



SHOWCASING HERITAGE

The Tugu group's **Lara Djonggrang** serves Javanese history and traditional cuisine one plate at the time.

By Dennis G. Kloeth

During the mid-1980s, Anhar Setjadibrata, a keen collector of Indonesian antiquities and historic Javanese artifacts, thought about building a warehouse that would be big enough to house his ever growing collection. He toyed with the idea of creating a “house” that could serve a dual purpose of a museum and hotel. And so, in 1989, he opened Hotel Tugu Malang in the East Java city of the same name.

Decorating the property with his priceless collection of Javanese antiquities and artifacts—and perhaps without even fully realizing it—Anhar had created a hotel-cum-museum that brought to life a “monument” to Indonesia’s rich cultural heritage (tugu means monument in Indonesian). The opening of the hotel can be said to have made an indelible and positive impact on the preservation of Indonesia’s rich cultural heritage.

Anhar then founded the Tugu Hotels, Restaurants and Exotic Spas group, with the mission, as it states on his company PT Toegoe Respati's website, "to bring back to life the art, soul and romance of Indonesia's yesteryears." From the success of the Malang hotel, Anhar then expanded his business into a series of hotels, restaurants and spas, mostly in Jakarta but also now in Bali, Blitar and Lombok, along with Malang.

For him, the Tugu interior design concept was the preferred way to go and certainly in a quest to be "different." When daughter Lucienne came on board as the director of strategies and development, the concept of restaurant-cum-museum was adapted and instantly Jakarta eateries Dapur Babah, Samarra, Shanghai Blue, Tugu Kunstkring and Lara Djonggrang all became the highly popular Tugu restaurants that dared to be different. Today, they stand out in Jakarta's crowded restaurant sector.



HISTORICAL COLLECTION: THE VIP DINING ROOM (TOP); THE SEAFOOD PLATE (BOTTOM); MAIN DINING ROOM SEEN TOWARDS MAIN ENTRANCE (LEFT PAGE).

Named after the stunningly beautiful princess that lived during the Prambanan Kingdom, Lara Djonggrang has rapidly become my favorite place to bring for dinner foreign golfers that come to Jakarta for a golf holiday or break. As part of a golf package, it truly is the perfect place to end their Jakarta golf experience with a sumptuous and traditional Javanese meal, and in an atmosphere that is enchanting, historic and amazingly different all at the same time.

Entering the restaurant from the main door, Lara Djonggrang certainly feels like a time capsule that allows you to embark on a journey way back into time and history. The courtyard that opens up behind the entrance is testament as to how the privileged must

have lived in "olden" days of colonial rule. Decorated with highly valuable antiquities and historic artifacts and placed in rather colorful rooms, the various spaces in the restaurant all represent a certain period in Indonesia's rich cultural history. Many spaces, large and small, are created for diners where statues and historic artifacts reflect the various periods in which the many different and ancient Kingdoms ruled during the 1,000-year history of the Indonesian archipelago.

The main dining space, with its high ceiling, resembles a spacious living room that we know from former Dutch colonial houses. As the gigantic table seats up to 12 people, here, ideally, group dinners can be held. The bar area is located in the back of the premises and

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this space allows for cocktails, drinks and socializing before dinner is served.

The Soekarno room shows historic photographs and documents representing tumultuous and heroic days experienced by Indonesia's best-known freedom fighter and first president. The pièce de résistance must be the three-meter tall statue of Lara Djonggrang that dominates the room that bears the name of this beautiful princess from ancient times. As it is located away from the main dining area, here 25 diners easily find a comfortable place to enjoy a culinary gathering or celebration of sorts in strict privacy.

Today's restaurant owners, often blindly, follow minimalist or industrial interior design trends to create dining places that all look similar. Not so Anhar Setjadibrata. He tries to be different, and in so doing, I don't go to Lara Djonggrang just to have a meal, but more so to enjoy a dining experience that is extraordinary. I surely also come to savor traditional Javanese dishes while undertaking an imaginary journey back into time and history one plate at the time, each time that I take in the exquisite surroundings. **SL**