



SURYA SAMUDRA, KOVALAM

HOTEL BY THE SEA

Past crowded highways leading to winding village roads, the journey from Thiruvananthapuram to Surya Samudra, Kovalam, of Niraamaya Retreats is just 20 km but it could as well be two different worlds.

The road, which branches off from the Pulinkudi village road, gradually narrowed to allow just one vehicle and ended at a wooden gate which didn't look much. But once past it, the outside world just fell away and it felt like being in a cocoon, with the distinct and rather high-pitched roar of the seafloor.

Spread over a sprawling incline, the luxury resort is full of lush greenery with winding stone paths that lead

to beautiful wooden cottages, over 30 of them, that dot the landscape and are all built in traditional Kerala heritage style. It is absolutely blissful to just lounge on a hammock or chair, and let the sound of the majestic Arabian Sea work its magic. Early in the morning, it seemed apt to try some simple *asanas* at the beautifully located yoga platforms facing the sea. Mid-morning was the ideal time for a leisurely deep-tissue massage at the beautiful spa (which won a best spa award in 2015). The petite therapist coaxed and cajoled away nagging pains and knots and left the body relaxed and rejuvenated.

Afternoon, it felt right to head out a bit and cruise the

backwaters around Poovar, ultimately reaching the sandy shores where they met the sea. But as the sun went down, the resort and its soothing environs seemed the best place to watch the sun paint the water and the sky in brilliant colours before darkness descended.

In between the walks, yoga and outing sessions, the brilliant chef, Prakash Nayak, dished up some absolute stunners to keep the palate on a constant high. (The resort does not believe in the buffet concept, and every meal is *a la carte*, including breakfast.) A veritable *sadya*-style feast in a *thali*, fabulous fish and prawn curry with red rice, lacy *appams* and flaky Kerala *parotas* with *ulli theeyal*

(tangy curry of shallots) and vegetable stew, and even fluffy *phulkas* and home-style *dal*. Each meal ended with an equally stunning dessert platter though the *ragi* brownie just blew my mind. And just so visitors can choose to mark a special occasion, the resort also organises romantic, candle-lit dinners by the pool or on the beach, according to one's choice.

—Anita Rao Kashi

NAVIGATOR

Go there for A wellness retreat

Address Pulinkudi, Mullur PO, Thiruvananthapuram-695521

Reservations (080) 4510 4510; reservations@niraamaya.in

Website www.niraamaya.in

Tariff Summer rates-₹10,000 per night; winter rates-₹20,000 per night