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CHECK IN

ANANTARA PEACE HAVEN TANGALLE, SRI LANKA

A Resort Packed With All the Amenities (Yes, Even Peacocks)

Rates

From \$255 for low-season doubles and \$435 for private villas. (High-season rates are \$390 and \$614.)

Basics

Now that long-divided Sri Lanka has achieved peace after a 30-year civil war (it ended in 2009), hotel developers are rushing in to capitalize on the country's pristine Indian Ocean beaches and tropical jungles, stately Colonial-era architecture and Buddhist temples. While smaller luxury hotels are cropping up on the island nation, Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort, which opened in December 2015, is the country's first full-blown waterfront resort: a sprawling but graceful compound of 152 rooms and villas, a spa, beach cabanas and infinity pools. Its third restaurant, Verele, opened in October, raising the chic factor considerably.

Location

The resort sits on a 21-acre former coconut plantation, just outside the fishing village of Tangalle on Sri Lanka's southeastern coast. Several of the region's main attractions, including the walled colonial city of Galle (home to elegant cafes, art galleries, and boutiques) and the temple complex at Wevurukannala (where a gold-painted, 160-foot-high Buddha statue looms above surrounding village rooftops), are within an hour-and-a-half drive of the property.

The Room

For about the same cost of a room at a fancy American hotel, I splurged on a private villa with its own deck and small infinity pool, and a view from sliding glass doors across palm-shaded lawns. The décor was standard up-market beach-resort fare: coral tile floors, a soaring roof with ceiling fan, plain cream-colored walls and upholstery in tones of



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sandy gold. There were some nice indigenous touches, though, like a carved teak-and-rattan settee and pair of chairs with curving armrests. A family of wild peacocks visited daily, including a preening male who seemed to like to admire his reflection in my windows.

The Bathroom

My villa's bathroom was enormous, with a free-standing tub (which I never used—the weather was too hot and humid for a soak) and a long double vanity leading to an open, tiled rainfall shower area. One wall of the bathroom had floor-to-ceiling windows looking over tropical flower beds, which I would have loved to enjoy while showering, but landscapers occasionally passing by with wheelbarrows made me self-con-

scious. Closing the slatted window shades felt like a shame.

Dining

The property opened with just two restaurants. Il Mare, set on a bluff overlooking the beach, serves upscale Italian cuisine like handmade pastas and herb-crusted tuna along with a Continental wine list. At the more informal Journeys, the menu changed daily to reflect a different culinary destination, though I preferred its permanent selection of traditional Sri Lankan dishes, like coconut-sauced prawns and local banana-leaf-baked fish. At the new beachfront Verele, dishes such as chili-spiced short rib and seafood yakitori are flame grilled and served beneath a pair of dome-shaped pavilions.



Since the end of Sri Lanka's 30-year civil war in 2009, hotel developers have been setting their sights on the country's beautiful beaches and unspoiled jungles. The Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle, above, was the first full-service resort to open in southern Sri Lanka, with private villas, infinity pools, a spa and beach cabanas. It recently added a third restaurant, the beachfront Verele.

Amenities

There is plenty of fabulousness: a 25-meter, chaise-lined swimming pool and 5,000-square-foot spa. There is also an alfresco lobby bar, a teaching kitchen for cooking classes, a surf shop, a gift boutique and a tennis court. Beachfront cabanas can be reserved for daytime lounging or private, torch-lit dining. Staff-driven golf carts and tuk-tuks can be summoned for transport around the resort—a boon in the midday heat.

Bottom Line

The first bells-and-whistles beach resort to open in southern Sri Lanka sets the bar high for other properties to follow.

SARAH GOLD

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