foundation which means a raft of reinforced concrete under the entire structure and in the building of this alone there is a huge amount of work, and 100,000 yards of cement have been used.

As the building stands at present the ground floor is practically complete, and some of the steel girders, which will carry the first floor, are in position.

One of the most serious issues which has had to be faced is the labour problem, it being very hard to keep down an efficient gang of carpenters together in Suva and the labour has been found very crude and untrained though there is a good gang of Indians, who have been drilled into the system of the work at present on the job.

It is estimated that 13,000 pounds (F\$39,942.69) have already been spent on the structure, and that when complete it will have cost 25,000 pounds. (F\$76,812.60).

When finished, the hotel will be in every way a model of luxury and comfort, and should compare favourably with such buildings — the the Galle Face Hotel and the Grand Oriental Hotel of Colombo.

On the ground floor there will be a most spacious dining room and lounge, the latter having an upstairs verandah all round it and a 15-foot balcony on the ground



The Grand Pacific Hotel stands as a national icon in Suva.

FILE PHOTO

floor should prove an excellent ballroom for which purpose it will no doubt often be used. On this floor there is also a smoking room.

The first floor will be devoted

almost entirely to bedrooms and bathrooms, which are excellently arranged to allow rooms being let in suites.

Electric light and fans will be in-

stalled throughout and there will be hot and cold salt and fresh water baths. The company is also installing a refrigerator and ice plant of an up-to-date pattern.

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The Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA

# From the old to the new

By FREDERICA ELBOURNE

THE old dusty painted wrought-iron railings, antiquated bronze swirling fans, polished wooden floors, rows of bright white architectural columns atop of which admirable craftsmanship of detailed designs are to be marvelled at, make up only a fraction of the old that has been retained in the revamped Grand Pacific Hotel.

As members of the public filter into the “grand old lady” today to celebrate the 100th year of the initial opening of this historic landmark, the first thing that will probably strike them is the original ballroom once graced, and made famous by Queen Elizabeth II and her husband the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Philip during their 1953 visit to Fiji.

The new owners, Fiji National Provident Fund and their Papua New Guinea partners NASFUND and Lamana Development, have continued the tradition of bright white paint in most parts of the interior as well as the exterior of Suva’s five-star hotel, a colour or hue that was said to be the signature paint initially chosen by the wife of former owner Wesley Barrett decades ago.

The sprawling Grand Pacific Hotel, sections of which now include marble tiled floors, see-through glass walls, a swimming pool and an additional 103 rooms from its previous capacity of 10 rooms, fuses colonial and royal flair with refined modern taste.

Project manager Rod Bradley says 15,000 square metres of new development was added to the hotel. That’s about the size of two rugby fields added to the old structure which is probably half or more the size of Albert Park.

For the most part, the hotel was a shell when Mr Bradley and his team started renovations.

Two-and-a-half years of renovation culminates this week as he and his team put the finishing to what is perhaps Suva’s largest hotel yet. And even still, general manager Eugen Diethelm, who comes with more than 40 years of international experience in hotel industry, believes there is still more improvements in the seafront hotel.

If floors could talk, the New Zealand-imported kauri wood which serve as panels on the floor of the GPH foyer would have some interesting stories to share for it dates back to the time Union Steamship built the hotel.

GPH can host up to a comfortable 240 inhouse guests at any one time. It has five restaurants and three bars, one of which is the Steamship bar named in honour of the original owners of GPH. Other new additions include a gym and spa, a Zen Garden, a business centre, its own in-house tour desk and five categories of bedroom which are anything from \$490 to \$1200 a night.

There is the refined and delicate elegance of the quiet interior of Prince Albert restaurant where fine dining is offered. The adjoining main dining Levuka restaurant is where breakfast, lunch and dinner is served, while the Na Toba restaurant and Bar restaurant, which is by the swimming pool makes for superb alfresco dining and entertainment.

The visionary that is Mr Diethelm tells us that a museum corner will be erected in the foyer, while a few retail outlets will be set up in one corner of the hotel.

One of the most captivating aspects of the hotel is a room that will be dedicated to Swiss confectionery, one which will be operated by a Swiss chef, fronting out to the Albert Park side of the hotel allowing even passers by to walk in for take-away or simply relish the Swiss confectionery flavours.

Why Switzerland? “Because the pastry chef and I are Swiss,” Mr Diethelm curtly responds.

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# It certainly was Pacific

By FREDERICA ELBOURNE

FOR all its grandeur back in the day, accommodation at the Grand Pacific Hotel cost \$3.03 a day.

Described American author James Michener as the most inexpensive thing in the tropics, dinner comprised a seven course meal that allowed you to choose more than one dish in a course.

Built by the Union Steamship Company in 1914 on reclaimed land, the grand old lady, as she was fondly referred to, was constructed primarily to serve the needs of passengers on transpacific routes, according to online encyclopedia wikipedia.

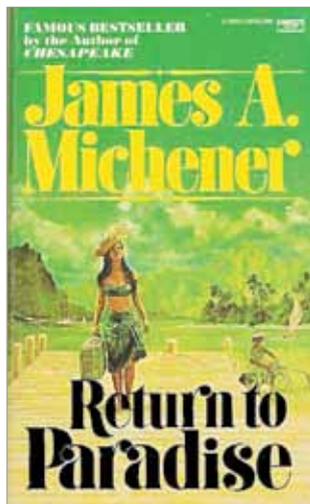
In his book *Return to Paradise* which he wrote in 1947 following a visit to Fiji, Michener said, "For \$3.03 a day, it provides antique living quarters, no baths in rooms, which are kept scrupulously clean, plus three meals a day that are difficult even to describe.

"Dinner customarily runs to seven courses, and the guest may order as many items from each course as he wishes. The GPH as it is called, is the only inexpensive thing in the tropics today."

Michener was one of the more famous guests at GPH, next to Queen Elizabeth II and the legendary Australian aviator Sir George Kingsford Smith who, among his many firsts and record-making stunts in the airline industry, landed his aircraft at Albert Park after flying in from California.

Michener's *Return to Paradise*, which followed his stay at GPH was described by *The New York Times* as, "All who have seen the South Pacific will find on every page the odours of frangipani, copra, blood, and beer".

According to [www.babasiga.blogspot.com](http://www.babasiga.blogspot.com), Michener wrote of Suva, "It has a canal that reminds one of Venice. It has brawling markets, stately banks, two movie houses, numerous churches and more taxicabs per capita — all owned by Indians — than any other city in the



*Return to Paradise* is one of American author James Michener's books where he mentions the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: IMAGES-AMAZON.COM

world." Wikipedia said the design of the hotel was to make the passengers think they had never gone ashore, for rooms in the GPH were like first-class staterooms, complete with saltwater bathrooms and plumbing fixtures identical to those on an ocean liner.

In his book *The World is my Home* (1992), Michener said, "And then came the target of my trip I would ever make to Fiji: one of the memorable hotels of the world, not majestic and not particularly spacious, but a haven to all who crossed the Pacific on tourist ships or who now came by airplane.

It was the Grand Pacific Hotel, famed GPH of the travel books, a big squarish building of several floors, with a huge central dining area filled with small tables, each meticulously fitted with fine silver and china, bud vases, and a facing porch leading out to the lawn that went down to the sea.

It was grand, and it certainly was pacific, and the barefoot Indians who served the meals had a grace that few hotels in the world could offer and none surpass."



The legendary Australian aviator Sir George Kingsford Smith stayed at the Grand Pacific Hotel after landing his aircraft at Albert Park on a flight from California.

Picture: WIKIPEDIA

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# Hosting the royals

By FREDERICA ELBOURNE

QUEEN Elizabeth II's visit to Fiji in 1953 wasn't the first royal visit to the country, but it certainly was the first for a reigning monarch to the colony.

On four occasions prior to her visit, members of the Royal Family, three of whom had ascended the throne, had visited Fiji, said the book *Colony of Fiji 1874-1929*.

An excerpt from the book said a subcommittee was appointed to make all the arrangements for the State Ball and this committee served under the chairmanship of a Mr D.A. Butler, the manager in Suva of the Union Steam Ship Company who was also the proprietor of the Grand Pacific Hotel where the ball was to be held.

Mr Butler was invited to organise the State Ball because of his previous experience in arranging dances at the hotel, as well as his energy and organising ability.

As the dinner would be held at Government House it would not be possible to hold the ball there too, and the only other suitable building in Suva for it, though it was rather small, was the Grand Pacific Hotel, on the foreshore about three-quarters of a mile from Government House.

Where it was initially recommended that 1000 guests be invited to the ball, Mr Butler said the number was too great, adding that a dignified and comfortable number should be 700 guests.

However, it was much easier to recommend a limit than to keep it.

Guests were selected by the governor where the first consideration was given to those born and bred in the colony, irrespective of occupation or social stature.

"Nevertheless, as the visit approached, the invitation list also began to approach the figure of 1000 originally sug-

... the invitation list also began to approach the figure of 1000 originally suggested," the book said adding that the subcommittee responsible for the ball had no choice but to accept the facts of the situation and revise the catering arrangements

gested," the book said adding that the subcommittee responsible for the ball had no choice but to accept the facts of the situation and revise the catering arrangements.

On December 17, the combined lounge and dining room of GPH were combined to accommodate even two orchestras.

It had been originally proposed that before making her entry into the ball, Her Majesty would appear on the balcony of Government Buildings overlooking Albert Park and show herself to the crowds there. However, the obstructed view of the roof of the pavillion and grandstand proved a disadvantage.

The pavillion was described as an unattractive building in poor repair and one which many people would have liked to see removed before the Royal visit.

But being the property of the council, the mayor and councillors stood firm on their refusal to demolish it unless Government guaranteed the money to replace it with a better one on another part of the park. The Government wasn't able to meet this demand, so it was decided that the queen appear on the balcony of the Grand Pacific Hotel which overlooked the park.

Two small palm trees obscured the view, which the management agreed to cut out, particularly as they appeared to be diseased and most unlikely to add to the attraction of the hotel frontage.

The access to the hotel balcony proved another obstacle as it was by the main stairway from the lounge and would prove an undignified entry for the queen when she made her entry to the State Ball.

Eventually, it was agreed that Her Majesty should make her balcony appearance after she had been to the State Ball, during an interval in the dancing.

"At all events it was to be the hotel balcony and not the Government Buildings balcony, and this meant additional work for the ball sub committee as it was necessary to raise the floor of the balcony to enable the queen to be seen from below," the book said.

"It was also necessary to build a canopy over it as a protection from the rain."

The work and worries of the subcommittee continued right up to the evening of December 17. The night of the ball, the road in front of the hotel was to be cleared a few minutes before 8pm when the queen was expected to drive along it on her way from Government House and, again before 9:45pm when the torch light procession began.

"There was therefore only about an hour and a half in which the 1000 guests in an estimated number of about 400 cars could arrive for the ball," the book said. But the ball was a success.



The swimming pool at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

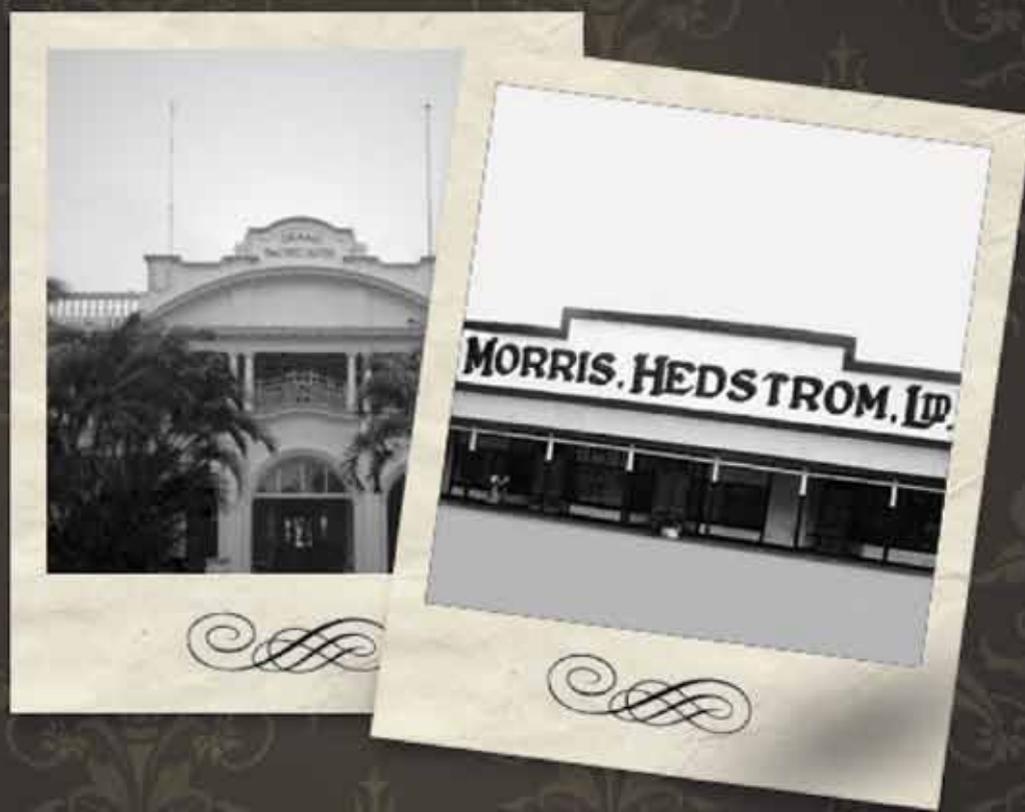
Picture: JESSIE NAUA



Queen Elizabeth II descends the stairs with Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara at the Grand Pacific Hotel during an earlier visit to Fiji.  
FILE PHOTO

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# Queen Mary's glory



The view from the popular balcony at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

FILE PHOTO

By **FREDERICA ELBOURNE**

**T**HE portico at Grand Pacific Hotel is famous for the fact that Queen Elizabeth II, during her visit of the colony in 1953, stood there and waved at the crowd that gathered at Albert Park and along Victoria Parade.

It was also on this balcony that Hibiscus queens were crowned back in the early years of the inception of what is now the mother of all festivals.

Mary Nelson, a registered nurse turned entrepreneur and restaurateur, was the third Hibiscus queen to be crowned there since the festival was established. She was crowned by Dorris Leys, wife of the city mayor at the time.

"They were real crowns," she said adding the Fiji Chamber of Commerce founded the

festival. She was 23 years old at the time of her crowning and said she was shocked to have scooped the crown ahead of 23 other contestants.

Hibiscus contestants would come from as far as Lautoka, Mrs Nelson said.

Mrs Nelson who now owns and manages the popular and sentimental Old Mill Cottage at Carnavon Street says she is grateful that the revamped Grand Pacific Hotel has maintained the famous balcony.

Crowned Hibiscus queen in 1958, Mrs Nelson describes the era as one where there weren't many people around, where families could sleep easy with their doors and windows opened, and where life was pleasant and easy going.

But the not-so-nice thing of that time was the colour bar issue which forbade the indigenous Fijians from entering the city willy-

nilly, without a valid permit from the district office or roko, Mrs Nelson said. "You could almost count the number of people in town. Each community was left to itself. There was little mixing," she said.

Sponsored by CWM Hospital where she worked at the time, Mrs Nelson won the Hibiscus crown ahead of a Penny Hunt whose family owned Hunts Travel and a Rachael Wilson.

Educated in New Zealand, Mrs Nelson was to return to the land of the long white cloud as a means of utilising her prize as Hibiscus queen. She quit nursing after she got married to start up Fiji's first art gallery which was located where Traps bar is today.

Simply called The Art Gallery, Mrs Nelson explained that it was borne of the need to do something different.

There, children were encouraged to paint,

as many had a natural flare for it, Mrs Nelson said.

"The gallery closed when the building was suddenly sold," she said. The Grand Pacific Hotel was the only hotel of its kind, Mrs Nelson said.

"Different pubs existed at the time like the Garnett Hotel & Pub, and, the Melbourne Hotel & Pub, now Sukuna House. It was just a double storey then. "GPH was the only place for diners, the only decent hotel in town and it had a nice ambience. There was a public bar at GPH, a cocktail bar on the side. Mr Barrett, wife of the owner at the time built a disco club, it was not part of GPH.

It was located between Holiday Inn and GPH and added to the nightlife of Suva.

"It was the in-thing at the time — disco, in the day of Lucky Eddies and Rockerfeller," she said.

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The person who can't feel happy here is not long for this world, the *Western Pacific Herald* said of the Grand Pacific Hotel.  
FILE PHOTO

The Grand Pacific Hotel's interior balcony overlooking the main entrance below.  
Picture: JOVESA NAISUA

# Rich tropical glamour

By FREDERICA ELBOURNE

JUST three months before the beginning of World War I, the Grand Pacific Hotel opened for business.

The day was May 23, 1914. What once was a tree-lined beach and a canoe landing place was replaced by the elaborate "grand old lady" on reclaimed land.

Said by some to be years ahead of her time, her majestic structure faced the sea while inland, it was flanked by the Thurston botanical gardens and Government House to one side while directly opposite was the old cricket pavilion in Albert Park.

In the book *Fiji's Past on Picture Postcards*, she was described as having a fine portico which were negotiable to vehicles from which guests could step into the main entrance leading to a lofty, broad, spacious lounge which presented a striking appearance to all who visited GPH for the first time.

The description was written by the editor of the *Western Pacific Herald* as part of the very much longer article produced after he had been taken on a complete tour of inspection in early June, 1914.

"Its fame will surely spread abroad in the course of time, and we have no doubt that Suva will be reflected in its glory," the unnamed editor referred to in the book, said.

The hotel incorporated some of the features of first-class ship travel of the time including individual saltwater baths.

Her spacious lounge was converted to a ballroom in quick turnaround time.

"Elderly European past residents of Suva no doubt recall with nostalgia the tropical glamour attached to such occasions in days long before the colonial sunset had faded for ever.

"Splendid receptions were held at the GPH. Royalty made appearances on the balcony. Honeymoons in the all-white bridal suite were popular," the article said.

GPH had a Smoking Room, a Billiard Room, a Gentlemen's Writing Room and even a Roof Garden.

On the Roof Garden, tourists could sit back, enjoy the breeze, feast their eyes on a glorious landscape, smoke a cigar or drink a glass of cold lager beer.

"From this eminence life feels good and the person who cannot feel happy here is not long for this world," the *Western Pacific Herald* said.



Detailed designed ceiling in the foyer of the Grand Pacific Hotel.  
Picture: JESSIE NAUA




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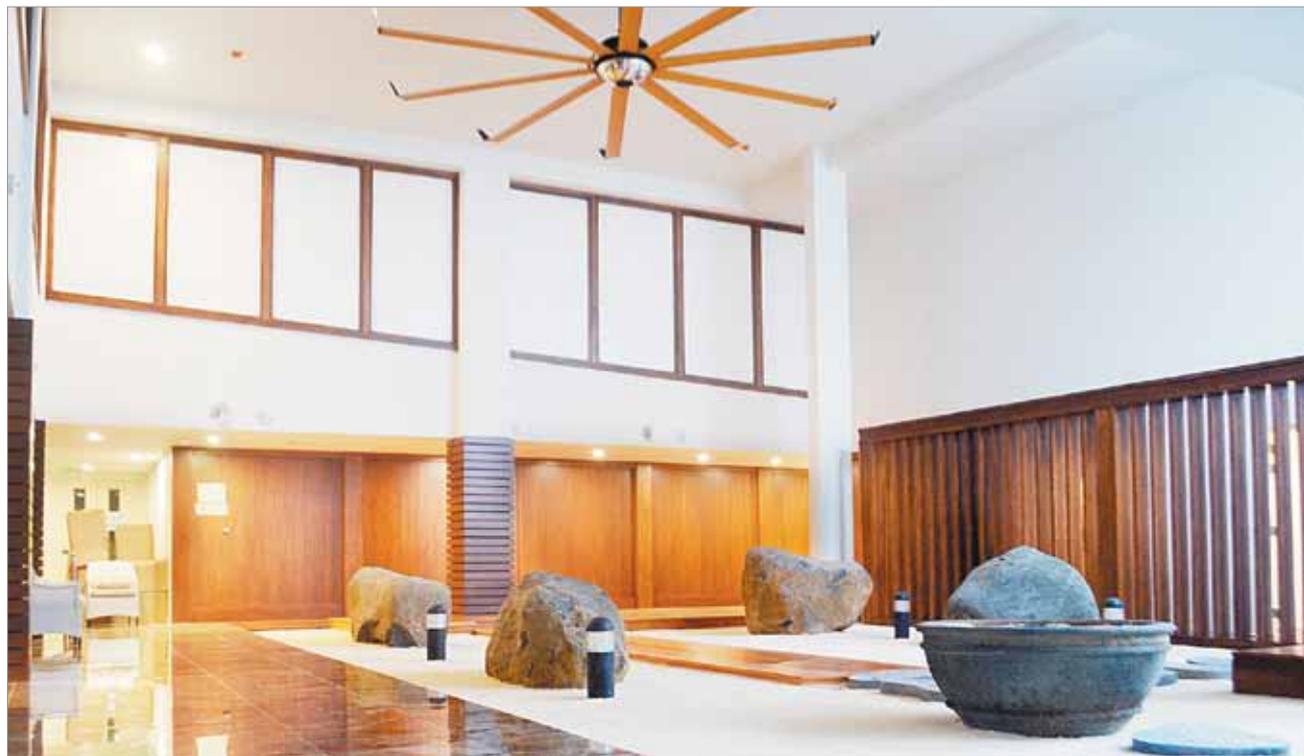
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The Zen garden at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



Newly-weds Adrianna Tiko and Bradley Hall were the first to have their wedding at the newly-refurbished GPH in Suva recently.

Picture: ELIKI NUKUTABU

# GPH's first wedding

By MERE NALEBA

THE Grand Pacific Hotel had its first wedding reception on Saturday, hosting the union of businessman Bradley Hall and former Fiji Airways Boeing 737 and 767 pilot Adrianna Tiko.

The wedding reception was attended by 150 guests who enjoyed the food and wine prepared by the staff members of the newly renovated Grand Pacific Hotel.

"They have great services and we are happy with how things went today,"

Mrs Hall said. "The food was great and everything about today's reception was just amazing. They really did it with style and I guess they wanted to show people what they can do for events like this and it's perfect."

Mrs Hall, 37, and Mr Hall, 47, dated for two years before Mr Hall proposed to the Lomaloma, Vanuabalavu beauty in California one and half years ago. An excited Mrs Hall, who has maternal links in Savaii, Samoa, said it was her desire to get married in Fiji and this was in her favour as the new couple managed to secure GPH as the venue

for their wedding reception.

"The wedding was postponed about three times because of the renovation works being done here at the hotel," she said.

The couple first met at the Hilton Hotel in Nadi but before that had met on five different occasions where they would say a brief hello and moved on.

"It was funny because on one occasion Brad was just checking out of Holiday Inn and I was checking in. We met at the front desk. Little did I know that as soon as I checked in, he also checked in," she said.



The entrance at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA

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# The lady returns to her throne



The Grand Pacific Hotel will return to her former glory when it is officially opened next month. FILE PHOTO



The Steamship Bar is named after the original owners of the hotel. Picture: JOVESA NAISUA

By **FREDERICA ELBOURNE**

**T**HE grand old lady will return to her throne during an official opening next month, exactly 100 years after she was built.

Built in an area that was initially known as Vunivesi — and home to the original landing spot of the Suva Village, the property first held the Hotel Suva, which self-employed customs agent and business consultant Al-

len Lockington described as a “little more than a shack”. In his article about GPH which was published on Crox Walsh’s Fiji Backup Blog, Mr Lockington said GPH at the time was compared with international icons as the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, Shepherd’s in Cairo and the Ritz in London.

“When members of the British royal family visited Fiji, they stood atop the wrought-iron portico, the bow of the Grand Pacific Hotel, and addressed their subjects across Victoria

Parade in Albert Park. In the old days, guests were greeted with ceremony by a Sikh in colourful inform and turban and ushered into the lobby cooled by slowly revolving ceiling fans.

“The GPH prided itself on its dignified atmosphere, high ceilinged rooms, immaculate furnishings and flawless service,” Mr Lockington wrote.

A favourite spot every evening was to sit on the rear verandah, gin and tonic on hand,

and watch ships of all sizes chug around Suva harbour, he said.

The design of the hotel was to serve the needs of passengers on its transpacific routes.

According to Mr Lockington, the design was to make passengers think they had never gone ashore, for rooms in the GPH were like first class staterooms, complete with saltwater bathrooms and plumbing fixtures identical to those on an ocean liner.

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Fiji's "grand old lady" back in the day.

FILE PHOTO



The dining room at the Grand Pacific Hotel in 1982 was prepared for a state banquet with Queen Elizabeth II on her second visit to Fiji. Kini Navusolo sets the table for a night of local fare of smoked *walu* mousse, baked Naboro ham, stuffed breast of chicken with Madeira sauce, *kumala*, *tapioka* noisettes, glazed carrot batons, green beans almondine, pineapple sorbet followed by coffee and chocolate ginger.

FILE PHOTO

# Back in the day



Queen Elizabeth II and her husband the Duke of Edinburgh enter the ballroom at the Grand Pacific Hotel in 1953. Picture: JUSTPACIFIC.COM

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Grand Pacific Hotel salutes *The Fiji Times* as the newspaper turns a year older.

FILE PHOTO

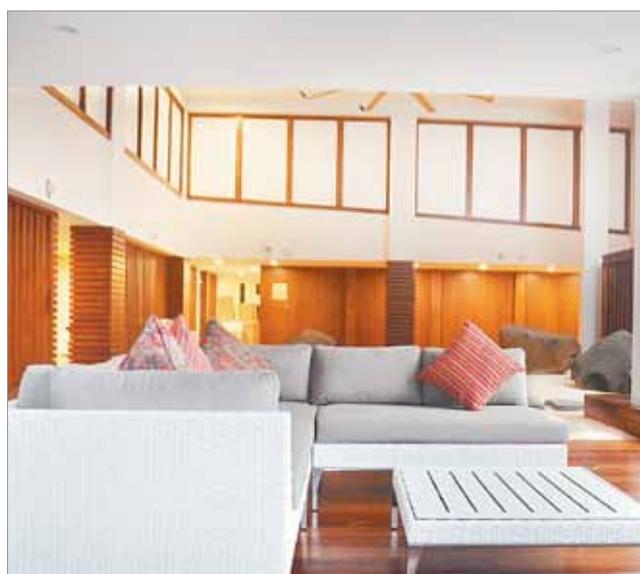


Executive sous chef Vinod Kumar and his team behind the busy scenes of Grand Pacific Hotel.  
Picture: JOVESA NAISUA

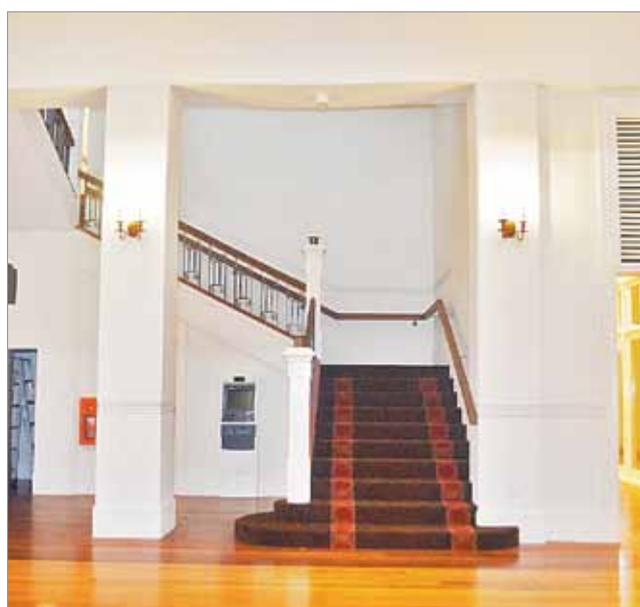
# Revival of national icon



Grand Pacific hotel lounge area facing the seafront.  
Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



This lounge area marks the place where the old GPH merges with the new extension.  
Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



The Grand Pacific Hotel fuses royalty, colonial and modern taste.  
Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



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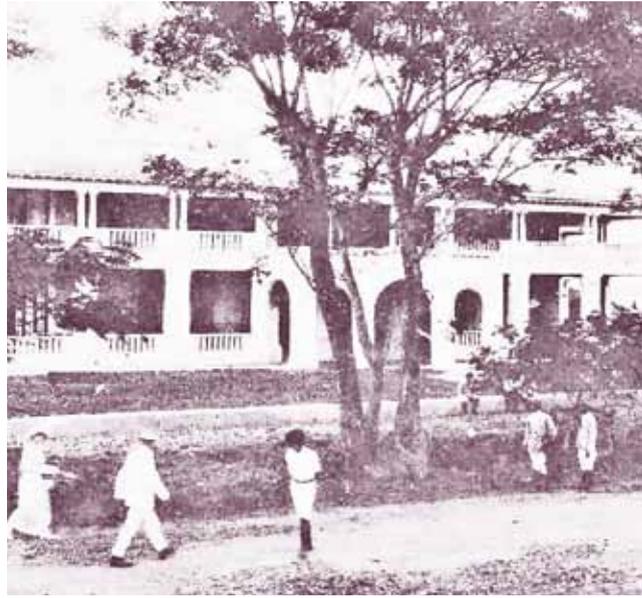
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# Those early days



Extension work on the Grand Pacific Hotel in June 1960.

FILE PHOTO



The original Grand Pacific Hotel had only 10 bedrooms when it was first opened.

FILE PHOTO



Like a scene from an old flick ... The Grand Pacific Hotel had a new bar and beer garden in 1960.

FILE PHOTO



The new addition to the Grand Pacific Hotel in this file picture which is not dated.

FILE PHOTO

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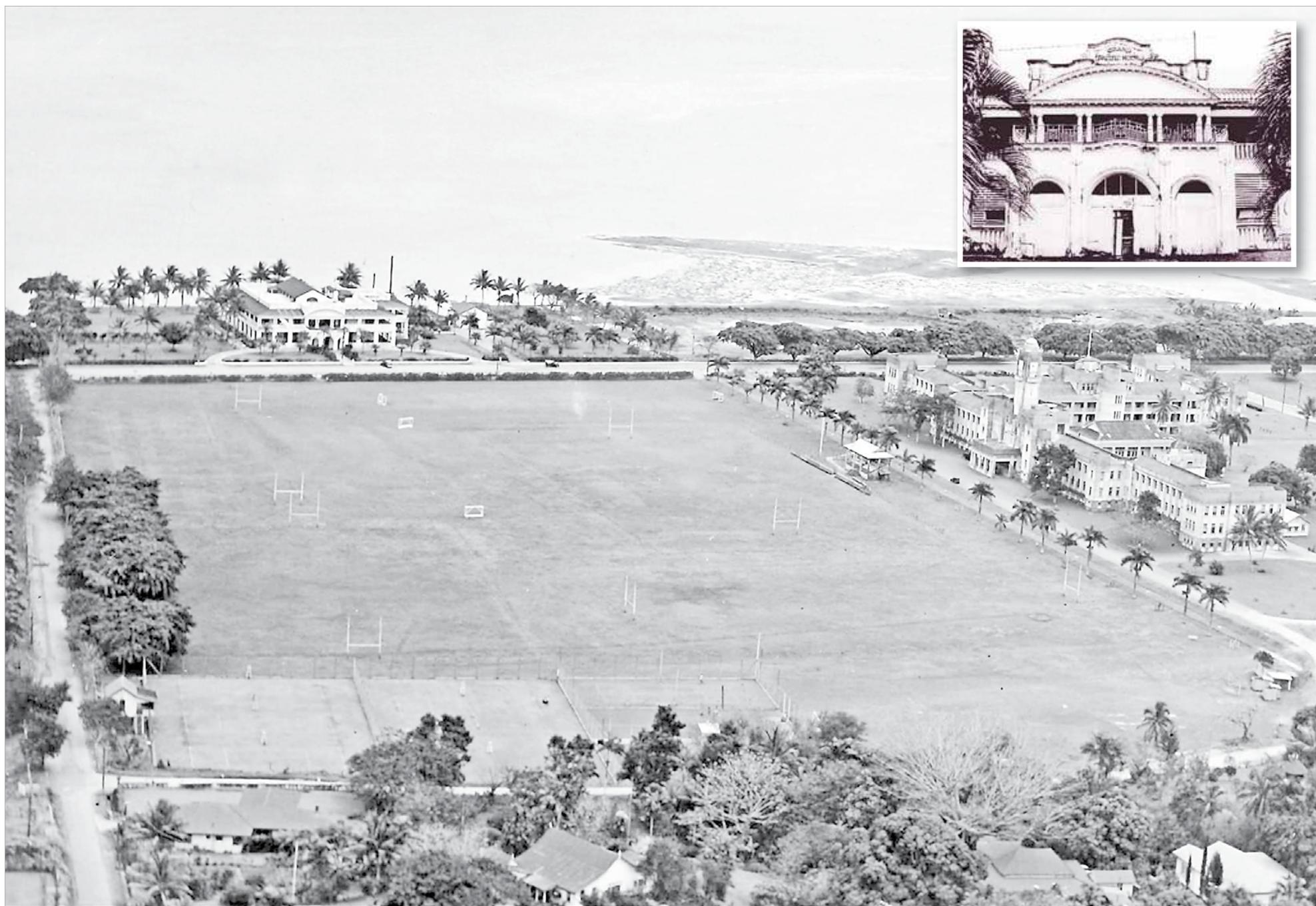
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Panoramic view of Vunivesi where the Grand Pacific Hotel is now located. Inset: A shadow of its former glory... The Grand Pacific Hotel in 2002 after it closed.

FILE PHOTO

# Built on reclaimed land



The Grand Pacific Hotel during renovations over the past two and a half years.

Picture: SUPPLIED



The rooms at the central part of the GPH all open out to a wide and airy balcony in an effort to resemble a ship's deck.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



Fine dining is offered at one of five restaurants at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA

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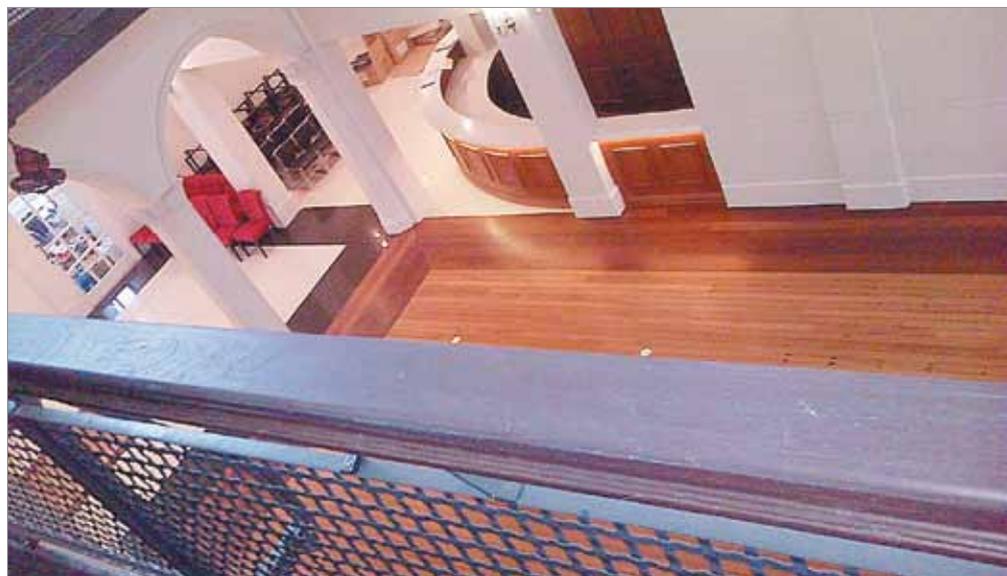
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A private dining room at the Grand Pacific Hotel for guests who prefer privacy.

Picture: JESSIE NAUA

# Elegant and classical



The view from the balcony above the original ballroom of the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JESSIE NAUA



Grand Pacific Hotel staff members pose for a picture.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



White tiled walls to complement the overall white painted walls in most parts of the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JESSIE NAUA



Wooden panelled walls with mirrors in an elevator that is used for the central part of the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JESSIE NAUA

# The famous balcony



The Zen Garden.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



The lounge at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



The balcony where Queen Elizabeth II waved to the crowd during her visit in 1953.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA



One of the rooms at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Picture: JOVESA NAISUA

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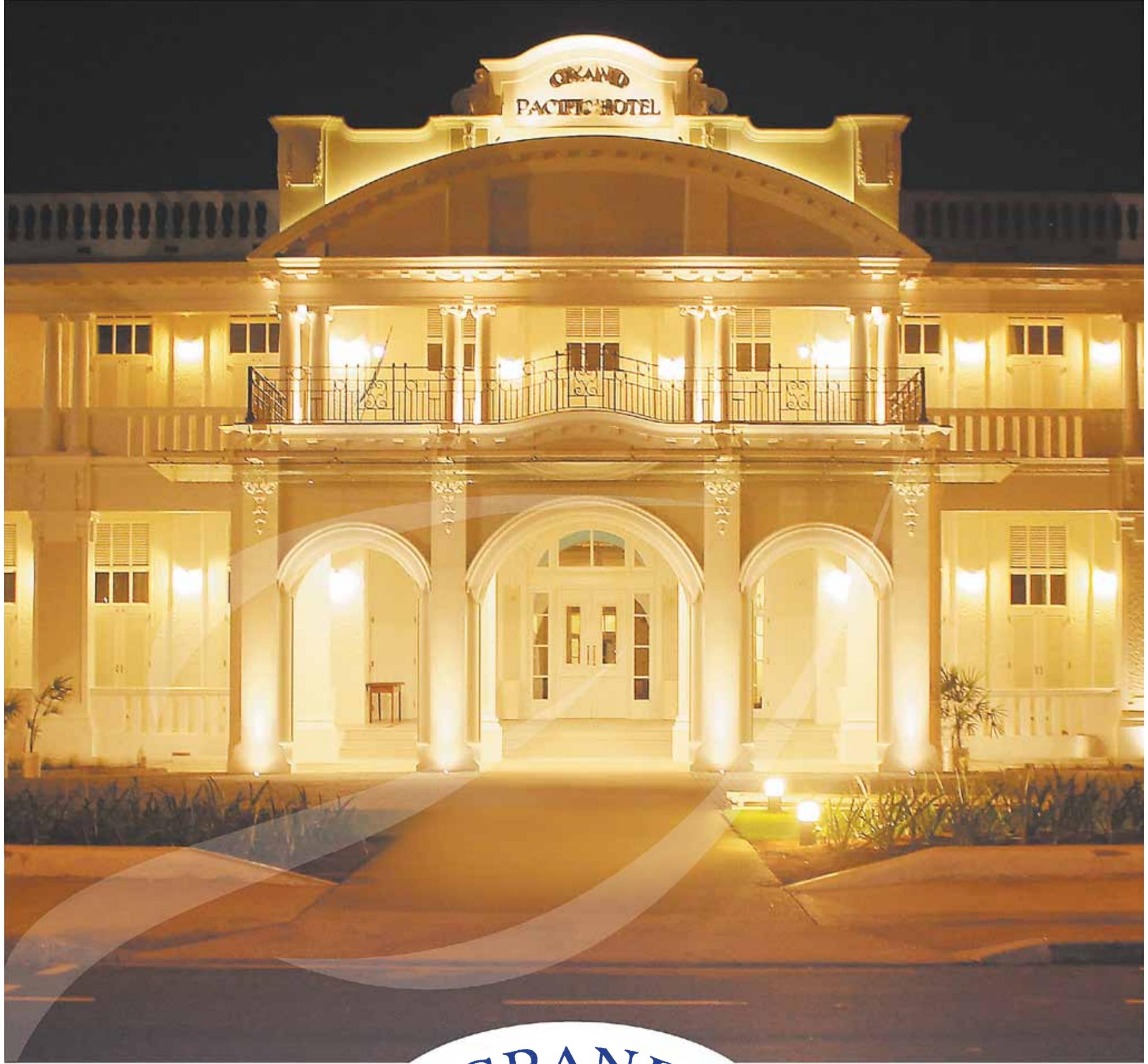
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