

UNBRIDLED LUXURY IN UTORDA

Ivory beaches glistening under the sun and a hot breeze whistling past — it's great on a strandkorb on the sand, but a whole new experience on the balconies at Planet Hollywood, says Rhea Dhanbhora

While I am guilty of having pasted the odd cut-out from a music magazine on the doors of my cupboard in the '90s, I've never been star-struck enough to want to envelop myself in the Hollywood dream. While cafés and bars claim to offer a glitzy, themed experience, I find them a bit tawdry, and the idea of an over-the-top stay in Las Vegas does little to excite me. But visiting Planet Hollywood is an entirely different ball game. It will intoxicate, thrill and electrify — and not just because they've done it up in the glitzy style tantamount to a Vegas casino hotel.



IN & AROUND

My last experience of the pristine white Utorda sands was over a year ago in January, when the winds were cool and dry (although afternoons were expectedly warm) and nights were quite chilly if you were riding through the tree-lined paths on a standard Goa-worthy rental. Among the spread of gorgeous beaches dotting the South of Goa, this is one of my favourites, especially since it shares a border with Majorda and Arossim, both usually great to walk to and from the shore on, as the silky sand slips between your toes. However, would it be the same with heavy rain lashing down and the trees swaying in the furious monsoon breeze? For one, you can't soak up the sun on unspoilt beaches, but that's when a trip to Planet Hollywood Goa — the first of the branch's expansions outside the US — comes in handy.

This is one of Goa's more pastoral settings and I shuddered at the thought of the beach being marred by a Sin City-esque structure, upsetting the idyllic area with its cacophony.

All for beach shacks and guest houses, I turned down my nose at those who needed a luxury getaway in Goa. What about the beach? Why would you be holed up in a hotel? Have you seen how quaint the little guest houses around the bend are? Planet Hollywood's open plan, isolated setting and private beach access help

rubbish these notions. And during the monsoon, there's nothing like sitting on a private balcony, watching the angry waves slap against the shore, spotting peacocks darting through a thicket of palm trees and taking a quick stroll on the green lawns when the showers let up.

There are a hundred and fifteen rooms at the resort, but it's still not the monstrosity you imagine. The hotel, designed by Jonathan Adler, is flashy, but while the décor is very cinematic, there's a combination of glamour and an old Goan charm. They've kept the structure low-rise, which helps give you a more level view of the coconut orchard, right above a sprawling garden and closer to the panoramic sea views and sparkling sands in the distance. The rooms are a smorgasbord of finery — from slightly tacky red couches spread out in front of large flat screens to heavy drapery and plush bedding (satin sheets will make you feel like a diva, if there was any question to the contrary there), with different themes running through each room. The 15 luxury tents are only available during tourist season, but we're going to go back and check them out!

SETTLE IN

You're welcomed in with a bottle of wine (with your name on it!) and a room that goes above and beyond to make your experience as cushiony as possible. The leg massager under a sprawling desk may be exciting enough, but wait till you see the

>> The décor at Planet Hollywood is flashy, but the interiors are luxurious and cinematic



>> Sit back and watch the waves crash on to the shore from your balcony at Planet Hollywood

EAT & DRINK

What about the food? It didn't disappoint, which wasn't surprising because they've got a star chef on board, Sundar Sudarshan. Take your pick from the resto-lounge called Fame if you're in the mood for an open air grill, a little lounging by the pool or hand-picked vegetable stir-fry specials. While there was a large wedding crowd when we visited, we still sampled the delicious Japanese sushi, handmade and sent up to our room by Chef Sundar — who lends his expertise in signature bursts of flavour through the hotel. Don't forget to visit Planet Dailies too. If you're in the mood for a buffet, this is the place to be. And, if you're in Goa for the Goan food, they've got the best Goan sausages we've tasted in a while. No mild, restaurant version here; they come directly from a local mother-daughter duo. There's also their own version of Goan beer and a mix of multi-cuisine specials on this menu. The service is so spectacular, you're going to want to learn the names of the people who serve you (our special shout-outs here go to Jawahar and Roston, our friendly servers through our stay) and remember to save room for dessert!



massage chair in the living room! And, did we mention the king-size baths, the Jacuzzi-style tub (that lights up, Hollywood-style) as well as the cakes, fruits and personalised chocolates left in your room through the day? Take the time to walk over to the French windows with your jelly legs (careful of overdoing your time on the massage chair to avoid that!) to a sweeping view of the sea, on a balcony that's perfect for an outdoor breakfast as the sun rises.

In between all the ooh-ing, ah-ing, fantastic meals and a pretty walk through the lawns to the beach (during a lucky dry spell on a rainy weekend), we decided to spoil ourselves at the Pink Room Salon & Spa. Small and unassuming on the outside, each room inside is soothing, surprisingly large and like everything else at the hotel, incredibly luxurious. Relax on the wooden benches in the shower room for a steam after your treatment.

If you can drag yourself down to the restaurant for dinner after, don't forget to ask for a bottle of Goa beer with your meal (see our box for more). General manager, Anand Chatterjee, although quite busy himself, scuttles over from guest to guest to make sure everything is on track — a hands-on approach that helps make everyone who is visiting feel like they're in the VIP section of the club irrespective of the type of room you've booked.

It may have been the monsoon, but as we lounged under the moon on the private balcony on the still quite hot evening, we were swept up in some sort of Deana Carter summer throwback, heads in a tizzy as the effects of the spa seeped through our muscles. We were tempted to go back to the massage chair, but knew it was sensible not to, drawing the blinds and sinking into the satin sheets instead.

A private sushi lunch, a quick stopover at the restaurant and a final run at the head massager and we were whisked back to real life the next day, kicking and screaming — well, internally anyway.

If you're looking for indulgence in Goa, this is it. Would I recommend it over the classic Goa holiday? No — but it's definitely one for the bucket list. And, for the luxury that you get here, prices are pretty competitive!

Prices ₹6,000 onwards (the more luxury you choose, the higher they rise)

Where 30/3 Acsona Waddo, Uttorda Beach, Salcete Goa

Contact 8326751002