



# Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore Hedonism Galore

By Devanshi Mody



The IT boom set Bangalore bang in the centre of international cyber cool. Bangalore has the bang and the lore and far from “bangalore,” it feeds hedonism galore. Heightening the hedonism is India’s very first Ritz-Carlton.

It hasn’t banged on about its presence. Indeed, I discovered it quite fortuitously, when a hotel I was to visit bungled their airport transfer, leaving me stranded at the airport. There, savvy young Saurabh Bharti, Ritz-Carlton’s Guest Relations agent, noted this damsel-in-distress and gallantly intervened. Over an hour, whilst Saurabh tracked another hotel’s errant airport transfer, he duly dazzled me with the glories of his own hotel. I could not but check into the most booming new address in town.

I’m bang on time for the launch of the searing-sexy, soaring rooftop bar, Bang, that opened with, well, a bang (for want of a more explosive expression). Under blazing stars, a bonfire crackled, contoured by sleek white seats. Hot young things, sizzingly skimpy, kept up the temperatures, whilst thumping music maintained the tempo (much to the chagrin of guests trying to sleep on the musically porous floors below). There were cabanas to canoodle in over teetotaler mixologist Manu’s cocktails. Illusions created by clever use of light, including the surrounding city reflected in glass, furred round the bonfire, and scintillating lights streaked across the floor that looked like rising steps, leaving you light-headed in every sense.

No illusion, though, the ubiquitous artwork, no less than 1,280 pieces, made this hotel a live-in art gallery. Light fixtures that struck down like crystal rain or fell like snow drops or tumbled like silver curls made for an enlightening experience.

Yet the hotel’s signature and pervasive decorative motif was the jaali, an interlaced intricacy of grill. In metal or wood, contemporary geometric patterns abounded with oriental teak filigree doors, windows and glass panels, whilst even cement acquired chic when finely fashioned, as on the hotel’s facade.

Suites have bathrooms stretched along their length that are a combination of walk-in wardrobe, closet, shower-corner and marbled white space, where an ample bathtub reigns. Suites come with Asprey





toiletries, much artwork and access to the Club Lounge, with its framed splashes of colour and fab South Indian filter coffee, unless you prefer Illy.

A superfluity of food and beverage options is the norm nowadays, and the Ritz-Carlton's inordinate selection seems commensurate with its staggering artwork. In addition to sky-rocketing Bang, there's the Ritz-Carlton Bar, whose swinging sofas, exotic elegance and discretion I prefer, although actually I go there for the deviled cashew nuts. There's also zingy Lantern Bar, which partakes of the three-tiered Lantern restaurant, specialising in delicate dim sums to be had on swank alfresco terraces. The hotel's designers didn't bottle up their creativity when they arrayed beautiful glass bottles across all-day dining at The Market. There, Executive Chef Anupam Banerjee buzzes over bubbly Sunday brunches. If you missed the fluffy idlis and dapper dosas at breakfast, make up with brunch-time mezzes, including suave mushroom paté and go-on-have-more green curry. But don't glut on green curry if you're dining at Riwarz, where a banquet unleashed at my table. Young Chef Ramandeep Kukreja presents fat, flavoursome bakarkhani bread that takes 14 hours to ferment, and dal makhani that requires 20 hours to acquire its unction. Chef's repertory of North-West Frontier specialities includes supple mushroom kebabs and sumptuous Kashmiri-mushroomed Kandahari bharwan guchi curry.



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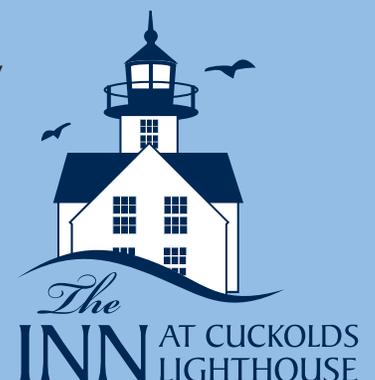


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After obscenely wallowing in all of these, I can but manage slender slices of iced saffron kulfi, studded with pistachios and almonds--alas.

I'd planned to luxuriate in a cabana at the Poolside Bar, over a panini (made fresh with basil pesto, tomatoes and aubergines, all from Chef Banerjee's herb garden). But Carlos from Rossano Ferretti would have none of it! The hair-dressers who play with Angelina Jolie and Kate Middleton's tresses have now established themselves exclusively in India at the Ritz-Carlton. Carlos relates, as his fingers and scissors dance in ellipses over my hair, that Ferretti began cutting hair at 14,

became Vidal Sassoon's protégé and his sole approved successor. But I'm more amused by the gossip that whilst the Los Angeles salon has clandestine entrances for Hollywood stars, the London branch, where Carlos worked, obliges queen-in-waiting, Kate Middleton, to walk an entire four meters of common ground to have her hair done at RF's.

Carlos would continue, but dash I must to the spa, Espa, for chokka. They cannot accommodate a full-fledged body ritual, comprising scrubs and seaweed wraps, but I manage a Radiance Facial that Philippine therapist Anna does excellently, followed by the

signature four-hand Jaali massage for which must-book-with Thai therapist Pai joins Anna. As they effect smooth, soothing tracteries over my body, I would lull, except that I'm tickled by tales the therapists tell of old men. Spa-ctacularly naughty!

I bolt from the spa, not because I'm alarmed by the hilarious stories, but

because it's that time of the afternoon for something naugh-tea; what else but afternoon tea that the Ritz-Carlton does so delightfully, always, everywhere? Sadly, the order takes its time to arrive, allowing me but a nibble of superb scones and sandwiches. The three-tiered platter's pastried pinnacles I never attain, having to make a loftier journey – my flight!