



HOTELS

CHECK OUT 28 GRAND HYATT KOCHI BOLGATTY **30** RADISSON BENGALURU CITY CENTRE **32** FRESH SHEET TAJ CONNEMARA **34** SUITE TOKYO

[CHECK OUT]

ISLAND IDYLL

The Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty has a flair for luxurious comfort, finds **Charukesi Ramadurai**

As soon as I stepped into the main foyer of the newly opened Grand Hyatt at Kochi's Bolgatty Island, I understood what was so grand about it: the view. The property overlooks the serene backwaters of Vembanad Lake, stretching out beyond the green lawns in the back.

The same vista welcomed me in my room on an upper floor, where a large glass window made up one wall. The lake was still and lifeless, reflecting the mood of the Kerala sky during the monsoon months. That did not dampen my own spirits one

bit however, and I sat by the window with a cup of coffee to watch the few odd boats bob up and down on the distant water.

My first meal at the hotel was at Colony Clubhouse and Grill, its décor a nod to the marine and nautical history of the region. It also doubles up as a rooftop bar, offering sprawling views of Kerala's famous greens and blues (although they were yet to get their liquor licence at the time of my visit). Shana Susan Ninan, the marketing communications manager, joined me for a leisurely lunch, as chef Prakash Sundaram took me through the concept behind the restaurant—colonial cuisine and cooking

techniques such as pickling, curing and grilling. The food is a nod not just to the more obvious influences in this area, such as the Portuguese and British, but all incomers, including the Egyptians and Arabs who had arrived here as traders.

Colony also has a sharp focus on sustainable dining, which means sourcing local and organic produce as far as possible. To this end, they work with farmers, fisherfolk, seafood harvesters, cheesemakers and butchers in the region, while growing their own microgreens and making plans to manage beehives. The menu changes seasonally to make the best

use of what is available in and around this part of Kerala.

The chef presented a series of samplers from the menu, beginning with a surprising but delicious starter platter with raw jackfruit hummus, green peas and avocado hummus, and pomegranate and chia seeds *mutabal* with a crumbly flatbread. The other delight was the smooth five-grain risotto with millets and black rice, bursting with typically Indian flavours. In the evening, Shana took me around the property. The undisputed highlight of this new kid on the Bolgatty block is the Lulu Bolgatty International Convention Centre next door, with indoor and outdoor event space of over 10,000 square metres.

This is the perfect time for me to begin rhapsodising about their spa, Santata, which means inner harmony and tranquillity in Sanskrit. The spa takes up a large part of the level beneath the reception area, and offers both traditional Indian and international therapies. I overlooked the clarion call of my usual favourite, the Ayurveda abhyanga, and

chose Spice Symphony, a signature treatment. For, was it not the heady scent of these very spices that attracted explorers and traders from all over the globe to Kochi many centuries ago?

And this treatment definitely did not disappoint: an application of warm and aromatic oil, made in-house with a blend of Indian spices, followed by a poultice of medicated herbs, also generously infused with the healing properties of spices like cinnamon, peppermint and cardamom. I rolled out of my massage table straight on to my bed, forgoing the pleasure of a dinner at Thai Soul, inspired by Bangkok's vibrant street food scene.

Although it was tempting to stay in and watch the rain all day, I headed out towards Fort Kochi early the next morning. One of the stated aims of this hotel is to promote Kochi as an interesting destination in itself, rather than just a gateway to this part of Kerala, as it is perceived today. And so, a multitude of experiences are on offer, from market walks to bicycle tours. The tiny neighbourhood of Fort Kochi, with its

Clockwise from left: a sprawling Grand Terrace Suite at the hotel; the entrance to the Santata spa; the lavish swimming pool; and Colony Clubhouse and Grill

narrow lanes and antique shops, is one I could never tire of. And in the company of my tourist guide, Shyam Kumar, the history and heritage of its various communities came alive.

Back at the hotel, I opted for lunch at Malabar Café, the all-day coffee shop that also dishes out regional recipes. Out came the *appam* and *puttu*, *avial* and *theeyal*, redolent with the taste of Kochi. I could easily see why they came in droves to this tiny dot on the map in south India through the ages.

THE INFORMATION

LOCATION Bolgatty Island, Kochi. Approx 1hr/31.9km from Kochi airport
ACCOMMODATION 264 rooms, including 38 suites and 4 villas
TARIFF From approx. ₹12,000, including breakfast
CONTACT +91-484-2661234; hyatt.com