

## Tantalising Tanjore

If you are a lover of all things related to heritage and culture, then a visit to Svatma—Thanjavur's (or Tanjore's) first luxury heritage property is a must.

**Bindu Gopal Rao** finds out how Svatma (which means 'one's own soul') blends almost seamlessly into the culturally rich city of Tanjore.

### Take a Wander

Krithika Subrahmanian, Svatma's founder, says the design of Svatma is all blending art, history, and culture. "I delved into the wealth of vernacular architectural traditions and analysed what gave energy to these forms since the conceptualizing of these monumental structures could never have been a chance idea," she explains.



So naturally there are no standard rooms in this property, and each of the thirty-eight rooms is unique. Notably, the seven rooms in the heritage building, which was built as an elite family residence over a hundred years ago, have been carefully restored. The rest of the accommodation is designed to resemble private rooms within a large elegant family home, with verandahs, hallways, and lounge spaces that each are designed to connect with individual personalities.

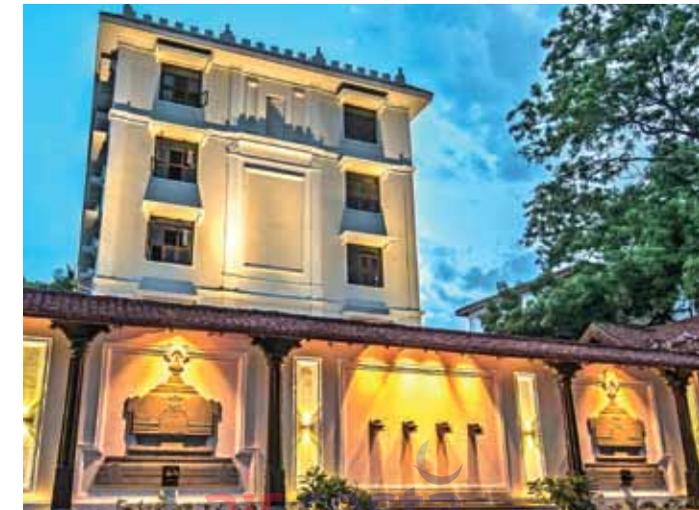
### Relax For a While

The resort's gym and yoga centre aptly called Arogyam is manned by experienced tutors who guide you to do both asanas and meditation. If in need of relaxation, head to Soukyam, the luxury spa that has four private treatment rooms as well as a relaxation area for foot and shoulder massages. The swimming pool is fitted with Jacuzzi and lounges for

relaxation. Conferencing facilities include Divyam a 250-seater hall with a colonial-ambience and Gautama, the main hall of the heritage building for smaller groups. The city of Tanjore is a shoppers' delight and Svatma reflects this with their in-house store, Sri, that has a carefully curated collection of ecologically sensitive products and antiques.

### Eat Something Delicious

Svatma offers traditional Tamil vegetarian fare and you can try this at any of their three outlets. At Palaharam, sample gourmet smacks and some traditional coffee made using a special hand-poured filter. Aharam is the all-day in-house restaurant whose unique menu will take you on a culinary journey of Tamil Nadu. You must try their exclusive bouquet of plated organic mini-meals that are aimed at waistline-watchers who still love experimenting with food. At Nila, you can experience dining under



the stars in the terraced rooftop restaurant in a manner similar to the dinner habits of the zamindars of yesteryear.

### Try Something Different

Svatma offers cooking lessons in the special guest experience kitchen where chefs personally teach guests to simple vegetarian food that's nutritious and delicious. If interested in arts, there's the option to attend the bronze casting demonstration of the famous 'lost wax technique' by master craftsmen, which is a speciality of the region. For spiritual satiation, check out the chanting of the Vedas by priests with the inherent meanings explained. If music appeals, attend traditional Carnatic music concerts—hearing the discussion of how moods change with ragaa renditions is a must. There is also a demonstration of Bharatanatyam by proficient dancers. Guests can have the resort organize a visit to temple site with an academic expert

who will take them through the restoration, architecture and iconography. Likewise there are also sessions demonstrating handloom weaving and wearing techniques, and the famed Tanjavur painting technique with gem stones inlay work.

### Look Around You

The great Living Chola temples in Tamil Nadu are UNESCO World Heritage Monuments, so start with the finest specimen of temple architecture, the Brihadeeswarar temple. Called the 'Big Temple', the majestic structure dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Located in its sprawling complex is the Saraswati Mahal Library which houses over 30,000 Indian and European manuscripts. The Thanjavur Art Gallery in the Nayak Durbar Hall of the palace complex is a repository of bronze and stone sculptures from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century.

You can also visit the state handicrafts centre Poompuhar to pick up the Tanjore paintings

and a range of souvenirs. If you have the time you can also visit the nearby towns of Thiruvaiyaru, a town known for its music, Tiruvarur, once the capital of the Chola empire, Chittanavasal Cave known for its murals, Thirueeyachur Temple and the town of Kumbakonam for its myriad temples. So pack your bags and experience this little paradise for yourself... ■

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