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ANANTARA Desaru Coast Resort & Villas Brings Authentic Luxury to Malaysia's Golden Shores

Text by JUHAN KAMARUDDIN

Images by ANANTARA DESARU COAST RESORT & VILLAS

Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas (www.anantara.com/en/desaru-coast) in Johor is a high-end resort development set amidst lush tropical vegetation located along a pristine shoreline facing the South China Sea. This property signifies Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas' first venture in Malaysia.

When news concerning the opening of Anantara in Desaru Coast broke five years ago, the Malaysian tourism and travel industry was abuzz with excitement because many concur that its presence puts the destination on the international luxury travel map. Incidentally, this property is the only one in Desaru Coast that has direct access to the beach.

Though Gaya Travel Magazine team members have been hearing the name 'Anantara' for almost two decades, it was only in 2020 that we finally experience the brand. We have been wondering what the name signifies since it sounds evocatively

sensuous, akin to an alluringly exotic land faraway.

As it turns out, the name refers to a world class hospitality group that first started operating in Thailand's royal town, Hua Hin, back in 2001. Taken from Sanskrit, the name means 'without end' to connote freedom, movement, and harmony. The word also refers to a jar full of fresh water that Thais of the past would leave outside their homes to slake their thirst and extended to all passing travellers as refreshment. The symbol for that jar can be spotted on Anantara's emblem to represent welcoming embrace and rejuvenation.



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Good to know:

Due to COVID-19 concerns, Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas takes the safety protocols seriously by assigning a dedicated 'Guest Guardian' who is responsible for internal audits based on stringent guidelines. Building on Anantara's existing holistic 360-degree approach, the guidelines extend beyond guest areas to the back of house operations that include supply chain deliveries, culinary preparation and housekeeping procedures. The resort also enhances its hygiene measures - for example the implementation of electrostatic spray technology - to protect guests' health and wellbeing throughout their stay.

Contemporarily elegant

Singapore-based architect firm WOW Architects and Warner Wong Design were entrusted to develop the resort's architecture, while Environment Design Consultants from Malaysia did the interiors. Sumptuous but hardly aloof, Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas is a subliminal sanctuary that is inviting, pragmatic and cosy.

The entire property, which is intimate in scale and proportion, alludes to the layout of a traditional Malay settlement composed of edifices adorned with indigenous

materials and woven textiles, Malaysian wicker elements, and silhouettes of traditional Malay crafts. The spirit of its location emanates throughout the property, characterised by the generous employment of highly visible home-grown design cues, motifs and accents that project authentic luxury honed by local expertise.

Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas features 90 deluxe guestrooms housed in low-rise structure overlooking the gardens, lagoon and ocean; including 13 stand-alone luxury one- and two-bedroom two-storey pool villas surrounding the lagoon. These pool villas are built in Malay vernacular to suit Malaysia's climate, expressed in the form of floor-to-ceiling windows; slanted carved wooden panels; louvres and vents placed directly under the roof; and wide-open doors for thermal comfort.

Each of the resort's accommodation unit is decidedly high-end in its use of space and furnishing, particularly the expansive balcony and hardwood flooring that is a joy to walk on. As a matter of fact, each end corner guestroom – for instance Room 301 – comes with an inviting lounge swing that accommodates two persons, ideal for guests to cradle on and dream away. The interiors are replete with wood, creating an intimate atmosphere that is unmistakably tropical to remind guests that they are in South East Asia.

The towels in the rooms are oversized, highly absorbent, fluffy, and plenty, which should please even the most discerning germaphobes. The bathtub is huge and deep, complete with water-resistant neck rest and 'The essence of Anantara spa' amenities, notably bath salts. After soaking themselves in the tub, guests should rinse under the strong-pressured rain shower that mimics an uplifting precipitation.

Apart from the deluxe guestrooms and two-storey pool villas, guests have the choice to stay at any of the three- and four-bedroom pool villas surrounded by lush foliage for utmost privacy, closer to the beachfront and the sea. Each of these villas spans between from 3,100 and 6,426 feet squared in size; comes with infinity pool and accompanying spacious decks; indoor-outdoor living space that lets in ample natural light and ocean breeze through floor-to-ceiling windows; bright en-suite bedrooms; open-planned dining and lounge areas; full kitchen with chef; and butler. These villas, which are part of an integral project called Anantara Desaru Coast Residences (www.anantaradesaru-residences.com), can be purchased at the starting price of MYR7.5 million, and the lucky owners of these villas earn themselves exclusive access to Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas' five-star amenities since the resort manages and services the residences as well.

Dining options

Dining at Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas is a gastronomic nod to fresh coastal dining. The resort's all-day



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dining restaurant, Turmeric, serves authentic local Malaysian fare and mouth-watering Thai, Chinese and international cuisine. The menu includes the iconic *nasi lemak* consisting of rice cooked in coconut milk laced with fragrant pandan leaves, served together with fried anchovies, sliced cucumbers, fried horse mackerel and sweet chili sauce on the side. Another signature dish guests should try is *otak-otak* (grilled Malaysian fish cakes served in a banana leaf).

Another outlet that guests should not miss is the resort's signature al fresco beachfront restaurant named Sea.Fire.Salt., which specialises in succulent grilled seafood and steaks served beachside, poolside, or next to the show kitchen where diners can marvel at the chefs in action as they demonstrate their culinary flair. At the same time, guests can nibble on snacks by the infinity pool at the Infinity Poolside bar adjacent to Sea.Fire.Salt. while taking in the chic beachside atmosphere. Talking about the resort's infinity pool, Gaya Travel Magazine team rates it as one of the best spots for tuning in to the sound of waves and natural surroundings.

In addition, guests are sure to be impressed by the elevated Observatory Bar, which opens up to the 360-degree view of Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas' lush landscape and the ocean while indulging in the extensive selection of top vintages and spirits, including imported cigars.



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Activities to keep guests occupied

Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas boasts two refreshing freshwater swimming pools as substitutes to the azure ocean. Since Anantara Desaru Coast & Villas faces east, the resort is a boon for sunrise-chasers.

When staying at the resort, children and teenagers alike can fill their day by playing the latest high-tech games or participate in cross-cultural educational activities at the respective Kids and Teens Clubs. Moreover, guests are invited to explore the resort's grounds by cycling, including the entire Desaru Coast area if they are up to it. An adventure water park and waterfront retail village are nearby in case guests intend to make the most of their Desaru Coast experience.

Anantara Spa – the very first Anantara Spa to open in Malaysia, which has just been declared as Malaysia's Best Resort Spa 2020 during the 6th World Spa Awards – is a sensual oasis that contains lush landscaped gardens, six treatment rooms with en-suite bathroom, shower facilities, and a homely relaxation area. The spa has a boutique too, which retails 100% natural products from Italian professional beauty care provider Marzia Clinic, ethical beauty brand Comfort Zone, and locally sourced Borneo



Addict. Drawing upon Thailand's wellness inspirations and indigenous therapeutic ingredients, the spa's treatments range from massages, body scrubs and wraps, to facials and bathing rituals. Guests may even request for the treatments to be done within the comfort of their own rooms or by the poolside.

The most popular treatment is the Anantara Signature, dispensed in the form of a 90-minute 'Roots of Malaysia Massage' ritual specially formulated for Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas, which merges Malay healing traditions and techniques using ingredients that include lemongrass, pandan leaves, coconut, kaffir lime and ginger, among others. The treatment begins with a foot soak and guided breathing techniques to relax the body, followed by full body palm work combined with light foot pressure points and passive stretching.

One treatment that meets the needs of avid golfers is the 120-minute Golfers' Remedial Massage to target the sore areas resulting from repeat movements by applying firm pressures to release tension and stimulate blood circulation. Since a day out on the greens can lead to sun and burnt skin, including aching muscles, this post-game treatment lets golfers recuperate via a massage, followed

by a calming body wrap that restores moisture and enriches the body.

Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas' well-appointed health and fitness centre promises wellness fanatics and adrenaline junkies the opportunity to maintain or increase their fitness level and physical performance as well.

Conversely, outdoorsy and adventurous guests should partake in activities made available by Dash Outdoor (<https://www.dashoutdoors.com.my/>), the certified provider of various water-based and outdoor activities such as kayaking, jet-skiing, surfing, stand up paddle-boarding and zorbing for the entire Desaru Coast. Among the most popular is the banana boat, which offers fun-filled overdrenched adrenalin rush, suitable for varying age groups. Another memorable activity is the mangrove tour on jet-skis to intimately explore Desaru's intriguing biodiversity.

Once guests are done with the sea, they can shift their attention to the land by taking the excursion to Desaru Fruit Farm (www.dff.world), a 15-minute ride away from the resort. This award-winning 100-acre farm cultivates over 100 types of tropical fruits such as rose apple, jackfruit, carambola, great hog plum, durian and more, thus become the best place for travellers to learn about local fruits and harvest them. Desaru Fruit Farm offers eye-opening guided tours that fascinate both adults and children. After the tour, guests are treated to a lavish fruit buffet spread. The farm also prepares fruit-based fusion dishes upon request, for example sweet and sour tom yam in coconut and spicy prawns cooked with pineapple.

Back at the resort, armed with knowledge relating to local fruits and flavours obtained from Desaru Fruit Farm, guests should immediately join the Spice Spoons cooking class to try their hands at creating local or regional dishes for lunch under the guidance of the attentive chef. Those dishes are to be eventually consumed by the guests themselves, who are bound to take pride in their own ability to prepare those dishes superbly as long as they follow the chef's instructions step-by-step. On the other hand, hardcore foodies can ask the resort to arrange for them food tours around Johor Bahru in the quest for popular local delicacies.

Another highlight for guests staying at Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas is the chance to golf at The Els Club Desaru Coast, renowned for its two beautifully manicured courses featuring 45 holes in total: Ocean Course, a 27-hole golf course designed by four-time major champion, Ernie

Els; and Valley Course, an 18-hole golf course designed in collaboration with another major champion, Vijay Singh.

Conclusion

Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas lives up to expectations as a truly refined getaway characterised by plush surroundings, scrumptious meals and bespoke experiences that incorporates ambiances and indulgences specific to the place yet rooted in impeccable service culture derived from the brand's birthplace, making it a must-stay for all aesthetes and epicureans alike...

Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas can be reached via a 45-minute drive from Malaysia's Senai International Airport (JHB) or a two-hour drive from Singapore. Alternatively, travellers from Singapore can travel to Desaru Coast by ferry, followed by a short drive.

Rates at Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas start from USD 222 per room per night, inclusive of breakfast; rates exclude six percent Sales Service Tax. For further information or to make a reservation, contact +60 7 8280 888 or desaru@anantara.com.

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