

Fam Trip	
Publication	New Indian Express (Indulge)
Date	8th Jan 2010
Page No	29



The Pongal retreat

Colonial bungalows, plunge pools and cultural offerings — Heritance Madurai plans to make 'quiet' weekends addictive



N EIGHT-HOUR journey by cab from Chennai to Madurai can leave anybody tired, but the 'resort in the city', the year-old Heritance Madurai at Kochadai, makes the long drive worth it. A good option if you are looking for a quiet yet fulfilling weekend getaway, this resort is the first in India from Aitken Spence Hotel.

Spread over 17 acres of land, the place used to be the British Madurai Club, with the Club House designed by the world-renowned architect, Geoffrey Bawa. It has since been restored, and I love how the key elements of Bawa's space — the stone pillars, roof and flooring — have been left relatively untouched. The pillars and floors have been redone, yes, but with granite of

the same colour sourced from the quarry as used in the original. This attention to detail retains the old world charm of the place.

When you get to the resort, expect to be impressed by the very entrance to the lobby — the porch has decorative 18th century Chettinad columns from Karaikudi, as there is an intricate antique door that forms a backdrop to the area. All furniture here is teak. You will also find yourself spending a lot of time in or by the pool — the 'temple pool', inspired by the tank at the Thirumaya temple in Chettinad, has a lovely banyan tree providing shade and a serene backdrop.

Checking into a luxury villa suite, at around tea time, I decide to head down to the coffee shop right away. The space is prettily lit with lanterns, and I settle down to a cup of south Indian coffee and some *samosas*. I learn that the multi-cuisine restaurant is most popular for its Sri Lankan and Chettinad fare. Energy levels recharged,

I set out to explore the resort on a buggy, stopping by the 48 different villas — luxury, junior, deluxe and standard varieties. The resort plans to expand its accommodation up to 81 villas, I'm told.

Coming up

Don't miss the old colonial bungalows that have been refurbished. Each suite has five air conditioned rooms, with individual plunge pools, LCD TVs, tea and coffee makers, a mini bar and piped music. Also on the anvil is an eight-bed spa, Svasthi, and a gym.

Thirst busters

The Swig & Tee Bar at the resort serves up delightful mocktails and cocktails. Their signature offerings — Swig Martini and Throughout Month are prepared from a blend of five fruits.

Need to know

Best time to visit: March to July, apart from Christmas and New Year and the festive season. The resort is cashing in on summer vacations when even the locals check in for an average of two days and a night. With Madurai being a tourist hotspot, expatriates are regulars here. Room rates begin at Rs 4,000 a night. Details: 0452 2385455 or log on to www.heritancehotels.com

Activity zone

The resort is introducing an exclusive package shortly to promote the state's rich cultural heritage. This would include a tour of Madurai and Chettinadu, as well as fun workshops on drawing *kolams*, making garlands, wearing saris and *dhotis*, making and applying *mehendi* etc.

— Shankaran Malini
indulge@expressbuzz.com



SAVE THIS
11, Melakkal Main Road, Kochadai, Madurai 625018
Details: 0452 2385455