

INDIA

Vivanta by Taj - Bekal, Kappil Beach, Kerala

Bringing a dash of secluded style to the northern backwaters of Kerala, the latest addition to India's Vivanta by Taj brand is well worth the two-hour drive from the airport at Mangalore, just across the state border in neighboring Karnataka. The 71-villa retreat is set behind Kappil Beach on luxuriant grounds overlooking a placid, palm-fringed river, which guests can explore by kayak or by foot along waterside trails. Roofs and awnings of hand-woven bamboo reference traditional *kettuvallam* houseboats, while inside the laterite-clad villas, rooms are decorated with wall murals inspired by *chitra pothi* (palm leaf) art; the most covetable units come with private courtyards and plunge pools. At Latitude, the resort's main restaurant, chef Valentine Athaide Latitude is at his best with Keralan dishes such as a tangy *karimeen* fish fried in banana leaves. The heart of the property, however, is the 15,000-square-meter Jiva Grande Spa, which features yoga and meditation pavilions, ornamental ponds, and a dedicated Ayurveda facility with a comprehensive menu of treatments. Try the Vishrama, a deep muscle massage that uses essential oils of eucalyptus, Indian ginseng, sesame, and camphor.

Bekal; 91-467/661-6612; vivantabytaj.com; doubles from US\$282



CAMBODIA

Maison Polanka, Siem Reap

Hidden behind Wat Polanka in a quiet residential quarter northeast of town, Maison Polanka is the former family home of Cambodian-French woman Nathalie Saphon Ridel, who has converted the main house into a four-room inn filled with vintage furniture, Khmer artifacts, and pieces by local artists. The estate also features the Khmer House, a traditional stilted dwelling relocated here from a rural village; upstairs is an open-plan suite, while on ground level, an alfresco living room comes complete with a pair of bicycles for trips up the road to

Angkor Wat. Meals, served in a poolside pavilion, are straight from Saphon Ridel's family recipe book of French and Khmer dishes.

Upper East River Rd.; 855-12/499-810; maisonpolanka.com; doubles from US\$120, exclusive use from US\$900

SUITE STUFF

A pool villa at Vivanta by Taj - Bekal, above. Below: The airy dining pavilion at Maison Polanka in Siem Reap. Opposite: One of the 20 smart rooms at the Georges Hotel.



TURKEY

Georges Hotel, Istanbul

Opened late last year by a French lawyer turned hotelier Alexandre Varlik, this meticulously refurbished 1890s apartment building in Istanbul's storied Galata area features 20 sleek rooms, most with bijou balconies that confer splendid views toward the Bosphorus. Interiors feature exposed brickwork, handcrafted desks of Brazilian rosewood, parquet flooring, black-marble bathrooms, and excellent soundproofing—a necessity in a city crowded with honking traffic and minarets. Other thoughtful in-room touches include Nespresso machines and yoga mats (private yoga sessions can also be arranged). The rooftop terrace offers Galata's most jaw-dropping panorama, while downstairs, petite lobby restaurant Le Fumoir is the best dining room in the neighborhood, with a wraparound leather banquette, a brass-embellished bar, and a French menu highlighted by entrecôte and a decadent chocolate mousse.

Serdar-I Ekrem Sokak 24, Galata; 90-212/244-2423; georghotel.com; doubles from US\$215



COURTESY OF VIVANTA BY TAJ - BEKAL; COURTESY OF MAISON POLANKA. OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF GEORGES HOTEL