

# ESCAPE TO ANANTARA PEACE HAVEN TANGALLE RESORT

By Caroline Phillips



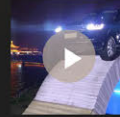
It's not often that there's a resort hotel that boasts an unusual welcome ceremony, a Nature Guru who's a conservationist with a Masters in Environmental Science, and a great Ayurvedic doctor too. I'll start with the first: a greeting that involves singing, drumming and three Sinhalese ladies in a lobby. That's the welcome I get at the Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort. I guess it means, "Hey! You've just arrived at a corker of a resort," or something like that. At any rate, that would be true.

Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort — let's just call it Anantara to save my word count — is on a rocky outcrop along a secluded stretch of Sri Lanka's southernmost coastline (under three hours' drive from Colombo), near the town of Tangalle. It's set in a former coconut plantation and with golden crescent, sun-drenched shores and Indian Ocean views. It's of a high-end design that pays tribute to the god of Sri Lankan architects, Geoffrey Bawa. It's also the country's first full-blown, bells and whistles waterfront resort. It's only since the 30-year civil war ended in 2009 that tourists and hoteliers have been returning to this tropical island, and Anantara was opened in 2015.



I kick off my Anantara experience with Edi (short for Ediriweera) Anuradha, the resort's Nature Guru. He takes me around the organic gardens and shows me an interesting thing or two: over there a chameleon agamid lizard camouflaged in the vegetation; and here, a saliva palace made by red ants between leaves — like a bag in which to keep their eggs. "That's a rain tree," he adds. "Or it's called a 5 o' clock tree because it's sensitive to light and its leaves close at five." He points out wild almonds, breadfruit, gardenia and passionflowers. And curry leaves for lowering

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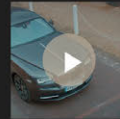
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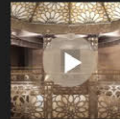
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cholesterol. He picks a leaf and squashes it in his fingers. "Any idea what it is?" he asks. I take a sniff. Cashew, obviously. (No, I didn't guess really.)

We stop near their paddy field for *beli*. Yup, this is a resort with its own paddy field. There we sip a herbal drink sweetened with *jaggery* (local cane sugar) and served in coconut husks. "It's good for the kidneys," Edi reveals. The paddy field itself has a yield of 450kg of organic rice which the resort folk give to the local community. They spray the paddy with neem. They're making breeding stations for dragonflies, the natural predators of mosquitos. They recycle grey water for the garden. At Anantara, they get enough environmental stars to make a firmament, they're so keen on saving the planet. They don't even use plastic straws.



They're also helping the turtles by working with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), observing the turtles over 100km of coastland. (Did you know turtles can stay underwater for up to 40 minutes? That they can sleep underwater? And that they can live to over 100? Or that turtles come up to the beach from January to October? Edi tells me all this and more). Guests contribute \$1US per room per night to this cause, and Anantara matches that.

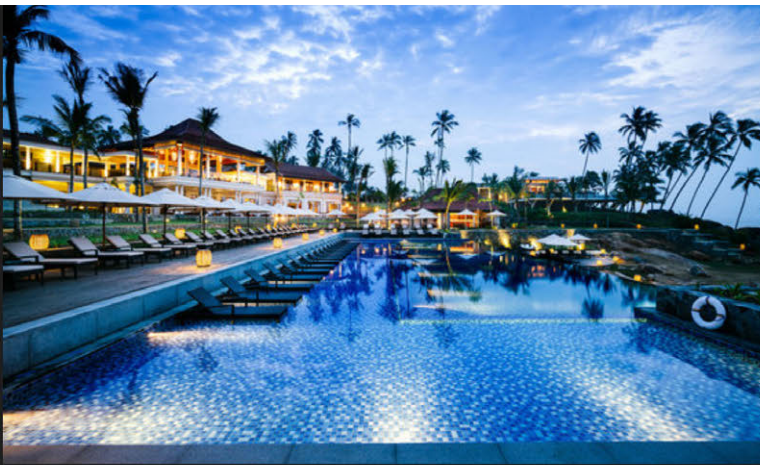
"There's a snake somewhere over there," Edi says, suddenly. "The birds are warning. It's a rattlesnake looking for birds' eggs. If it's a venomous snake, the birds make that huge sound."



The mangrove stream is certainly teeming with birdlife: there are a mere 70 different bird types on the property. They're big on wildlife around here. A notice nearby tells me to look out for otter, the Indian robin, rose-ringed parakeet, land monitors and an Indian flying fox (I'd like to see a fox flying but, annoyingly, it's otherwise known as the greater Indian fruit bat). I see peacocks, langur monkeys, parakeets and another guest saw a Malabar giant squirrel (it's rare).

Time to move on to the next interesting feature of the resort. A visit to Anantara wouldn't be complete without an appointment with Dr Thampi, its spa director cum Ayurvedic doctor from Kerala. We meet in his consultation room in the 5000-square foot spa to discuss the 5000-year old science of Ayurvedic healing. Dr Thampi hails from a family of healers (from his grandfather to his uncles) and says he "grew up in Ayurveda." He's charismatic, boasts high energy and is prone to dropping into conversation aphorisms such as, "Living is local, dying is universal" and "Don't look at what you're eating, look at what's eating you."





We talk about everything from his views on the energetic transfer that occurs when being treated on a wooden Ayurvedic massage table to my Dosha (or humours) and whether I'm big on wind (Sanskrit 'vāta'), bile ('pitta') or phlegm ('kapha'), and in what balance. (Turns out I'm a fiery pitta with some phlegm chucked in, since you ask.) He also gives me some lifestyle suggestions such as, "After cleansing bowels, take a spoon of coconut oil with a pinch of turmeric added" and the like.

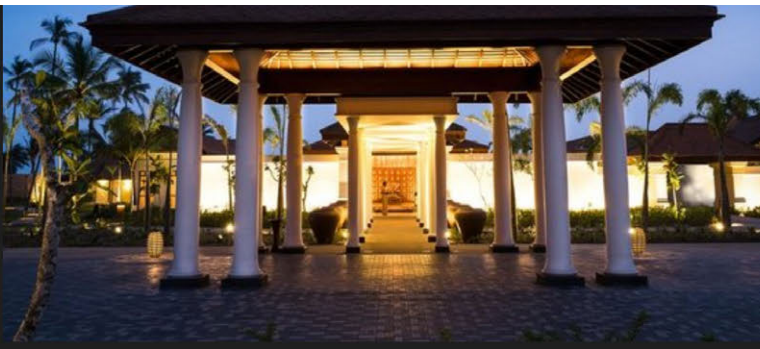
I guess you want to know about the rest of the resort. The amenities and all that stuff. Well, they're excellent. There's an ocean-sized infinity pool with sun loungers in the shallow end, to enable you to splash-cool your body with one hand whilst drinking a cocktail with the other. There are 152 rooms, pool villas and beach cabanas. I have a private Garden Pool Villa with its own wine humidor, desk and small plunge pool (there I go boasting) and a view from sliding doors across palm-fringed lawns. The villa comes with a third of a butler — or rather, an entire butler who is shared with three villas. And then there's that man in the sarong who appears in my garden just by my pool (did I tell you I have a private pool?) to see if I would like a drink: at which he will shin up the tree to pluck down a fresh coconut, juice in its original packaging.



Inside the villa, there's a king-sized bed and day bed. Fluffy pillows, a Bose sound system, Nespresso coffee machine, loose tea, bagged tea. I could go on. Actually, I will. Think also soaring ceiling and fan, cream walls and sandy and coral-coloured upholstery. And a bathroom that's the size of a small island, with a free-standing tub and a rainfall shower area and every last detail considered: from four types of soap and after-sun moisturiser to flip flops, two kinds of dressing gown (one cotton, one towel) and books in the loo.

And what of the food? My favourite is the Italian meal we have in Il Mare — handmade pasta, pizza straight from a brick oven, homemade focaccia and fresher-than-fresh grilled lobster. Their beachfront Verele restaurant offers cuisine that's (loosely based on) Teppanyaki: try the Lagoon prawns. Then there's Journeys, where it takes me 15 minutes to walk around ogling the ginormous breakfast buffet with its specialities that are Sri Lankan, Arab, British...from waffles to curry, tropical fruits to a gluten-free section and an impressive array of sugars including lemon sugar, cinnamon sugar and jaggery.





Sri Lanka is a fascinating island full of intense history, religion, beautiful scenery, elephant sanctuaries, wildlife parks with leopards. Oh, and tea plantations and pristine beaches and Buddhist temples. Still, there's not much point in leaving the resort when there's a therapist, Nandika, in the spa for a massage that sends me to heaven and beyond; friendly and helpful staff; and a charming GM who wanders around chatting to guests. Plus the Nature Guru and the Ayurvedic Doctor. To say I leave Anantara on Cloud 9 would be too low a number. And as I do, guess what? They perform a traditional farewell ceremony.

Nightly rates at Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort start from £185 for an Ocean View Room on a bed & breakfast basis. For more information about Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort, go to <https://tangalle.anantara.com>.

Caroline Phillips is an award-winning freelance journalist who contributes to publications from Sunday and daily newspapers to glossy magazines and various luxury websites. To see more of her work, go to [www.carolinephillips.net](http://www.carolinephillips.net).

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