

The Architect



THE JOURNAL OF THE SRI LANKA INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS | VOL. 114 | ISSUE NO.1 | JANUARY-MARCH 2013 | RS 200 | thearchitect.lk





Expo Rail

A carriage of comfort

A lone carriage painted in blue attached to a long line of red hued train carriages signaled the latest addition to Sri Lanka's railway system. A pioneering venture of Expo Rail and created by KWA Architects, the brightly coloured carriage signified the dawn of a new era of luxury train services in Sri Lanka.

By Krishani Peiris

The concept of luxury train carriages was first formulated through a public-private partnership between the Government and Expo Rail, a subsidiary of Expo Lanka. Created by KWA Architects with Architect Thilan Koththigoda at its helm, the project utilised 30 year old disused rail carriages to bring in a whole new

dimension to the Sri Lankan railway system. Connected to intercity trains the carriages provide facilities to give passengers a comfortable ride to their destinations.

"The basic function of the carriage is transporting passengers in a more comfortable and luxurious environment," said Architect Koththigoda. "We were brought into

design the interior of the train and we tried to achieve a futuristic and sophisticated image."

Having obtained the steel shell from the railway department, the design team first created a secondary steel structure that they clad with plywood, which acted as the surface for receiving the interior of the carriage. The floor



was created using concrete similar to all rail carriages in Sri Lanka, but was covered with a vinyl floor covering, which is scratch resistant and easy to maintain. Modelled in a colour palette of blues and greens in most part to communicate a sense of calmness and cool, the carriage also includes touches of teak panelling that adds a feel of luxury to the décor. The seats in the carriages are either imported aircraft seats or railway seats from India – upholstered to match the intended colour theme – and convey comfort to the passengers. Besides these comforts the carriage also include free wifi, televisions, air conditioning, reading lights, onboard meals and other amenities that make the travel experience unique. Furthermore, due to the sealed windows, the noise factor, which can be felt to a great amount in normal carriages is greatly reduced leaving a calm atmosphere within the carriage. The onboard

washrooms of the carriage were also redesigned and fitted in with new fixtures communicating a feeling of luxury even within that small space.

“The transformation was almost unbelievable. No one could believe that this was a discarded old

railway carriage,” elaborated Archt Koththigoda.

Although, the target groups of the train service were tourists and corporate clients, now the service is being used far and wide by many segments of the society due to its





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convenient nature. Equipped with facilities to offer onboard meals and other services, it is deemed by many to be the ultimate travel experience. Furthermore, depending on the size of the carriages they can accommodate between 36 to 42 people.

On the challenges that the architects faced in designing the carriage Archt Koththigoda said, “the first challenge was to get the structural part or the technicalities right. The next biggest challenge was to see how we could correctly position the carriage from a design point of view.”

As designing a moving body is different from that of a stationary one, the project team first had to figure out the deflections, movements and other technicalities related to moving carriages before implementing their designs. After sorting these difficulties, the next was to design each carriage depending on its destination and route. The project team decided to increase the leg room, compared with normal carriages, and in addition they also had to take into consideration the differences of train carriages that goes to Kandy, which take longer curves versus carriages that moves towards Badulla that take shorter curves. Furthermore, as this one is a self sustained unit with its own generators and power set up, figuring out the wiring and other technicalities have proved to be a daunting task that the architects have overcome strategically.

“We did not want the carriage to have a utilitarian feel to it but an image of “modern luxury” and ultimately we have achieved what we have set out to achieve initially. I also feel that it will have a lot of potential in the future – as an efficient, comfortable railway transport system is a huge asset to a country” concluded Archt Koththigoda. ▣

Principle Architect: Thilan Koththigoda
Architectural Firm: KWA Architects
Project Architect: Hashini Ranaweera
Other Persons Involved in the Building Process: Design Asia Group Fabricators
Date of Completion: November, 2011
Project period: Three months
Client: Expo Rail (Part of Expo Lanka Holdings)

Photographs
KWA Architects