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Grand colonial style of The Sanchaya, main; the spa, above left; airy suite with views, above; canopied day-beds by the beach, above right

It's breakfast time at The Sanchaya, a petite and wonderfully atmospheric property on Bintan Island, a ferry hop southeast from Singapore, and part of Indonesia's Riau Islands province. A staff member is slowly circling tables, carrying a basket in a shoulder sling arrayed with jamu tonics made from spices and roots such as ginger and galangal. A purging hit of turmeric and lemongrass, perhaps? I opt for a metabolic kick-starter because what I don't want to risk at this beachside holiday hideaway is sipping anything that will make me even more relaxed. There are beach walks to stay awake for and appointments for treatments with spa director and reiki master Ria Cantle; there's no point in dozing through a coconut hair mask and nurturing face mask with Australia's peerless Sodashi products.

I have been up since dawn, sipping coffee on my private first-floor veranda, which would not look out of place at Raffles Singapore. The style here is all very breezy, in a palette of white and black, and while The Sanchaya, which opened in 2014, is not an original example of colonial architecture, all the recognisable elements are present and correct, from colonnades and palms to wicker furniture, rattan blinds, ceiling fans and floors patterned with Peranakan encaustic tiles. It would seem very possible, after a few sips of jamu, that the likes of Noel Coward or Somerset Maugham could appear, slow-motion visions in creamy linen and rakish straw hats.

The Great House, with nine suites above and communal facilities below, is the sprawling centrepiece of the estate, which covers about 10ha and also features satellite villas with one, two or three bedrooms spread through glossy grounds, plus Vanda Villa, a palatial four-bedroom stunner with private pool. These free-standing options look rather like the heritage black and white houses of Singapore, with over-hanging roofs, architectural features of the arts and crafts movement, and shuttered windows buttoned up against the sun.

Everything at The Sanchaya is angled towards a long white beach with serried rows of palms, past a 50m-long aquamarine-tiled pool, and with many seating options, from umbrella-shaded loungers to canopied day-beds. It's a mesmerising view of the Singapore Strait and, as I dawdle, an attendant brings a basket containing water distilled on site, sunscreen and chilled refresher towels. He has also included a menu because it has been at least an hour since my last meal.

The hotel's Russian-born and Singapore-based owner and CEO, Natalya Pavchinskaya, is also a film producer, most recently involved with *Hotel Mumbai*. She has clearly stamped her personal and flamboyant style on the public areas. Sanchaya means collection in Sanskrit and the series of salons are wonderlands of studded Chesterfields, chandeliers, objets-d'art, stacks of coffee-table books and mirrors. Furniture styles, all handcrafted in Indonesia, range from French empire to vintage oriental, while decorative items, also found in suites and hallways, include gongs, oversized ginger jars, fine ceramics, maps and nautical instruments. It all references the age of exploration, a recreation of the 18th-century era of the Grand Tour, albeit of Asia, not Europe. Armoires and glass-fronted cabinets hold celadon bowls, iron teapots and heavy old bells. Humble kitchen utensils, worn and bent, have been given new life as wall hangings and potted white orchids are positioned at every turn.



IN THE RIGHT PLACE

A breezy getaway off sultry Singapore

SUSAN KUROSAWA

of being in a small museum, it's all madly comfortable and feels far removed from the identikit design of many contemporary lodgings. Staff refer to the hotel as an estate, which speaks of the scale, scope and plantation feel. About 30 gardeners attend the lawns and plantings of magenta bougainvillea, white spider lilies with leggy tentacles and brightly flowering vines. This busy brigade also maintains flourishing vegetable and herb patches.

My suite, No 6, is the size of an apartment and deeply comfortable. There's a Bang & Olufsen TV and sound system, roll-top bathtub with claw feet, complimentary mini-bar, coffee machine and quality teas. The generous cargo of Aesop toiletries is a treat, the furnishings immaculate, the parquet floors just perfect in this environment, but what most appeals is that veranda, reached via French doors, set with a lounge and black wicker table and chairs. From this vantage point, as airy as a birdcage, it's apparent how the verticals of slender trees align with the columns and uprights of the resort. Even the black and white striped paper straws in soft drinks and mocktails mimic the unified design.

Tanasee Grill by the pool opens for dinner and serves spicy Thai, Indonesian and Vietnamese specialities in a semi-outdoors setting. Crispy fried soft shell crab in a yellow curry sauce? Yes, please. But first, wide-smiling Nita appears, holding a round tray set with dim sum baskets and a big silver scoop at the ready. "We have four varieties of rice tonight," she announces. "There's turmeric, pandan, jasmine or brown ..." For such a small

IN THE KNOW

Book direct for best rates and seasonal deals such as early check-in, late checkout and IDR500,000 (\$50) credit per room. Ferries depart from Tanah Merah terminal near Changi airport for the one-hour crossing; The Sanchaya has an exclusive arrivals and departure lounge, express immigration service and transfer vehicles on Bintan Island. The Gary Player-designed 27-hole Ria Bintan golf resort is nearby; there are nocturnal mangrove excursions to spot fireflies, jungle walks and watersports activities. Consider a donation to the Mr Morris Foundation, The Sanchaya's philanthropic initiative on Bintan Island named for the resort's black and white striped cat toy mascot, or ask to visit the care project. It comprises an orphanage, home for the elderly, a school with a scholarship scheme for further education, and medical centre.

■ thesanchaya.com
■ mrmorris.org

weight when it comes to menu variety and clever extras. Bread and pastries are baked in-house, including excellent brioche and sourdough; smoothies of spinach and coconut or papaya and calamansi lime surpass the usual blends. How about a breakfast starter of poached Tasmanian pear in a light organic palm nectar and aniseed syrup and an iced mint and lychee tea. At lunch, as a pick-up after pool-lounging, a wellness shot of orange and passionfruit. Ice cream? I give you coconut, tamarind, mango, honey, black sesame plus the chef's whimsy of the day.

The Dining Room belies its penny-plain name with decor as groovy as any restaurant in Singapore or Seminyak. When side dishes are as diverse as potato chips with truffle mayonnaise or fried morning glory with shrimp chilli paste and crispy garlic, you are in for a diverse offering. There's an Italian emphasis, thanks to the homeland influences of executive chef Giacomo Turzo, and plenty of Indonesian staples designed to share. In the opposite wing, The Bar is clubby, leathery, the spot for cigars, shisha pipes and cocktails created tableside, shaken, rattled and foamed by mixologist Andreas, who uses barrel-aged rum and top gins such as Monkey 47. A Vesper martini is de rigueur.

Dutch-born Jeroen L'abee has been the estate sommelier and fromager for more than two years and his cheese and wine pairings in The Decanter, a snug space lined with glass-fronted wine fridges and featuring fine Riedel glassware, are hugely educational and enjoyable. Sit at a long table and learn why a manchego is best enjoyed with a tempranillo and a camembert teams nicely with a late-picked riesling. Then, Magnus Olvson, the ebullient general manager, appears unsummoned and whispers there might just be time for a little lie-down before dinner.

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