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The Luxe List 2011 – India - Saratha Vilas, Chettinad

Built in 1905 by a wealthy merchant, Saratha Vilas is one of several Chettinad mansions that have recently been restored and converted into hotels. Known as the moneylenders to the British Raj, the Chettiers of Chettinad made their fortunes ferrying hardwood, gemstones, and lacquerware between Southeast Asia and southern India, and used the profits to build spectacular mansions across the arid farming land of central Tamil Nadu.

Built in Hindu-Tamil and Italianate architecture styles, with Burmese teak, Belgian glass and Japanese tile work throughout, this stately mansion was home to birds and monkeys before French architects Bernard Dragon and Michel Adment began a five-year restoration program. Upon arrival, guests are greeted in the grand reception hall, beyond which lies the main courtyard.

From here, the carved wooden doors and black marble floors lead to 9 simple but stylishly dressed guest rooms, each with antique art pieces and the architects' own furniture designs; book the Victorian Suite to sleep in the finely carved mahogany bed.

Saratha Vilas : 832 Main Rd., Kothamangalam, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu; 91-98/8493-6158; sarathavilas.com

