

# Rural retreat

Ideal for a weekend break, Mangala Heritage Home in Thirupugalur, Tamil Nadu, comes with all urban comforts.

**MADHUMITHA SRINIVASAN**

Thirupugalur is your quintessential village perfect for a country getaway. Though largely unchanged, it has not been able to escape the clutches of urbanisation, albeit minimally. One room houses with their thatched roofs accessorised with a satellite dish; nursery school vans plying on single lane *katcha* roads; a young temple elephant caretaker going about his job with a latest Tamil movie number belted out by his mobile phone for company.

May be it is just the beginning; may be it is all the village will give way for. Whatever be the case, it is the perfect place to get away from the mechanical madness that is the bane of an urban lifestyle. But a break in a village need not necessarily mean you have to do without the comforts you are used to at home or even better ones. Mangala Heritage Home promises just that — a perfect rural break with all the urban comforts.

Arriving at the village after being on the road for over seven hours, we were desperately on the look out for a building that would stand out from the other houses in the village. In fact, till the vehicle stopped right before the home, we couldn't tell it from the rest; it was just like any other house in the village, but just a little newer.

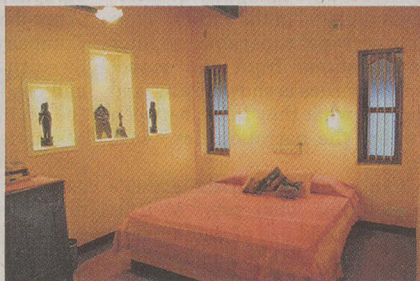
## Traditional

The Spartan exterior was a contrast to what the home was like inside. It is a traditional Chettinad-style house that is in two parts — the front portion with the open courtyard right in the centre, two bedrooms and a yard; and the back portion beyond the yard with the kitchen, dining area and two more bedrooms.

It's not the structure, but what Shanta Guhan, member of The Crafts Council of India, and architect Benny Kuriakose, credited with designing Dakshinachitra, have done to it. The facelift comes from the contrastingly painted



**RUSTIC CHARM:** Perfect setting from the past.



## How to get there

Closest cities/ towns:  
Kumbakonam (37 km),  
Nagapattinam (17 km)  
Closest railway station:  
Tiruchi (120 km), Tiruvarur  
(18 km)  
Closest airport: Tiruchi

walls (bright yellow, blue and orange), polished pillars, double wooden swings, framed artwork, brass artefacts, cement bathtubs to brass fittings in the bathrooms.

The contradiction is not just in the wall colour or between the exterior and the interior, but in the fact that the former owner sold the property to move to the city seeking better fortunes and it was bought

over and renovated to house those wishing for a break from that very city.

With just four bedrooms, privacy is ample; even when you are sitting out on the verandah, the villagers go about their business, except may be a few kids trying to while away a Saturday evening. This, by the way, is one of the things you can do to pass time — strike up a conversa-

tion with the curious kids. A simple smile is all it takes to encourage them to gather around and start chatting.

"You English or Tamil?"

"I speak both."

"Are you from Chennai?"

"Yes."

"Is Chennai the same as Tiruchi?"

"!!!"

After such insightful conversation, you could perhaps glance beyond the courtyard to look at the magnificent fourth century Agneeshwarar temple's *gopuram* overlooking the entire village as if to constantly remind them of the higher power. That was the very reason why *gopurams* were built that way in the first place, just that later man decided to take over with taller structures.

The temple, along with the temple tank around which the village is built, makes for a lovely sight. You could also admire the view from the stone benches across the house except that the goats might not be so pleased to give up that seat in the evenings.

## Friendly environment

The experience is enhanced by the friendly staff who are only happy to help and also keep you company when in need for a conversation giving insights into the village and its activities. They also cook up some delicious simple, home-cooked vegetarian meals and savouries, adding to the "homely" factor. No wonder then that they chose to call it Mangala Heritage "Home".

Barring the occasional power cuts and not having much to do except for the spiritually-inclined (every adjacent village or town has a temple of significance and there are also the famous Velankanni church and Nagur Darga), a weekend here should serve as your ideal retreat, or a short stop en route.

For details on Mangala Heritage Home, look up:  
[www.mangalaheritagehome.in](http://www.mangalaheritagehome.in)

**THE SPARTAN EXTERIOR WAS A CONTRAST TO WHAT THE HOME WAS LIKE INSIDE.**