Cloistered In Green

Posted on



Nature surrounds the retreat on every side

The mere mention of Unawatuna, like many of the Southern Coast’s pristine beaches, conjures images of hot sun and, if the season is right, heaps of tourists. Not even half a kilometre inland, the Thambapanni Retreat nestled in bamboo forests is a far cry from the usual beachside accommodations. Tall trees make it an oasis for those inclined towards nature, interested in a cool and calming environment.

Words Benjamin Fowler

The first thing that one might notice at the Thambapanni Retreat is the abundance

of greenery at every turn. The property blends effortlessly into the verdant surroundings, nestled snuggly into Unawatuna’s massive Rumassala Rock. Though not even a kilometre away from the beach and busy roads, the air is filled with the noises of chirping birds rather than car horns. It’s truly a retreat in every sense of the word – and the numerous therapeutic facilities lure you deeper into blissful relaxation.

The Retreat’s main building is an inviting, cozy peach colour, and seems like it only has walls when absolutely necessary – the dining area has an unobstructed view of nature, which in this case is bamboo trees and flowering plants that hang over the pool. The large tiles on the floor are both practical and elegant, the stones maintaining coolness while embedded stars and diamonds add sophistication to the walkways.

Utterly surrounded by green, the open air eating area allows you to breathe deep the fragrant, tropical air while you eat food prepared by a master chef well-versed in Western and Asian cuisine, infusing both with ancient Ayurvedic touches. The architecture is also a tasteful blend of tropical Asian and colonial styles, made all the more charming by Art Deco flourishes.

This is most evident one storey up, in the yoga room. The peach columns that at best imply a wall, are sandwiched between the floor’s cool stone tiles and the dark wood of the ceiling. The peach sections are accented with white lines and elaborately detailed wooden columns.

The arrangement of buildings is irregular, but true to the contours of the mountain. We wind our way past the buildings and find ourselves confronted with nature at every turn until we arrive at a courtyard with high walls entirely composed of stone. It’s quiet and still, and consists of a simple stone throne and a pedestal in the centre on which sits a large, white bowl filled with colourful flowers. It is simple and striking, and functions almost like a lobby for the variety of therapeutic options that await you on the other side.

The stairwell to the spas is actually just rocks naturally jutting out from the mountainside. In fact, when the spas are in use, water is circulated down the rocks, creating a waterfall that seamlessly makes its way down to the stone courtyard.

At Thambapanni Retreat, aside from the Ayuvedic spa, you’ll also find a massage centre, a sauna and the open-aired yoga room that overlooks much of the property.

In fact, many of the Retreat’s facilities are open to nature, taking maximum usage of the shade to keep things cool. A tree grows through the massage centre, right by the table. Many of the rooms were built around the natural trees and boulders, incorporating them into the design.

Leaves and vines lay strewn over many of the roofs and awnings at the resort. Rather than clean them off, the resort keeps them where they are, maintaining that connection with the environment. This makes the property seem like its intertwined with nature rather than merely surrounded by it. The monkeys bounding around the trees certainly add to this effect, as do the friendly rabbits.

Most of the accommodation are found in the tower, a four-storey structure at the Retreat’s highest point. That it’s barely visible from the rest of the property is testament to how much tree cover there really is, and how little of a footprint was made in the construction of the place. Concrete stairs with inset diamond-shaped tiles take you up to the different suites. Each floor of the tower is its own suite, complete with a balcony that has furniture and hammocks. The ocean is visible from the top, and its hard to believe somewhere so shady, cool and isolated could be so close to the beach.

Thambapanni Retreat

Unawatuna

Tel: (+94 91) 223 4588

info@thambapannileisure.com

thambapannileisure.com

[nggallery id=272]