



# THE IMPERIAL

*New Delhi*

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## **THE IMPERIAL, NEW DELHI** **- INDIA'S MUSEUM HOTEL**

***The Imperial, New Delhi:*** Have you ever dined in an art gallery? Or have you ever enjoyed your dinner over a book on modern Indian history? A book on British rule in India to be specific. Have you ever dined at a place frequented by Gandhi, Nehru or Jinnah or Kipling? The Imperial, perhaps the only ***museum hotel*** of its kind, offers this and much more.

The Imperial's relationship with art is a long-standing one. Since its inception, over 70 years ago, the Hotel has not only been a repository of art, but also a home to many famous artists. The Imperial has carefully preserved its collection of original engravings and lithographs and has added steadily to it over this period. Since the Hotel was established, it has in some form or the other supported, collected, restored and displayed unique works of art.

There are long vistas of corridor and rich carpets, delicately shaded wall lamps, chests and brass pots, prints and paintings. Insistence on the authentic has led naturally to research – here a set of old photos taken by a guest, there an unregarded corner little interfered with since the 1930s. A search of rooms, stores, corridors and hallways produces hundreds of pieces of original furniture from antique to art deco.

Each floor in the Hotel is dedicated to an artist whose original works adorn the walls of the rooms and the corridors. Suites are named after personalities such as Lutyens whose names are associated both with the Hotel and Imperial Delhi. Meticulous care has been taken to recreate the room décor and ambience of the period of Raj. The rooms offer a choice of marble or parquet flooring with artistic borders and exquisite Persian hand-knotted carpets. Each room also has unique antique pieces of furniture and paintings from the art collection of the Hotel.

The Imperial is characterized as a '***museum hotel***' and has to its credit the distinction of hosting one of the earliest Art Exhibitions in the year 1936. This was graced and inaugurated by H.H. the Maharaja of Patiala.



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The Imperial, proudly, displays a priceless art collection of the 'British Art on India.' The collection includes the works of great artists who worked in India in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century and produced etchings, wood engravings, lithographs, aquatints and mezzotints based on sketches of landscapes, architecture, topography and life and times of India. Some of the prominent artists are *Thomas and William Daniells, William Simpson, William Hodges, John Zollony, James Ferguson, J.B. Fraser, Emily Eden, Charles D'Oyly* among others.

These artists with prior permission of The East India Company found captivating subjects in the great Moghul monuments, historical events, naval and military scenes, landscapes, topography, royal durbars, costumes, castes and traders of India, the imposing forts, the elegant Capital cities along with the abundance of natural beauty – the majestic mountains, curving rivers and breathtaking waterfalls. Such is the inspiration behind the glorious art works on display at The Imperial.

The Hotel has three main art galleries and a collection of life size oil paintings of the Princely Rulers of India. The First Floor strolls down the corridor of time and is aptly called '*Views in Lucknow*' based on the siege and mutiny in Lucknow by Assistant Adjutant – General David Scott Dodgson. This can be attributed to the fact that The East India Company had its main naval and military camp enforcements at Lucknow, Calcutta, Agra, Madras and Bombay.

Lucknow situated by the banks of the river Gomti offered numerous charms to landscape artists by virtue of being the erstwhile Moghul capital, thus well endowed with marvelous architectural forts, places of worship and lush gardens.

The entire Northern wing of the ground floor main Art Gallery gracefully adorns the established works of the Uncle and Nephew duo - *Thomas (1749 – 1840) and William Daniell (1769-1837)*, including the famous '*Oriental Scenery*,' published in 1808.

The first floor of the Southern Wing houses *James Fergusson's* (1808-86) works titled '*Rock cut Temples of India*' (1845). Indian architecture and archaeology attracted the Scotsman to such an extent that he gave up his business activities in Calcutta to pursue studies that subsequently earned him the distinction of being the leading authority on Indian architecture.

The Second Floor Main Corridor, facing the Art Deco wing, transports the viewer to the lush '*Views of the Himalayas*' (1842) and its foothills wherein one could begin the spiritual journey of life and rediscover a newer self. The second floor art corridor exudes a sense of calm in the tranquil surroundings depicted by the drawings of The Himalayas, its foothills and the people who have undergone the spiritual journey of self-discovery. *James Ballie Fraser (1783 – 1856)* is one of the significant artists whose works of the Himalayas are displayed here.



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Wives of the British officers would sometimes stay in Simla while their military ranked husbands were posted in the plains. A number of the ladies were amateur artists. *Anne Eliza Scott* was one such artist. By virtue of being Mrs. W.L.L. Scott, the young wife of a lieutenant in the Bengal Army, Anne spent some time in Simla between 1850 and 1851. Moved by the pitiful plight and an uncertain future of the orphans of British soldiers at the Lawrence Asylum situated near Simla, Mrs. W.L.L. Scott published her works of art under the title of '*Views in the Himalayas*' in aid of the orphans. Surmounting all difficulties such as rainy season, limited hours of sunlight and her own delicate health, she dedicated morning and evening hours of the day to draw on the spot in order to capture the captivating bliss of the scenic splendor at Simla. Her lithographs feature a general view of Simla with its pretty cottages, snaking roads, tall fir trees and Christ Church, which had begun in the year 1852.

The entire Northern wing on the first floor is dedicated to *William Hodges R.A.* and the entire part of the second floor is dedicated to *James Hunter*. James Hunter was a Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery who died the same year that the third Mysore war ended. His sketches were titled '*Picturesque scenery in the Kingdom of Mysore*' (1804-05) which also shed light on the minor places associated with Tipu Sultan and his father, for example, a music gallery in the palace at Seringapatam, the gateway to Lal Bagh and a street outside the palace at Bangalore. Hunter was inclined to choose subjects, which would show aspects of military and everyday life.

Third Floor Hallway of Art is a visual treat of vivid, bright colours depicting the people and scenes of life in *Northern India*. Among the many illustrated books published as a result of northern campaigns, one work, which conveys the rebellious character of the landscape, was *James Atkinson's* '*Sketches in Afghanistan.*'

The art theme on the third floor of The Imperial is dedicated to the grandeur, color and vibrancy of Northern India and its people. A land of fertile soils, rich yellow fields of mustard flowers, happy people with their heart warming country lore and folk songs and lest we forget, each home – a temple of hospitality. *Honorable Emily Eden* (1797- 1869) enjoys a pride of place here.

The Northern wing on this floor showcases works of *James Atkinson* (1780 – 1852). James Atkinson was an amateur artist in the Bengal Medical Service and throughout his tenure with the service both he and his better half continued to draw and paint.

The Southern Wing exhibits works of *Hon. Charles Stewart Hardinge* (1822 – 94). His twenty-six lithographs were titled '*Recollections of India*' and were divided into two parts and subtitled as, British India and the Punjab *and* Kashmir and the Alpine Punjab. The inspiration behind his enchanting prints stems from his fervent wish to expose the magical diversity of the land and water of India.



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No area of the Hotel has been left deprived of the magical influence of Art which forms and imparts an integral Royal flavour to the Hotel. The Royal Ballroom, that till date exudes the exuberance and grandeur of the first Ball inaugurated by Lord Willingdon, boasts of a huge 11 ft. by 22 ft. oil painting by *Bourne and Shepard*, titled *The Durbar of the Nawab of Maler Kotla*, and vividly depicts the generous luxury of the early 1900s.

In perfect sync with the larger than life oil painting, the pre-function areas to the Royal Ballroom proudly house life size oil portraits of Royalty of seven different princely states, viz. H.H. Nawab of Maler Kotla, H.H. Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, H.H. Nawab of Rampore, H.H. Nawab of Mursheadabad, H.H. Maharaja of Gwalior, H.H. Maharaja of Jaipur and H.H. Nizam of Hyderabad.

A point worth a mention is that The Imperial has the largest collection on display of land war gallantry awards in India and neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Burma, Bhutan and China apart from a sizeable record of orders and decorations bestowed by the King, the Emperor of India as an honor to the local Maharajas and ruling Princes of different states of India.

Finally, the Lobby, too, dedicates its lounge to period art. The Lahore Lounge is dedicated to the Anglo Sikh wars: The Battle of Aliwal, Moodkee, Ferozshah and the wars of Chillianwala and Gujarat by Mather Brown and Heneary Martins. It has the portraits of the two war heroes Sardar Hari Singh and Shyam Singh along with the medals won in these wars.

“The Imperial depends for impact on its art collection – one of the most arresting public displays of colonial images and memorabilia in all of Asia,” says Anthony Paul of *Fortune* magazine.

We couldn't agree more!

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