

Nothing to do, yet so much to do

Surya Samudra is a manmade paradise that is quintessentially Kerala



LOLLING IN LUXURY At Surya Samudra resort

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Eight-thirty in the evening. I am sitting at Madira, the outdoor bar. The sea is only a few paces away, but we are separated from it right now by darkness and drizzle.

The music playing at the bar is Latin, the bartender good-natured, the cocktails are fancy; we could be at any exotic, sea-kissed location in the world, a location far away from home, where you would earn a holiday to. But I am in my own backyard, in Kerala, at a resort called Surya Samudra near Thiruvananthapuram, enjoying world-class hospitality and the best that Nature can offer to a visitor to the tropics.

Nature, for that matter, is always offering spectacular things: it all depends on where we are at a given moment.

For example, there is nothing new about the sound of the waves crashing onto the sands, but when you listen to the same sounds from the comfort of a four-poster bed, ensconced in an old-fashioned cottage, the sound becomes a luxury. Similarly, there is nothing unusual about watching the sea, but when you do so from the verandah of the cottage, surrounded by manicured lawns

and thoughtfully-grown gardens, the same view of the sea becomes a luxury.

That's what resorts thrive on — packaging the ordinary into extraordinary and making your stay memorable. Surya Samudra, owned by Niraamaya Retreats, does a neat job of it because the moment you step into its premises, you are transported into a manmade paradise that is quintessentially Kerala and yet insulated enough to promise you exclusivity — a sort of place where time appears to be standing still. Which is why, even though I have been on my feet ever since I arrived here last morning, I get the feel of having done nothing. My stay began with a hearty breakfast at Samsara, the resort café that is set against a forested valley and offers a marvellous view of the swimming pool (carved out of rocks) and the sea beyond; followed by a foot massage at the spa, which, in hindsight, prepared my feet for a walk around the property — no mean feat.

The property, the story goes, was a barren hill until 1982, when Klaus Schleusener, a professor at IIT Madras, built a Kerala-style cottage on it and made it his winter abode. In 1986, it became a one-room hotel called Surya

Samudra, with more cottages and the café — and the 6,740 sq ft spa — added in the following decades.

I was to return to the spa this afternoon for a rejuvenating abhyanga massage, but not before a cruise — along with three fellow guests of the resort — on the Poovar estuary, right up to the Golden Sand Beach where the backwaters meets the sea. The cruise, through mangroves, would have been a bird-watcher's delight — kingfisher and egrets, to name some, meditated on branches protruding into the water, almost touching distance — but the icing on the cake was the picnic on the largely empty beach, where we had parasols over our heads and baskets containing sandwiches and chilled wine by our side.

You know you have started liking a place when, during the fag end of your stay, you find yourself asking, "Can't I spend a few more days here?" That's the question I am asking myself now, as I sit at Madira sipping my drink, to the sound of music — and to the sound of the sea and the drizzle.

(The writer was at Surya Samudra at the invitation of Niraamaya Retreats. For reservations and queries, visit niraamaya.in.)