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July 2016

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JULY 2016

# Heritage Retreat

Within the whitewashed walls of Anantara Angkor Resort & Spa is an oasis full of Cambodian charm and where tailored service prevails. **Chong Seow Wei** checks in



**SCENE STEALER** A moonlight feast at the resort is tailored to discerning palates and sets the mood for romance



**IN CLOSE PROXIMITY** Anantara Angkor Resort is located less than 10min drive from the airport and no more than 20min to the city's busy downtown strip and world-famous archaeological sites

**W**HILE THE MIGHTY Angkor Wat temple and its surrounding Angkor make up the charm of Siem Reap, it is the touching stories of the Cambodian town that add richness to its history.

For instance, word has it that the Anantara Angkor Resort & Spa, a boutique hotel where I was invited to stay, was born out of a Cambodian military general's love for his wife. He wanted to present it to her on her 50th birthday seven years ago and had built it to resemble a grand Khmer villa replete with elements that illustrate the history and culture surrounding it. As a nod to its enchanting locale, an aerial view of the resort's layout reflects the silhouette of the Angkor Wat.

The resort is also peppered with womanly touches, such as the sandstone sculpture next to the saltwater swimming pool, featuring a mother cuddling her child in her arms. After the general's wife allegedly expressed her dissatisfaction with calling a hotel her home,

the 39-room retreat changed hands twice before becoming part of the Anantara brand.

Upon my arrival at the resort, I was greeted by the soothing sounds of flowing water, which in Cambodian folklore is said to represent fertility, birth and new beginnings. I was then ushered into a warmly lit, lemongrass-scented spa for a quick welcome foot scrub. I returned to the spa the next day and was almost lulled to sleep as my massage therapist skilfully worked away the knotted muscles in my shoulders and back.

They say the way to a woman's heart is through her stomach, and the resort's private dining concept, Dining by Design, aims to win hearts. You can tailor your own menu of gourmet meals and also choose from two venues: a quiet spot within the hotel, or a traditional residence at a nearby village. You will also have a personal chef and butler at your service.

A heavy downpour, however, halted any plans I had to dine under the stars at the resort's well-manicured courtyard. So instead, I partook of the five-course dinner at The Sothea, the resort's main dining room. Beneath impressive brass chandeliers modelled after Khmer Buddhist umbrellas, where service was on point and food so tantalising, I found myself falling in love with Cambodian cuisine at first bite.

The ideal setting to savour your meal for Dining by Design is, of course, inside a 90-year-old Khmer wooden house a 10min drive away. The house, which was relocated from the banks of the Siem Reap River, has been rejuvenated to feature an art deco-style living room and an unparalleled view of the peaceful countryside. ☪