

HOTELS

The Aviary – Paying Tribute to Cambodian Birdlife

BY ADRIAN BALACHANDRAN, 30 OCT 2019



As I lounge on a divan by the balcony, I can't help but be soothed by the sight of little pittas flying in formation. The birds are not real though; the pittas in my suite at The Aviary Hotel – a boutique property smack dab in the middle of Siem Reap – are metal figurines crafted by local artisans.

Along with large feathers made from wood and palm-sized kingfisher motifs, the avian ornamentation in my suite is the hotel's way of paying homage to nature, particularly Cambodian birdlife. In fact, all four room categories – Tailorbird (35sqm), Kingfisher (45sqm), Sambok (55sqm) and Sarus Crane (60sqm) – are named after the country's feathered icons.

My Kingfisher Deluxe suite is cosy and inviting with solid oak flooring, pristine white walls, lime green clay vases that complement the turquoise hints of the divan, and of course, the birdlife decor – each handmade from locally sourced materials. The room also comes with a beautifully decked out en-suite, complimentary Wi-Fi, a 42-inch HD TV, and my favourite – a portable JBL bluetooth speaker that supplies great audio while I enjoy the tranquil views of The Aviary's aquamarine swimming pool from my balcony perch.



With walkways and corridors lined with neatly-trimmed shrubs and airy stairwells enclosed by burgundy bricks, The Aviary exudes contemporary cool. Adding to the cool factor is the hotel's unique experiential stay packages that are designed to provide guests a true taste of Cambodian culture and hospitality. A highlight is the four-hour Siem Reap Art Tour hosted by The Aviary and Irish art curator Robina Hanley of McDermot Gallery. With friendly Robina as my guide, I sample Siem Reap's art scene, which includes handmade bohemian couture at Eric Raisina Couture House, and lacquer artworks at Theam's House – the atelier cum gallery of famed Cambodian artist and designer Lim Muy Theam.

Back at the hotel, I discover that the avian theme continues through its eateries – Plumage, which serves sumptuous breakfasts; The Flock Cafe where guests can savour a selection of coffees and snacks in cosy confines that open onto a jungle-inspired garden; and Glide Bar, a breezy rooftop roost that dishes up Asian and Western cuisine. At Glide Bar, the Khmer Set Meal comprising a spicy beef salad (raw beef fillet dressed with lemon juice, cabbage, bean sprouts, peppers and herbs), vegetable coconut soup (a brew of mushrooms, sweet potatoes, pumpkin and coconut milk), traditional Amok Trei (steamed fish in coconut curry), and refreshing fruit platter, is a delicious way to sample the best of Cambodian cuisine.



All good things, however, must come to an end. But before I check out from my weekend nest, I book an appointment at the hotel's Amret Spa. There are few things better than a relaxing 90-minute massage to rejuvenate the senses and prepare mind, body and soul for the week ahead.

Address: 09, Tep Vong Street, Siem Reap, Cambodia

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Adrian Balachandran

When he's not swamped by columns and emails, you'll find Adrian clangin'-and-a-bangin' at the gym. Unless it's a Friday; he'll probably be sipping on a crisp Guinness while enjoying some live music.



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