

SLEEPER

GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

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Keemala

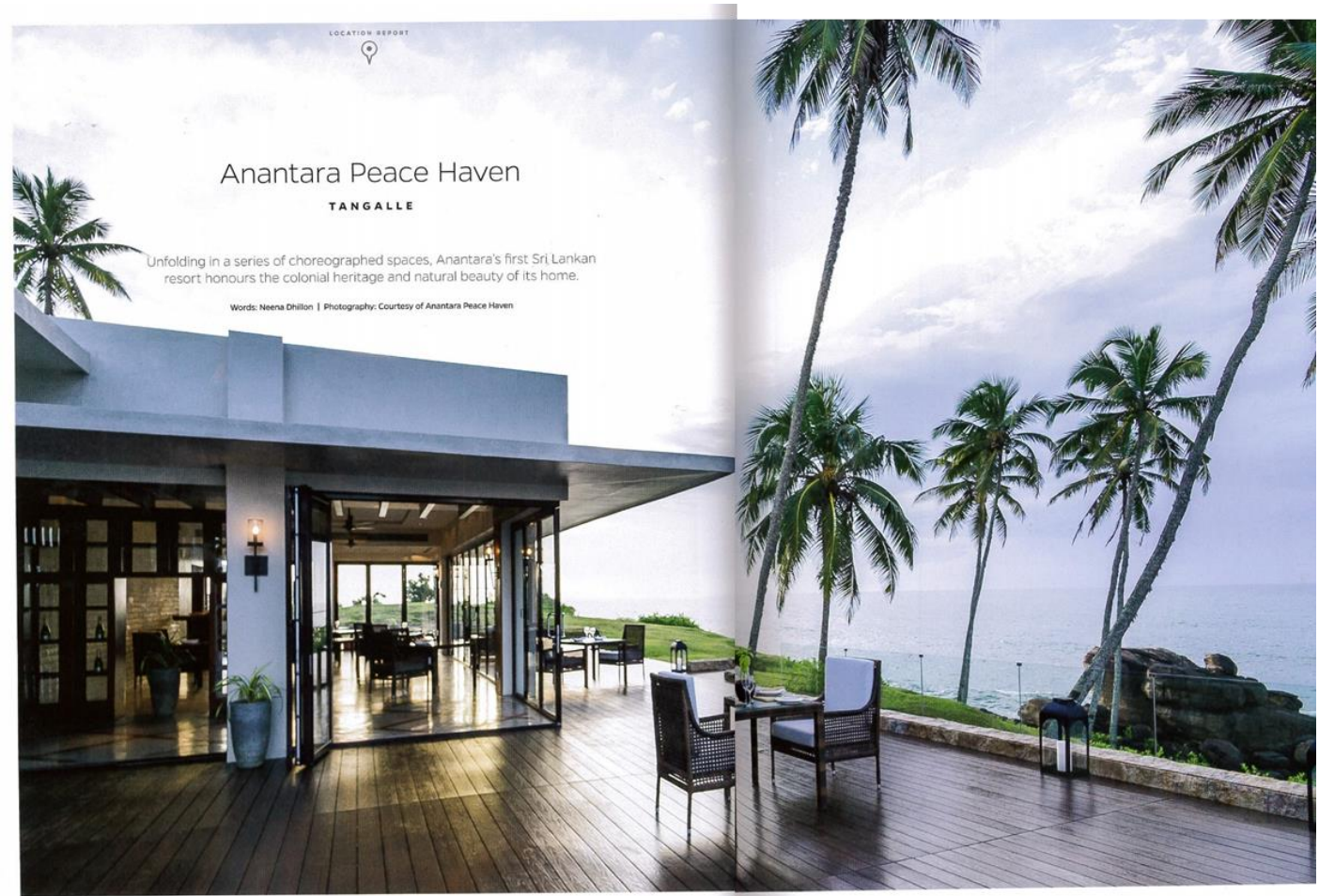
Boundary-pushing design comes to Thailand with a treetop wonderland in Phuket

Space Copenhagen

The Danish duo on introducing their Scandinavian design aesthetic to New York

Anantara Peace Haven

Anantara makes its Sri Lanka debut with a colonial inspired resort on the rugged south coast



LOCATION REPORT



Anantara Peace Haven

TANGALLE

Unfolding in a series of choreographed spaces, Anantara's first Sri Lankan resort honours the colonial heritage and natural beauty of its home.

Words: Neena Dhillon | Photography: Courtesy of Anantara Peace Haven



The opening up of Sri Lanka's ruggedly breathtaking southern coastline has much to do with the arrival of Anantara. Having anticipated that the southernmost shore was set to become an emerging travel destination, the brand's parent company, Minor Hotel Group, has invested US\$200 million in a joint venture with Sri Lankan firm Hemas to launch Anantara on the island nation, the investment divided between a full-service resort located in Tangalle, and a forthcoming sister property found closer to Colombo, in Kalutara. "As the first internationally branded resort to introduce an elevated standard of hospitality, luxuriously appointed rooms and villas, multiple dining options, destination experiences, the biggest spa in Sri Lanka – and with residences and a clubhouse to come – we are setting the benchmark," says Tamir Kobrin, General Manager of Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort. "We are genuinely invested in delivering local hospitality too; 98% of our staff are Sri Lankans and, of these, 25% are women."

Owned by Hemas for years, the Goyambokka coconut plantation, replete with swaying palms spilling down to a pristine beach dotted with rock formations, presented the ideal opportunity for development. In site planning, chosen architect WATG Singapore took its lead from the very conditions of the 21-acre plot, including the existence of a colonial manor house that has been retained and will be restored. "There were a number of natural elements that

helped mould the overall plan, most of all the spectacular views that the design team could envision being framed by future amenities and arrival buildings," explains Nora Kaichung Pui, Project Designer, WATG. "Keeping a large number of the existing coconut palms or relocating them on the property allowed the final destination to have a mature landscaped look and gave the colonial-inspired design of the resort a rooted and historic feel."

Aware of how much impact the sparkling turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean could have on guests, WATG has purposefully sequenced the arrival experience so that the resort unveils its bounty slowly, creating a sense of discovery. As the first point of entry, the arrival pavilion sets out the cornerstones of the "contemporary architectural language with refined colonial details and design elements linking the resort back to its past life," which the WATG team has woven throughout. The roof, constructed from flat clay tiles, in addition to teak columns call to mind regional colonial architecture. Titanium flooring, no stranger to the local vernacular as a result of its cooling properties, paves its way across the resort while teak latticework screens and carvings handcrafted onsite speak of local homes and temples. Antique oil lamps alongside bronzed metal statues gather atop teak chests (or 'Dutch boxes') while the Raban drum played by female musicians welcomes visitors and a bull cart stands poised to transport the native King coconut. As one-time colonial rulers in and





Above: Hosting cookery classes, Spice Spoons features brass and perspex lighting fixtures designed by Wimberly Interiors

around nearby Matara Fort, the Dutch influence remains tangible in historic houses. Anantara's custom-designed teak and cane furniture "represents a timeless interpretation of this authentic Dutch colonial style, taking a more contemporary approach in the lobby's seating vignettes, for instance, when compared to the library where a more traditional version is illustrated," says Christine McGinnis, Associate Vice President, Wimberly Interiors.

WATG, in partnership with its interiors studio, has chosen to replicate indigenous traditions and techniques for more than one reason, as Kaichung Pui observes: "With projects in remote locations, it is important to understand the local building methods and craftsmanship. There is the opportunity to create a design that boosts the economy through jobs. By employing regional craftsmen, we are able to infuse the unique arts and crafts of the destination into the overall approach. Importantly, this also helps to ensure that those executing the design are well-versed in construction and fabrication methods, thus avoiding issues of finishing quality."

Consistency of finish is evident as guests make their way through arrivals into the open-air lobby lounge where the ocean first makes its presence felt through framed vistas. From here, the dramatic double-level resort pool also reveals itself, embedded into a stepped landscape of locally quarried stone, lit at night with lanterns given rope and

bamboo accent finishes. Guestrooms too have been oriented to face out to the sea, each featuring a balcony, with interiors favouring a quiet palette of natural colours accented only by a deep grey-blue inspired by the ocean. Local handicrafts displayed as wall art and vintage photographs add a decorative touch while coconut accessories double as soap holders in bathrooms, all with separate cement-cut titanium clad oval tubs. The 32 freestanding villas are residential in nature, their high-pitched ceilings sheltering upholstered day beds and Dutch colonial furniture; the cane accent additionally woven into carved, columned headboards. Wall sconces are shaped as gold-hued coconut leaves while the evocative drawings of local resident and shop owner Barbara Sansoni convey scenes of Sri Lankan life in the 1960s and 70s. Large bathrooms here are finished with multi-coloured granite feature walls. Outdoor decks with private pools again reinforce the idea that interiors blend seamlessly with the external landscape, the lush vegetation and trees home to majestic peacocks, their mating calls a natural alarm clock, and a family of frolicking monkeys.

Dining venues benefit from a dash of individual character: Journeys, the all-day eatery displays hand-loomed cotton textile panels and a burnished copper border above the open kitchen. Intimate cellar El Vino and cookery kitchen Spice Spoons are installed



Above: The dramatic double-level pool is embedded into a stepped landscape of locally quarried stone, lit at night with lanterns with bamboo accent finishes

with colonial pearl granite cladding in combination with brass and perspex lighting fixtures designed by Wimberly. For beachside Verele, serving teppanyaki and Sri Lankan street food, as well as signature Italian restaurant Il Mare, variations on the resort's architectural language have been made. Verele's highly memorable and energetic structure, inspired by the form of a sea urchin, has not been seen in Sri Lanka before, its shape requiring the contractor to visit Dubai to learn more about unusual construction techniques. While the vibe here is playful, merging the indoor and outdoors, Il Mare ramps up the sophistication from its elevated position on a cliff edge. "As a one-of-a-kind destination within the resort, this restaurant is a much more contemporary design with very clean lines and large openings to allow for optimal views," explains Kaichung Pui. Appearing as a glamorous oceanside villa that would not look out of place in a James Bond film, Il Mare is sleekly understated, a symphony of white granite, teak wood beams, millwork and rattan furniture in a subdued palette, keeping the emphasis firmly on the expansive vista enjoyed from the generous outdoor deck.

As another standout location, the Anantara Spa complex benefits from a tranquil setting next to the site's natural lagoon, its roof lined with turf and pebbles, melting into the landscape. A ceremonial water court, around which cement urns hold displays of native water lilies, welcomes visitors. Latticework screen doors lead to a reception where teak pillars, decorative oil lamps with a bird motif and a display of natural Ayurvedic ingredients dominate. Reflective water pools characterise the relaxation areas, teak and cane chairs have floral flourishes, stone sculptures in treatment rooms adopt meditative poses and three-dimensional woodcarvings pay homage to the ancient art seen in Sri Lanka's most valued historic monument, Sigiriya. Returning closer to home, wall art made from coconut fibres is a reminder of the former plantation while modern evocations of traditional ceramics are oversized and crafted from metal.

At no time does Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort lose its sense of place. While interest is created by subtle changes of design rhythm, the narrative remains rooted in both the history and coastal charm of the original site.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT: 152 guestrooms and villas | 4 restaurants | 2 bars | Boardroom | Spa, gym, swimming pool | www.anantara.com
Owner: PH Resorts (joint venture between Hemas and Minor Hotel Group) | Operator: Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas | Architecture: WATG Singapore
Interior Design: Wimberly Interiors | Landscaping: Element Design Studio | Furniture Consultant: Raux Brothers