

The Il Mare Italian restaurant amid swaying palms

# HOTELS

**CHECK OUT 24** ANANTARA PEACE HAVEN, TANGALLE  
**28** ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS, UTTARAKHAND  
**31** BABA'S BEANS COFFEE BAR, DELHI

[CHECK OUT]

## TRANQUILLITY AT TANGALLE

Amid swaying coconut palms, **Charukesi Ramadurai** cooks up a scrumptious Sri Lankan meal and soaks in luxury at Anantara Peace Haven

Within minutes of my arrival at the Anantara Peace Haven in Tangalle, my private valet announced that he had a busy itinerary ready for me. Hello, this was supposed to be a relaxing stay, I thought but didn't say out aloud. Turns out, I worried needlessly, for my itinerary

was indeed packed but far from hectic.

Set off the bustle of the main road on the south coast of Sri Lanka, the new(ish) Anantara property is the stuff of picture postcards. It is situated on the site of an erstwhile coconut plantation, which meant that the land's greens and blues vied for attention wherever I turned. From my spacious Ocean View

Pool Villa at one end of the resort, I had spectacular views of the aquamarine Indian Ocean, through a thin curtain of swaying coconut palms.

Although Tangalle falls on the busy tourist route between the capital city of Colombo and the popular Yala National Park, this stretch has managed to stay away from the onslaught of the

small and large hotels found further up along the coast. There are several tourist attractions—a rock temple here, a surfing beach there—within a couple of hours' drive, but for pleasure seekers such as myself, there really was no reason to step out of Anantara.

In fact, I could (and tried my best to) spend all day just outside my villa, listening to the roar of the sea and cooling off in the plunge pool. The only exercise I got was on my walks to the various restaurants at meal times; except in the peak midday heat, I eschewed the valet and buggy mode of transport for leisurely strolls through the winding paths bordered by trees.

The villa itself, with its straight lines and open spaces, was a tribute to local design and architectural elements. Bright fabric furnishings, quirky wall décor items and colonial teak and rattan

furniture dotted the bedroom, while the bathroom was an ode to indulgence, with its massive bathtub and separate shower and change areas. And when the trek to one of the restaurants located near the main lobby seemed too much of a chore, I ordered a sumptuous local meal of Sri Lankan curry with rice to the room, served on a pretty wrought-iron table with matching white chairs near the pool.

There was not much need for this though, given that there are six dining options inside the property. From the multi-cuisine coffee shop Journeys, where the breakfast spread included my local favourites (string hoppers with piquant *sambol* and thick dal) to Verele that served teppenyaki with a Sri Lankan twist, I was spoilt for choice. On my first evening at Anantara, I had a smoked arrack cocktail at the tea lounge overlooking the lush expanse of the

*Clockwise from top left: a tea maker shows off his skills in the lobby lounge; ocean view villa; Anantara gives you ample opportunity for beach picnics; and an ayurvedic treatment at the spa*

property before heading for dinner at the Il Mare Italian restaurant. Seated at a table on the outside patio, I tucked into pasta and wine to the audio backdrop of the waves crashing against the huge boulders on the shore.

The special experience here, however, was not the eating (alone) but the Spice Spoons cooking lessons curated by the chefs. In preparation for that meal, I headed out with the chef after breakfast to the local market at Tangalle, with a short detour to the paddy fields lining the highway. The tall stalks of the red *rathu kekulu*—the nutritious local favourite used in string hoppers and most meals—swayed in the tropical breeze as



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*A private dining space  
by the Indian Ocean*



we waded through the fields to watch the farmers at work.

The market was a cornucopia of fresh vegetables and fruit gleaming in the muted sunlight that had found its way through the narrow slants in the red-tiled roof. The vendors were doing brisk business, regular customers bantering and bargaining with obvious relish. There were plump and purple brinjals, long and green bananas jostling for space with the golden yellow jackfruit everywhere. We wandered through the crowded aisles, lazily stopping at several stalls to shop for the meal, buying local specialties like winged beans and lotus stem.

Back at the hotel, I cooled my heels

with a king coconut water—somewhat literally after the blazing heat of the morning—waiting for the team to set up the cooking class at the Spice Spoons room. Under the watchful eyes of the chefs, the lesson was an elaborate affair, laced liberally with fresh coconut, onions and tomato, cinnamon and bay leaves. At the end of two hours, we sat for a hot Sri Lankan vegetarian lunch cooked entirely by me (okay, I fried the onions and garnished with coconut whenever instructed—and I have the photos to prove it).

A meal like that deserved the respect of a nap, after which it was time for a pampering session at the Anantara Spa. Never one to shy away from massages, I let

myself almost fall asleep as the masseuse worked magic on my aching muscles for an hour. Walking back to my villa in a well-oiled stupor at the end of the massage, I was sure I could get used to this.

The good life is rather easy to get used to, after all.

### THE INFORMATION

**LOCATION** Goyambokka Estate, Tangalle, Sri Lanka. 215km/3.5hr from Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport

**ACCOMMODATION** 152 rooms and villas

**TARIFF** From \$374 (premier beach access room) including taxes and breakfast

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