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# ESCAPE TO THE PARK HOTEL CHENNAI

By Caroline Phillips

Think of a place of dreams that transports the viewer. Imagine its being in the erstwhile location of Gemini Studios, a leading Indian movie studio. Then picture somewhere that has cinematic themes incorporated in its décor. This is the five-star art-concept THE PARK hotel, Chennai (Madras). Its grand atrium is like walking on set, with its 'stage' the seating area — as if guests are part of the performance — plus there's a huge screen onto which movie images are projected silently as dusk falls.



Around the hotel there are film stills on walls, movie posters, and rugs that recall movie spools and the world of celluloid. Even the roof-top is an elaborately designed set with its tented and canopied sun-beds lit by giant arc lights around the pool, and where guests have sunset cocktails and sushi overlooking the cinemascape of the city. Everything in this 214-room hotel situated in the heart of Chennai has been inspired by films, performances and screen sets.

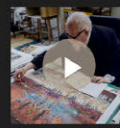


## VIDEOS



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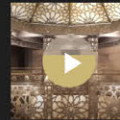
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Let's rewind to the opening sequence. On arrival — after a pre-performance welcome drink of pomegranate juice and a bite-size cheesecake — someone from the reception desk (or is it really a ticket office? And is he actually an usher?) leads me upstairs. The lift has theatre-style curtains against its walls. As for my suite, it has a cantilevered ceiling, polished plasterwork walls, marble floors and...and lights, take one, and action...there are original images of *Grahasti* (a Hindi family drama) being shot at Gemini Studios and a dramatic four-poster bed fit for a movie star.



Beside the bed, there's a surprise — the unexpected being a feature of the best screenplays — a test tube containing a gift of seeds: to encourage guests to plant trees. Behind another screen (this one's made of clear glass) is the bathroom. In it there's yet another unexpected twist in the plot — a little box of foot-care cream, luscious-lip-red nail enamel, and pure rosewater toner that smells like Ilsa's (Ingrid Bergman) love for Rick (Humphrey Bogart) in *Casablanca*. (Producer's note: it's Kama Ayurveda toner.)



Downstairs, at the breakfast buffet, there's an international film festival of foods: in one area, there are the eats that could be the Tamil blockbusters (local specialities such as green pea *paratha* [bread], Chennai lentil stew and rice and lentil kedgerree); over there are art house offerings (think fresh watermelon juice alongside *Karupati* [jaggery coffee] served in South Indian tin cups); then there's the La La Land breakfast screening (flax seeds, buckwheat and soya milk); and, finally, intermission snacks (of an ice cream bar and 'wall' of doughnuts). This is 601 — the hotel's 24-hour restaurant. (For those who want yet more world cinema, there is also the Lotus for Thai and A2, by the pool, for truffle parmesan fries to tempura).





Back in the lobby, you'll visit The Box, the hotel's shop. Does it sell theatre programmes, Maltesers and popcorn? Or screenplays and posters of movie stars? No, it boasts an eclectic and stylish collection of bags to necklaces to pop-up Ganesha cards, mango chutney and Rajsthani cushion covers — like a romance, adventure, drama and fantasy film rolled into one. The hand-painted papier-mâché figurines of a wedding party are a must-buy. My Big Fat Indian Wedding, surely?



## FURTHER INFORMATION

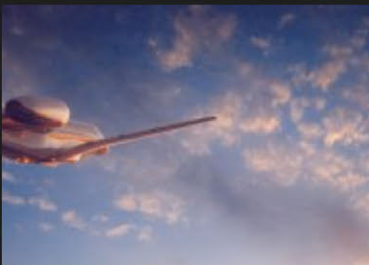
For further information, visit [www.theparkhotels.com](http://www.theparkhotels.com). The Park Chennai is 17 kilometres from the airport (approximately 40 minutes' drive). Hotel nightly double room Luxury Room rates per night are inclusive of breakfast, usage of swimming pool / fitness centre and complimentary Wifi from £160. Prices mentioned are exclusive of applicable taxes.

### Special Offer:

The Romantic Getaway package offers couples a luxurious stay at The Park Chennai inclusive of flowers and a celebratory cake on arrival, a specially curated candle-lit dinner by the poolside, complete with a premium selection of wines. This exclusive room package is priced at £285.

*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).*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEEK



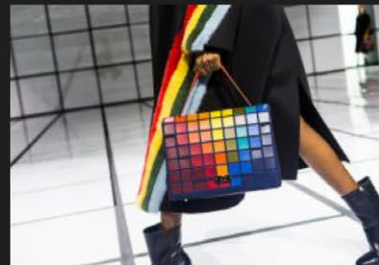
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