

COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

Ayurveda,
yoga, ancient
wisdom and
spiritual
sustenance

**THE INDIAN
WELLBEING
GUIDE**

Edited by
DAISY FINER

CONTENTS

122 **BEST HOLISTIC RETREATS**

From iconic Ayurvedic health hideaways to boutique mountain escapes that touch the stars, find the place that mirrors your soul

142 **SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS**

From the most reputed ashram to ancient pilgrimage sites, deep dive into the real India

144 **NEED TO KNOW**

Discover Ayurveda closer to home, the UK experts to have on speed dial, and the products to align with your dosha



ON THE COVER: Six Senses Vana

Editor's LETTER



When dreams travel, they take you to India. The vibrancy of colour, a twinkling ankle bracelet, smoking sandalwood. The seductive awakening of the night jasmine, the sacred waters of the Ganges, well-worn mala beads.

A land where wisdom and technology, chaotic street markets and silent temples, sprawling cities and princely palaces jostle and steam in one giant copper-bottomed cooking pot.

A crossroads of religious influences, cultural messages and symbolic patterns, all of mankind converges here, pulsating with lifeblood, elevated by the most potent spiritual vibration on earth. From celebrating honeymooners to lone wanderers, since time immemorial Mother India has opened her arms to an exploration of what it means to be human, to be lost, to be found, to love, to connect, to heal. Which is not to say that she is easy; India can break you down and build you up like nowhere I have ever been. She is never a holiday, always a journey.

When I first visited, aged 16, and complained about the rats scuttling around our haveli in Rajasthan, I was told by the night manager, 'Open door policy ma'am, open door policy'. All I could do was smile. The sweet and the spicy, the light and the dark, sit closely together in a country that ever brings the shadowlands to the surface. Three decades later, I was to return from a retreat in India knowing I needed to end my marriage. It was a relief to be able to admit it. And herein lies India's teachings. She invites us to step into radical honesty, to deal with what is easier to push aside, to find the jewel in the dagger, to rise once more. No other country offers you the potential to be reborn in this lifetime.

To begin your inner dialogue with India is to question everything you thought you knew about yourself and the nature of existence. It is to delve into profound ways of living, to honour Mother Earth, to witness the connection between biography and biology. This guide is a portal to your own investigation. Explore India's offerings. Allow your brain to soak in mystical mantras which have been passed down for thousands of years and chanted by millions of people. Feel the power of breath in lung, learn to stretch out emotion, steady mind, connect with fellow souls and the beyond. Traverse from the tangible into the ineffable. Perhaps, even, discover how to live a meaningful life.

Back when I was 16 and down with the rats, I thought to be 'well' meant to be successful, thin, popular, rich, married. I now understand it to mean something so much deeper and truer. The word 'holistic' originates from the word 'holy', or 'whole'. In India's sacred lands, to be whole, and hence healthy, is to be connected to the divine, to origin, to Brahman, the supreme Self in all. The ancient wisdom cradled in India's arms is the tonic humanity needs in modern times. Peace within, peace without, peace all around.

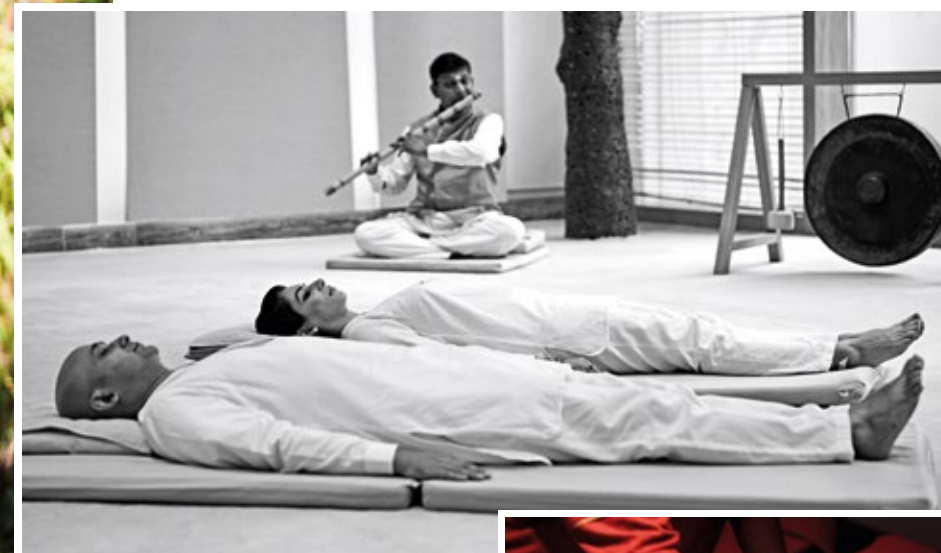
Thank you, India, for being the light that calls us home, the eternal fire that reminds us.

Hari Om,

Daisy Finer

BEST HOLISTIC RETREATS

Transformative escapes for your complete wellbeing



the stars. Rich and rewarding, every guest I spoke to had both laughed and cried. There is a hushed profundity to the proceedings which takes you back to the raw, true you.

Vana has always soothed tired spirits. No wonder protecting this special place is a prerogative for so many. In the old days Deepak Chopra asked if he could run a retreat here with 40 guests. Veer said no. His ultra-protective touch ensured a sacred, sealed vibration. But, as the scriptures teach, change is the only constant. Were Vana to remain the exclusive, insider enclave it once was, it would likely not survive. Surely it's better to become economically sustainable than vanish completely? When you think about what has been thrown at this property, starting with a lobby so beautiful I discovered I am not the only one who once cried on arrival, it's easy to appreciate why Vana deserves to undergo its own transformation and meet the needs of the new world.

If opening up to more people means spreading the healing further, allowing the seed to blossom so that more people can share in her fruits then I'm right behind it. Vana is, as it has always been, a superlative sanctuary soaked in goodness and generosity. It is still a centre of love and light. A discreet hideaway illuminated by the midday sunlight or come dusk, candlelit walkways. You, in turn, should come here to find and rekindle your own light. Let's make sure both you, and Vana, keep shining. *Daisy Finer*

BOOK IT: From £5,550pp for seven nights full board, based on two people. Includes internal flights, transfers, accommodation, consultations, treatments and activities according to your programme. greavesindia.co.uk

Esteva i Esteva) remains cool, contemporary and clean-lined. A wall made of backlit pink Himalayan salt, corridors lined in beguiling images of the Buddha, a sleek swimming pool and polished interiors peppered with Indian touches: bowls of flowers, a candlelit statue of Ganesh, an underground tantric-meditation cave. All this beauty remains. What the old guard, known as Vanavasi, are struggling with is that Veer has now taken a backseat and the day-to-day management of this exquisite hideaway, surrounded by Sal trees in the northern state of Uttarakhand, has been given over to global resort group Six Senses. Rebirth is ever painful but beyond the chitter chat, what is the truth of the experience at Vana today?

One French guest on his eighth visit from Paris shares with me, 'it was a retreat, now it's a wellness centre'. It's true that the intense, intellectual atmosphere akin to a designer ashram has been gently popped. Children over six are now allowed, and the five-night policy was abolished during the dark days of Covid, meaning guests can now flit in for a weekend should they wish. The price of the rooms has risen (with a loyalty discount in place for old timers). More Indians themselves are visiting. More wine is being ordered. And yet, and yet, we're not exactly talking church to nightclub. Photography and social media remain forbidden, phones are not allowed in public, and the crisp kurta pyjamas, designed on special commission by Abraham & Thakore, are still worn for the duration of a stay. Crucially, the elevated mood of healing and harmony remains. Indeed, herein lies the point. As a portal for spiritual, emotional and physical restoration, Vana still holds its place in the world.

The insights given by the in-house doctors are outstanding, every treatment a story unto itself. A central nexus of staff who have stayed the course ensures you are held in superbly caring hands. Days begin with yoga as it should be – slow and centred on the breath – and are then peppered with the likes of back-to-the-womb Watsu sessions, incredible reflexology, Ayurvedic massages where even your ears are stretched and astonishingly nurturing Tibetan treatments (ask about the oil used and your therapist might reply, 'it opens the white channels where the wind energy flows'). Vana is the first place in the world where the Dalai Lama has allowed therapists trained at Men-Tsee-Khang, his Tibetan Medical and Astro Institute, to work.

Some guests come for time out from high flying jobs or to think about their marriage, others to recover from illness or to grieve a devastating loss. Don't miss seeing legendary acupuncturist Dimple who has an uncanny ability to read your story. Towards the end of our revelatory session she tells me: 'Stay away from energy vampires, keep your circle small. Making yourself powerful, this is your responsibility. Your mission is very big. You can become the medicine.' Inspiration and needles all in the same room. Rare indeed.

Under the watchful eye of soulful financier and GM Jaspreet Singh, who talks on the phone to Veer every day, the attention to detail is still fastidious. The food is deliciously, dangerously healthy and the most avant-garde of any wellbeing centre I have visited in India. With sustainable earth-conscious principles pulsing through its veins, there are vegetable and herb gardens, hot tubs with views, jaw-drop treks into the hills and immersive trips to Rishikesh, where you can watch the ritualistic evening aarti. Other highs include varying meditations, flute therapy, yoga nidra, cookery workshops and movie nights under

PHOTOS: KERRY DEAN



SIX SENSES VANA, Dehradun

A Reimagined Icon

There's change in the air at Vana, which, when it first opened in 2014, marked a new dawn of spiritual luxury on the Indian wellbeing scene. Founded by Veer Singh, a young man of pure intent in his 30s, here was a global game changer, a world-class design hotel with a pulsing heart offering a unique combination of Ayurveda, yoga, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan medicine) and superb natural therapies. And while India's other top tier destination, Ananda in the Himalayas, maintains an atmosphere of old school charm and heritage, Vana walks a different path.

Impeccably executed with no expense spared, the design (by Spanish architectural company



« SIX SENSES FORT BARWARA, Rajasthan

For Tiger-Spotting Spa Queens

The Six Senses remit in India also includes this reimaged 14th-century frescoed fort in the arid Rajasthani desert. The level of luxury and service is superlative. In fact, this 48-suite hotel really takes things to the next level. Toilets with heated seats automatically flush themselves. For some, it's all a little OTT, though, demanding travellers do seem to flock here. The hotel opened amidst much fanfare for a Bollywood wedding, which set a template that has yet to be adjusted for a more subtle market. The approach to sustainability is also a little Disney, with local women in saris brewing chai and potters with wheels squatting by the swimming pool. There is a fine line between integrated community work and a sense of voyeuristic display. More authentic is the spa, with gorgeous Ayurvedic pro Dr Neeru Jain, who will read both your pulse and mind, and recommend therapies. Have you ever been massaged with heated tiger's eye? This powerful stone is said to release anxiety and is used in a 90-minute spa treatment that includes writing down the emotions you want to release, breathwork, visualisations and sound healing. There are tigers, too, just 45 minutes away, with two game drives a day. A leading spa and safari combo. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £621 B&B based on two sharing. sixsenses.com



» TAJ RISHIKESH, Uttarakhand

For High-End Hippies

This hotel puts a new spin on luxurious spirituality. Even children are invited with dedicated pools and a play area. The sharp design, using only local materials and blissfully at-one with the surroundings, is more reminiscent of an Aman hotel than traditional Taj outposts. Be warned, there are some steep climbs for those that don't want to buggy-it. The J Wellness Circle spa is remarkably comprehensive, offering one-to-one yoga sessions which cover the full spectrum – asanas, pranayama, mudra, bandha – as well as consultations with Ayurvedic doctors, body rituals and beautifications. Yoga and meditation take place in a domed pavilion with the splendour of the Himalayas right on the doorstep. The absolute highlight, though, is the privacy, peace and sheer privilege of enjoying the pure waters of the Ganges gushing right past the hotel. It's a far cry from the hectic holiness of nearby Rishikesh, about an hour's drive away. Sound healings on the riverbank are beautifully profound, so too is a personal 'Homam', a sacred Vedic fire ritual in which the presence of deity is invoked by mantras. Every evening the hotel also hosts an exquisite purifying Ganga Aarti solely for guests: conch shells, ghee, fires, puja blessings and singing – a symbolic and sacred occasion you won't easily forget. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £340 for a superior room. tajhotels.com



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES



SOUKYA, Bengaluru

A Holistic Medi-Centre For Results

What do Sting, Deepak Chopra and Queen Camilla have in common? They have all stayed at Soukya, a world-class, purpose-built health centre near Bengaluru. But don't let the big-name roll call fool you into expecting something glitzy. The prettiest plantation-style compound is exquisitely simple, a natural beauty with the sort of discreet old-world charm that immediately soothes frazzled hearts. Though the surroundings alone are not what guests come for. They come instead for the holistic approach to wellbeing. From low energy, depression, anxiety, hormonal issues and insomnia to addictions, arthritis, diabetes, Long Covid, Parkinson's and beyond, founder and homeopathic practitioner Dr Mathai offers remedial relief to seekers from all over the world.

One of India's leading holistic health experts, known as the father of alternative therapies, Dr Mathai believes in an integrated, layered approach to health. This is exactly what Soukya delivers. After a series of initial one-on-one consultations (addressing everything from health history to personality, emotional state and niggling ailments), your case is then discussed by a clutch of in-house doctors and a meticulously curated



programme designed. Most guests stay for at least a week; for dramatic life-change a month is recommended. Expect a regimented routine. Days start with 7am yoga in the black oxide shala. No alcohol or smoking is allowed, talking is banned in the dining room and lights out is recommended at 9pm. You don't come here to party.

Instead, enjoy the deepest and purest of rests, nourishing vegetarian food and tenderly delivered Ayurveda. Traditional therapies are undertaken in the morning, luxuriously layered one after the other, perhaps interwoven with some naturopathy and lasting as long as three hours. Just when you are wondering if you can ever stand again, it's time for a shower, maybe a coconut water, then lunch and likely a rest. It's astonishing how tiring relaxing can be. The afternoons call in yet more therapies: stomach packs, reflexology, acupressure, acupuncture. By day five, you are literally floating.

The gardens are equally magical and fill you up on the inside. Over 120 organic herbs and vegetables are grown on-site. The whole place is a model in self-sufficiency. Every morning a bell is rung and Dr Mathai, his wife (a nutritional therapist) and all the staff gather for morning prayer, which creates a potent atmosphere of medicinal spiritualism. Give this place a week of your life, watch time slow, feel your cells settle. 'Come into silence so you can truly know yourself,' says Dr Mathai.

Soukya is an incredible investment in your future self, a rare jewel that you will treasure, polish and want to return to. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £2,669pp for a seven day programme, full-board, including transfers. healingholidays.com





« **ATMANTAN, Maharashtra**

For Escapee Urbanites

A four-hour drive from Mumbai, this 42-acre property near Pune overlooks Mulshi Lake. The design is a little hard-edged, a lot of grey and black stone and brightly coloured furnishings, but it's the softness of both fellow guests and staff that will win you over. The promise is transformation. As 82-year-old guest Vanita puts it, 'We all need to make changes when our lives go in a direction that we don't want to take.' From mini rejuvenation breaks to those on two-week detoxes or a 32-night stay to deal with chronic back pain, everyone is set on living better. The restaurant looking out onto the lake remains the beating heart. Food is proudly SLOW: sustainable, local, organic and wholesome. No use of 'the three devils' (white flour, sugar, salt). For breakfast, a papaya and date smoothie, followed by masala oats, finished with a sweet potato galette. Days start at 6.30am in the Kriya Pavilion, where staff guide you through traditional Ayurvedic cleanses: a neti pot to clear the sinuses, followed by a throat gargle and eye wash. Next comes yoga on the terrace. Treatments include a mix of traditional Ayurveda with the likes of Chi Nei Tsang, acupuncture or life coaching. As Robert from LA says: 'What this place has made me realise is that I can operate from a greater place of serenity. We can all lead with love.' *DF*

BOOK IT: From £999pp for three nights, including accommodation, meals and daily activities. atmantan.com



» **NEELESHWAR HERMITAGE, Kerala**

For Traditionalists With a Wild Side

This restorative hideaway on North Kerala's untrammelled coast is unashamedly focused on one aim: to offer guests a '200 percent experience'. And the great thing is that ebullient owner Altaf Chapri and his team nail it. This eco retreat is the perfect place to get away from it all – particularly with the hotel's Lotus houseboat which chugs its way along Kerala's serene backwaters. Back on dry land, Neeleshwar is incredibly spoiling. It's not super luxury but that doesn't matter, you'll simply be seduced by the sublime stillness. Modelled on traditional fisherman's huts, there are 18 thatched cottages – all handmade wooden furniture, antiques, teak floors – tucked away among acres of verdant gardens, which brim with hibiscus flowers, frangipani and banana trees. Some have private pools, others captivate with stunning sea or garden views. Each is named after a yogic virtue and sets the scene for the small but perfectly formed spa, with traditional Ayurvedic treatments, meditation and complimentary Hatha yoga. Cycle the roads and soak up local life before choosing between the two excellent restaurants. Open-sided Annapurna serves mainly Ayurvedic-inspired vegetarian plates, but lunch at toes-in-the-sand Meenakshi is a must for its just-caught fish – it'll lull you into a further state of happiness. *Harriet Compston*

BOOK IT: £150 B&B. neeleshwarhermitage.com



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES



SHREYAS RETREAT, Bengaluru

A Chic Yogi Hideaway

A small pocket of bliss near Bengaluru that's ideal for yogis looking for an immersive experience in an innately tranquil setting. In 2004, founder Pawan Malik, a London-based spiritual entrepreneur, decided he wanted to create a modern, upgraded ashram, suitable for high-achievers on the path to self-realisation. His concept is now a fully fledged but quietly grounded destination health retreat. Simple without being spartan, sleep in one of the 15 atmospheric tents, with bathrooms open to the elements, a little deck with campaign-style chairs, Indian herbal teas, fresh flowers and wi-fi. Rooms are cleaned seemingly whenever you step outside. What bliss to return after the dawn class and find your king-sized bed already made and your laundry taken care of. You will rest well here. The air is clean, the 25 acres of lush green grounds are a delightful exploration of aroma and exotica. Think jack fruits, fig trees, marigolds, coconuts.

Classes happen twice daily in the al fresco yoga pavilion with accompanying birdsong and smoking incense. In-house teachers work on rotation, all teaching pure Hatha style, slow but purposeful. Some, like Ramakhan, have been here since inception and guests relish his hands-on adjustments. 'People say I have six pairs of eyes,' he laughs. 'I am all about alignment.' The morning class is an hour-and-a-half long and sets you up for a delicious breakfast of tropical fruits and homemade granola. The shorter afternoon class at 4:30pm is less rigorous but no less effective. Peppered in between are optional chanting and meditation sessions. Or perhaps



some time in the gym, library or by the sparkling swimming pool. The Anaha spa is equally alluring, a seriously lush addition with treatments as outstanding as the design and a scope that covers everything from beautifully delivered Ayurvedic therapies to crystal salt scrubs, coffee body masks and reviving facials.

Don't miss a revelatory session with wise man Bala Sundar. 'Have you seen him yet?', guests whisper to each other, many sharing that he cracked them open and the tears came. The spell he weaves combines personalised meditations, visualisations and the sort of soul reading that leaves you feeling validated and renewed. 'Every breath is a chance to start again,' he shares. Insightful consultations with Ayurvedic practitioner Dr Manjula are equally inspiring, as is a visit to the nearby orphanage, built largely by donations from guests. A profound and life-enhancing experience.

Come here to move and strengthen the body, nourish your belly with abundant and lovingly prepared vegetarian food (no eggs, no alcohol either), unravel the mind and reflect on this journey called life. Just five days here will leave you lean and keen; many guests stay for two weeks annually. The whole team is something beyond and watching the staff practise yoga together gives a glimpse of the strong, heart-led community. The extraordinary level of care, humour and knowledge-sharing woven throughout is rare. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £1,959pp for seven nights full board, transfers, with Healing Holidays. healingholidays.com



ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS, Uttarakhand

India's Reigning Legend

You've no doubt heard of India's most long-standing spa hotel, known affectionately as simply 'Ananda'. The last time I visited was in 2011. I was pregnant with my third child, anxious about whether I would be blessed with another healthy baby. The relentlessly bumpy car journey from Dehradun made me feel incredibly nauseous. Fast forward 12 years and the road surface is not the only thing that's been polished to perfection. Every element of Ananda – which means 'eternal bliss' in Sanskrit – is running as smooth as Himalayan honey. Which is particularly impressive when you consider the plethora of offerings in the spa, what a jigsaw the timetabling must be, and the fact that there are, at least, nine customised food menus, each on a seven-day rotation and each changed seasonally to suit different programmes, personalities and doshas.

Food is a central concept at Ananda. The ethos is explained as 'to eat is a necessity, but to eat intelligently is an art'. Every guest follows a menu to suit their constitution or the intent of their programme. As part of my 'Yoga Detox' programme I was put on the nutrient-rich and balancing sattvic menu – plant-based, fresh, wholesome and palpably grounding. Despite the lack of any over-stimulating ingredients (including ginger and garlic), no meal was disappointing or felt like deprivation. Even on my one-day 'yogic purification', which involved drinking warm water with pink Himalayan salts and a series of asanas to encourage a cleansing of the gut, the after-care meal of kitchari, a delicious, homely combination of rice, lentils and turmeric, tasted deeply satisfying and nourishing. The cleanse itself was far gentler, kinder even, than those I have experienced in the medi-clinics of Europe. It left me feeling reconnected



with my heart and body and truly lighter of spirit. But, instead of seeing Ananda as a place to lose weight, you'd do well to remember that the approach here is rooted in inspiring guests to find and integrate 'a way of life'. Many of the kitchen ingredients are grown in the hotel's own garden, home to everything from asparagus, clove, garlic, lemon balm and mint, to Ayurvedic superstars such as ashwagandha, said to relieve stress and increase energy, and peela bansa, to soothe coughs.

With views out across the Himalayas and down to the birthplace of yoga, Rishikesh, and the sacred waters of the Ganges, the air at Ananda tastes pristine and purifying. Within just a few hours, you feel as if your whole nervous system is being washed clean. At the same time, the foundation blocks of Eastern healing – yoga, Ayurveda and the study of the Vedas (ancient Indian teachings centred in self-realisation) – bring you back to yourself and the touchstones that really matter. No facet of your health is left untended. Every day starts with a delivery of hot ginger, lemon and honey bed tea. In the colder months, a hot water bottle is hidden in your bed at night. Here is a place where you are tenderly looked



after but where you are also encouraged to look after yourself. In your bathroom are tools for oil pulling, tongue scraping and nightly foot massaging, and the minibars in the cocooning bedrooms (each with balcony and day bed) are stocked with coconut water and kombucha.

Immersive programmes run from seven to 14 or 21 days and range from a traditional Ayurvedic Panchakarma to weight and stress focuses. Whichever programme you land on, complimentary add-ons include mountain treks, cooking classes, meditation, yoga rooted in the Bihar school. Why wouldn't you want to stretch out your limbs every day like animals do? The point at Ananda is to take your time, breathe into the positions, fine tune them, remember the art of slow living. There is a genuine feeling of family between the staff, which lends a particular sweetness to proceedings. It is clear that each member is allowed to shine in their own orbit, together making up the whole.

Rather than high-tech diagnostics or medical advances, it is the interconnected and integrated approach to wellbeing that is progressive at Ananda. Traditional Chinese Medicine is incorporated alongside ancient healing modalities. While the majority of the therapies are Ayurvedic, there are also aromatherapy massages, facials, reflexology and in-house energy healers. The physiotherapist will give you tools to release the responsibilities carried in your posture, while emotional healing sessions can help resolve trauma-related behaviours or childhood baggage.

No longer just a standardised Ayurvedic spa, Ananda today is a destination wellbeing retreat up there with the best of them. Born of a harmonious heart with a spiritual pulse, when I returned home I felt every moment was ripe with potential. And that's what Ananda can reignite in you. Inspiration. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £7,288pp for seven nights based on two people. Includes internal flights, transfers, accommodation, consultations, and some treatments. greavesindia.co.uk



« BAMBOO YOGA RETREAT, South Goa

For Om Shanti Beach Bunnies

One of the most wonderful locations of any beach property in Goa, possibly India. Recently relocated to the southern end of Polem beach, stylishly sparse huts and cabanas tumble out onto soft, sultry sands, framed by forest and graceful palms. Expect more than a hint of Thailand, and none of the chaos that India sometimes delivers. A well-oiled team of seasoned staff cater to your every whim and nourishing comfort is the vibe: vegetarian buffets in a dining space with blue-green waters beyond, fruit and snacks, a shop, even a bar. A small portion of partners neatly avoid the yoga, although, whilst this may not be the place for die-hards with an already strong practice, it's the ideal hideaway for most. Real India remains but an echo (Patnem and Palolem are a 15-minute tuk-tuk ride away and happily deliver the gentle throng of tourist towns). Days kick off with morning meditation before classes of gentle Vinyasa flow. Unless the powerhouse that is Judith is leading, and then asanas are cranked up to full throttle, everyone challenged to the max, whilst still feeling held by her expertise. No wonder she has such a firm following. Afternoon classes are blissful Yin or Yoga Nidra. It's hard not to fall under the spell as you listen to the roll and thunder of the waves, and the siren screech of a lone fish eagle keeping a watchful eye on this tiny corner of paradise below. *Tanya Dalton*

BOOK IT: From €570 for five nights per person. bamboo-yoga-retreat.com



» PURPLE VALLEY YOGA, North Goa

For Dedicated Ever-Evolving Yogis

A very specific language of yoga, Mysore Ashtanga has a cult-like following, and while all are welcome at this shoes-off commune, to attend one of the back-to-back retreats really deserves a decent foundational knowledge of the primary series. Offering intense retreats throughout the season and a little into the monsoon, an insider crew share a hunger to push their technique to the max. Many of the staff are keen, well-honed yogis and nearly all join in the daily practice. Fall in line with an unwavering focus. The shala is decked with flickering oil lamps and Hindu deities dressed in fragrant garlands of marigolds. The sense of togetherness begins as, one by one, the students unfurl their mats, find their drishti and join in the sonorous chanting. Send good vibrations out into the dawning of the day, which often also begins with the bark of the dog and the honk of the horn, letting you know India is still close at hand. Hearty nourishing food ensures you feel supported throughout your stay and the two-hour, daily workshops offer insights that will see you scribbling away and improving postures you thought you had nailed. Everything radiates and resonates around the yoga which will actively change you inside and out. *TD*

BOOK IT: From £600 per week, per person (single occupancy), all inclusive. yogagoa.com





« SWASWARA, Karnataka

For Swimming Under a Mango Moon

This rustic hideaway is a short amble from the beauty that is Gokarna's Om Beach. Shaped like the sacred Hindu word 'Om' with two glorious coves, swimming in the ocean as the sun sets feels healing in itself. Though don't expect privacy, sunbeds or beach service. The scene is akin to Goa 30 years ago: a few beachside shacks, holy cows and fishermen's boats. Afterwards, retreat to one of the 24 cottages with upstairs seating areas, open-air bathrooms and doors that open onto dragonflies darting over a water reserve. There's an outstanding pool – one of the best in India – to while away some hours, and an Ayurvedic spa which you can dip into as you see fit. The doctors are not the most invested (so maybe avoid embarking on the likes of Panchakarma), but the treatments themselves are a delight, blending the traditional with the westernised. Abhyanga massages alleviate fatigue while scrubs use sea salts, spices and aroma oils to leave skin glowy. Dosha-based menus for those on a curative programme are wholesome if sometimes a tad bland. For breakfast perhaps oat porridge sweetened with jaggery. For lunch and dinner, soups followed by the likes of vegetable korma with beetroot gojju and red rice. Whilst the whole place could be jazzed up, SwaSwarā's appeal rests in its soporific atmosphere. You'll feel wrapped in gentle vibrations as soon as you arrive. A special spot. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £871 for five nights.

cghearth.com/swaswara



» ASHIYANA RETREAT, North Goa

For the Soul Sisters

Lily ponds, swimming pools, a resting marble Buddha and the nearby untouched beaches of North Goa, including Mandrem, home to some of India's finest surf: Ashiyana's Goan outpost has it nailed. Part Moroccan, part Indian, and all yoga with a smattering of sound healing, jaunts to weekend night markets and spa treatments. No wonder guests (usually single women) carry knowing smiles, either returning or visiting on the word of a trusted friend. From gentle Hatha style through to dynamite Ashtanga with a hint of Vinyasa, twice daily yoga classes are varied and inclusive. Days slip by in a dreamy haze of stretching, beach walks, new awakenings, old aches of the bones – or of the heart – all gently soothed by the magic this place holds. Accommodation is a varied tumble of bamboo huts, tree houses, pretty rooms and lavish suites, all nomad chic and atmospheric. Lap up the endless hot, honeyed lemon water and masala chai, and feast on plentiful vegetarian meals held around a long communal table. Man-at-the-helm Brandon genuinely cares about each individual's path, not just their flight connection. Harmonious and happy making, this is a true find and one to cherish. *TD*

BOOK IT: From €973 per week in an Eco Lodge, all-inclusive. Open 1 Oct to 15 May. ashiyana.com





SITARA HIMALAYA, Himachal Pradesh

Most Exciting Newcomer

'For me it was never a hotel', says founder Anita Lal, which goes a long way to explain the atmospheric homestead vibe at the most exciting new opening in years, Sitara Himalaya. This new ten-bedroom retreat, on the way to the ancient Buddhist valleys of Lahaul and Spiti, is located at 8,200 feet, 14 miles below the Rohtang Pass. Surrounded by epic mountain and glacier views, breathtaking in their splendour, you can feel the magic and mystery as soon as you arrive. There is a potency, a transcendent spiritual majesty to the surroundings, which is palpable. No surprise, then, that within a short walking distance lies the very spot where it is believed that thousands of years ago the great Indian sage Rishi Ved Vyas meditated for 12 years before inscribing the eternal cosmic wisdom into the four Vedas. This higher knowledge, a philosophy rooted in the idea that everything in the universe is connected and of the same source, is the bedrock of every detail at Sitara.

The whole property is decorated with a touch of the divine by Mrs Lal, the force behind India's lifestyle brand Good Earth (with stores in Delhi, Mumbai and beyond) with Tibetan rugs, sacred ornaments, a brass work by Vikram Goyal, hand-painted murals, vases of flowers, the earthy smell of juniper berry incense. Beauty abounds.



Everything encourages you to relax, reflect and elevate. The glass-roofed Skylight room is an invitation to lie back and watch the Milky Way. 'On quiet nights, I can hear the hum of the earth,' says Mrs Lal. Connecting to the absolute is a thread that also runs through the library of spiritual tomes and straight into the Svasthi wellbeing area. This exquisite mini retreat space is its own sanctuary complete with a plunge pool, sauna and steam. Daily yoga with Naveen will wring out both physical knots and emotions, while exceptional body treatments combine sound healing with ancient Marma massage techniques.

Days are spent walking with butterflies, reading or in contemplation. Candlelit evenings pass by with storytelling, singing, dancing or dumplings on the veranda, a hot apple toddy in hand. Food is traditional and comforting, the vibe of a laidback house party. Don't expect room service, mini-bars or TVs. 'You have to be so careful of polluting your system', says Mrs Lal. 'Every cell knows.' One gets the feeling you could settle into a new (or is it old?) way of life here. Read a little more, sleep a little more, dream a little more, do nothing a little more. Whatever, you'll leave feeling rejuvenated and reconnected. This is the secret but super luxe India you have been looking for. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £4,555pp for seven nights full board based on two people. Incl internal flights, transfers, and some activities. greavesindia.co.uk



⤴ THE LEELA KOVALAM, A RAVIZ HOTEL, Kerala

For Ayurvedic Beginners

This tranquil Kerala cliff-top hideaway, overlooking the Arabian Sea, opened in summer 2022. However, it is already making waves with its show-stopping 8,000 sq/ft Ayurveda centre complete with a yoga pavilion and three pools. Kerala is known for Ayurveda, and Leela does it justice, with deeply intuitive therapists rolling out a combination of hard-hitting treatments and top-to-toe pampering. The Panchakarma, an all-out purge, will leave you squeaky clean inside and out or tackle fat with Udvartana, a dry massage with herbal powders. The crescent beaches, ringed by coconut palms, will lull you into further relaxation. Breathe in the salty breeze and go for a ramble, surf, kayak or paddle board. Visit the gloriously restored Halcyon Castle on site, once a summer retreat of the royal family of Travancore, before cooling off in one of the infinity pools. The 188 beautifully designed rooms up the rejuvenating environment (book the Ocean View Suite with its large private patio) and don't miss the just-caught seafood in the abundance of restaurants, with produce plucked from the sprawling organic veg garden. Just make sure to stop and take in the breathtaking sunset – particularly special in God's Own Country. *HC*

BOOK IT: From £240 per night.

theleela.com/the-leela-kovalam-a-raviz-hotel

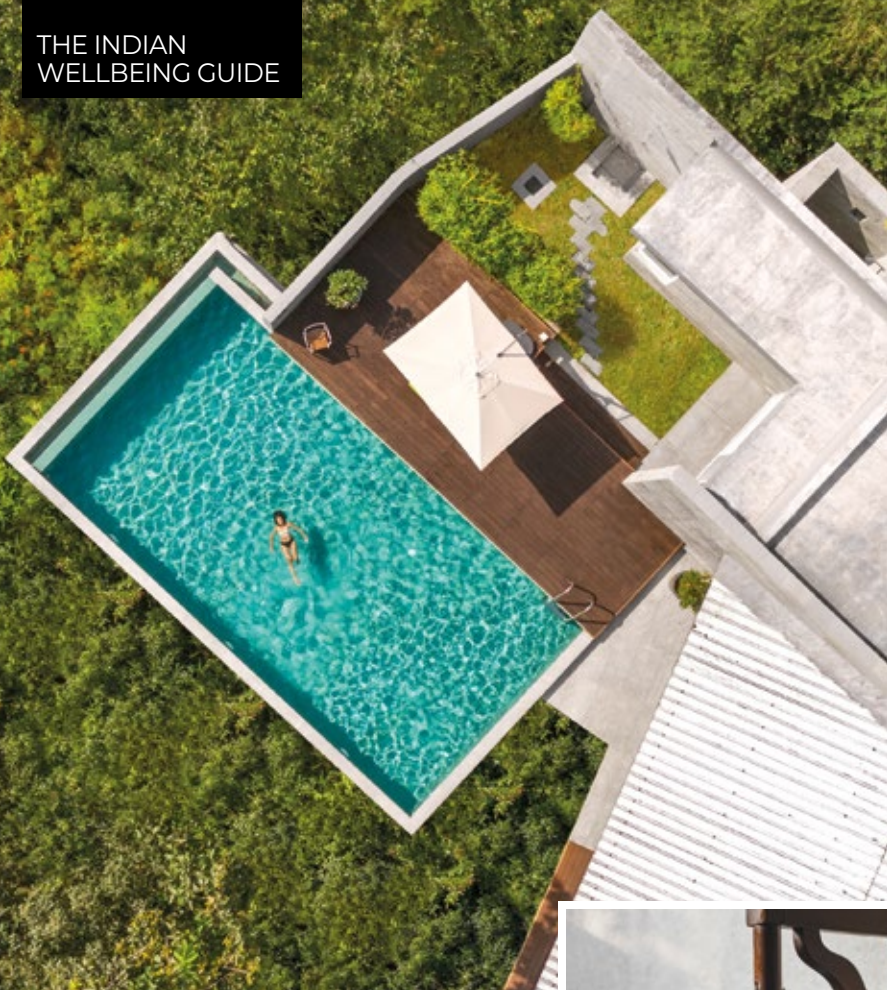


⤵ SHAKTI HIMALAYA, Ladakh

For an Authentic Mountain High

It's easy to overlook India in the summer with its scorching 40-degree temperatures. But Ladakh, in the far north with its cool climes, gives you the perfect excuse to visit. A Buddhist kingdom, otherwise known as 'Little Tibet', it's a spectacular picture of stark jagged mountains, pristine turquoise lakes and crystal-clear skies. Shakti Ladakh shows you the best of this isolated region, taking you off the beaten track, with stays in a clutch of six village houses mingled with mountain adventures. In May 2024, this inspired outfit unveiled its latest addition: Thiksey House. Set opposite mesmerising Thiksey Monastery, there are four cosy ensuite bedrooms, all with a hint of luxury but still authentic. Lovely local hosts are on hand for anything you need. During the day, enjoy a deep dive into rural Ladakh life, from exploring ancient monasteries and sacred shrines to tackling beautiful treks through the valley. There's even the chance to learn all about your future from a local oracle. Go in July and you might catch the Ladakh Polo Festival. Food is not forgotten. Picnic in style amongst the riverbank's willow groves, and, in the evening, take time out to admire the brightest stars you've ever seen. Then tuck into absolutely delicious homemade Ladakhi food, made from generations-old recipes and cooked using local ingredients in a small wood-burning stove. Magical. *HC*

BOOK IT: From £5,677 for seven nights, including accommodation, meals, activities, guides. shaktihimalaya.com



DHARANA AT SHILLIM, Maharashtra

A Journey To Conscious Being

The dawn Shillim peak trek was worth every last puff. Our small group of five, led by expert in-house wildlife guide Pralhad, navigated the rugged terrain, observing areas of untouched 'sacred god forest' as well as the oriental honey buzzard, Asian emerald doves, Indian coral trees and the Karvi plant, which only flowers once every seven years. It's not every day that you smell the scents of a forest waking up. Nor is it every day that you summit the top of a mountain, reach the plateau, and are greeted by a pulsating, rising sun and sacred grounds that stretch out to a horizon so vast it speaks of the divine.

Another Indian retreat undergoing its own inner transformation, Dharana at Shillim, has recently unyoked itself from the Hilton brand. This move will allow its uniquely profound wellbeing philosophy to pulse into every delicious cell of this bubble of beauty. The setting itself is truly a celebration. A three-hour drive from Mumbai, you slip into an exquisite landscape comprising 2,500 acres of verdant wilderness, waterfalls and woodlands. This precious spot, where Mother Nature unfurls, was 'rediscovered' by two De Souza brothers, William and Denzil, in the 1990s. Struck by its raw tranquillity, they decided to conserve it as an ecological hotspot for future generations. Gradually, gently, they acquired more land,



planted more than a million trees, reintroduced indigenous flora and fauna and encouraged local farmers to adopt sustainable land-loving techniques. The knock-on effect on the wildlife has been astounding. Herein lies the difference at Dharana. Come here to connect with an ancient land and experience wellbeing programmes that lay equal emphasis on both personal and planetary wellbeing.

We need holistic ways of living interwoven with science to promote a regenerative future. The younger generation of the De Souza family continue to uphold this viewpoint. Sleep in sleek villas built at one with nature (private swimming pools and sunken bathtubs are special). Feast on natural foods, herbs, elixirs and teas proven to have medicinal properties, and delight in healing spaces designed to raise your vibration. The yoga pavilion is a central nexus for steady lessons in Iyengar and the stunning meditation cave feels sealed and safe for beautiful Tibetan bowl meditations and guided Pranayama. Your 'dinacharya', or daily routine, as prescribed by the invincible Dr Arun Pillai and the in-house team of experts, sets the pace for your stay. A range of non-invasive

diagnostics are some of the best I have come across. Days are peppered with everything from acupuncture and posture-correcting physiotherapy to traditional Ayurvedic rituals. For an interconnected approach to health which weaves an ecological sensitivity with programmes tackling every pertinent issue, from stress to sustainable weight management, Dharana has it – and you – covered.
DF

BOOK IT: From £1,699pp for a five-night programme, full board, based on two sharing, incl. transfers and accommodation. healingholidays.com

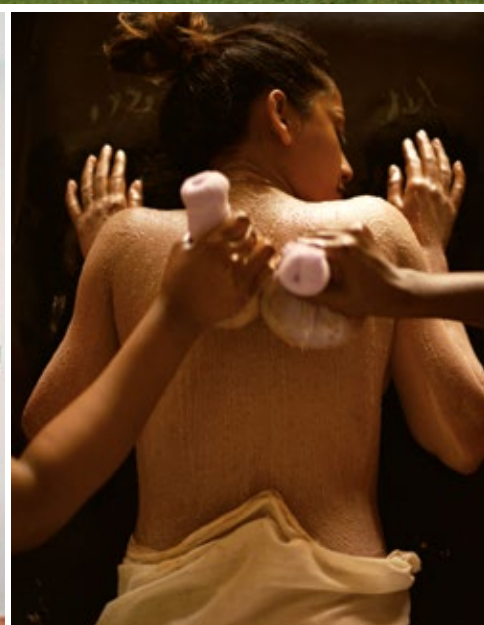


KALARI KOVILAKOM, Kerala

Top-End Panchakarma

Hidden amid singing tropical greenery, Kalari, as it is affectionately known by old timers, is a world unto itself. If you're looking for somewhere to experience Ayurveda without any dilution or compromise, and, in particular, its legendary detoxification process, Panchakarma, then this exquisite 19th-century royal palace is where it's at. With only 19 basic-but-splendid bedrooms, you couldn't ask for a more atmospheric setting, replete with carved wooden staircases, inner courtyards with sunken basins to catch the monsoon rains, a temple in the grounds, and a building which whispers of rebirths, hopes and dreams.

Behind protective walls, to enter Kalari is to leave yourself at the door and adapt to a new set of rules and disciplines. Expect strictly no talking at meal times, a white kurta pyjama uniform and an environment of monastic calm intended to encourage inner connection. There are no TVs, mini bars, or processed foods of any kind. No sunbathing is allowed. No sex (no chance). No alcohol. No smoking. And no leaving the premises. Days start early with yoga, dinner is at 6pm, bedtime at 9pm. While many guests are on their tenth or even 13th visit, newbies who have yet to feel the benefits do threaten to flee. I don't blame them. Panchakarma is by far the most challenging detox I have ever undertaken. And yet, if you can commit to the minimum stay of 14 nights, ideally 21, it is an investment in yourself that will likely surpass all preconceived ideas you might have about detoxing. A bio-purifying therapy that provides a safety wall against future

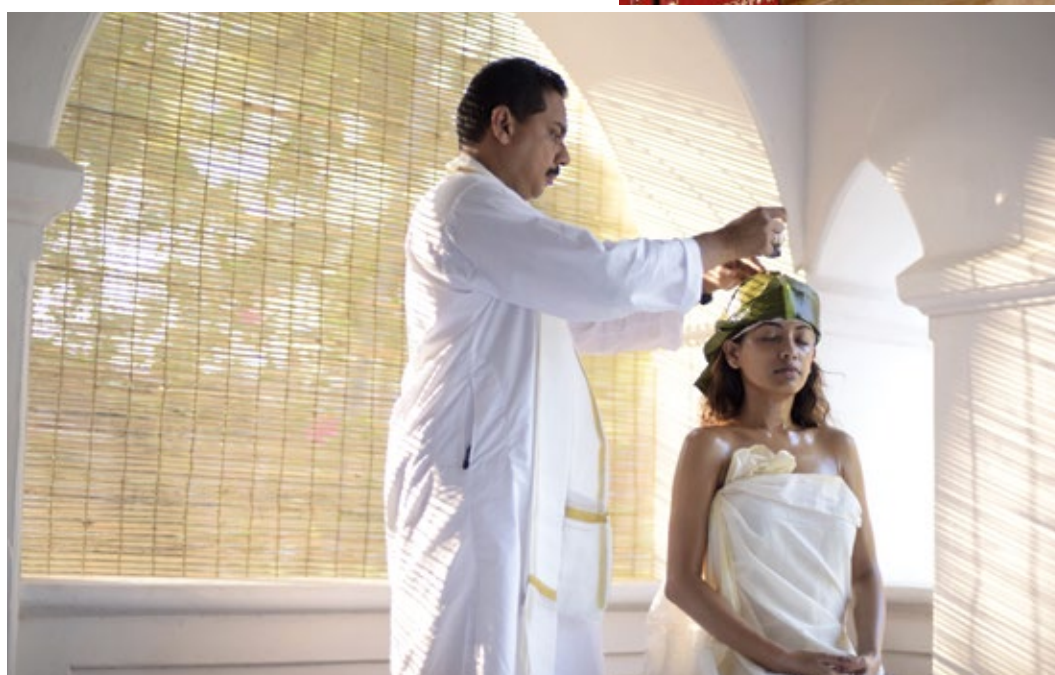


illnesses, the mother of holistic cleanses can help to alleviate everything from back pain, migraines and arthritis to stress, anxiety, insomnia, and even trauma. Considered holy by the sages of India, the Panchakarma method initially involves drinking, in ever increasing amounts, medicated liquid ghee (clarified butter) for breakfast. The ghee is infused with different herbs, depending on health concerns, which are discussed at length with your 'vaidya' (doctor) who truly goes into the minutia of your lifestyle, sleep, your spiritual compass, even your libido. Programmes are then

meticulously individualised. The initial effects of drinking the ghee include retching just from the smell of it and a loss of appetite but, ultimately, a loosening of toxins, or 'ama', on a cellular level in the body. These toxins are then purged through a layering of traditional purification methods, including a liquid purgative, a series of hardcore enemas and Nasyam therapy, which involves using medicated oils to clear the nasal passages. Thankfully, leeches and induced vomiting are rarely prescribed these days. During the ghee stage, which for most guests seems to last around five days, it's important to move the

body. Walking the grounds is the morning constitutional. The earth holds you and, combined with daily yoga, yoga nidra and pranayama (yogic breathwork) classes, there is a palpable feeling of a return to a natural state. As Raj, one of the team of in-house yogis, says: 'Breathe into the depths, notice how you feel in this moment. Light and calm in the body, calm and quiet in the mind.'

In between the thoughtfully conceived daily structure, pounding-to-painful massages are delivered to help remove toxins. The therapists are trained in traditional Kerala martial arts and their touch is vigorous to the point of bruising. There's no room for modesty. Breasts and bottom get as much work as shoulders. By completion, hair is soaked in oil and is wrapped in a comforting white turban. Pre-purgation, lunch is a repetitive rice gruel, post-

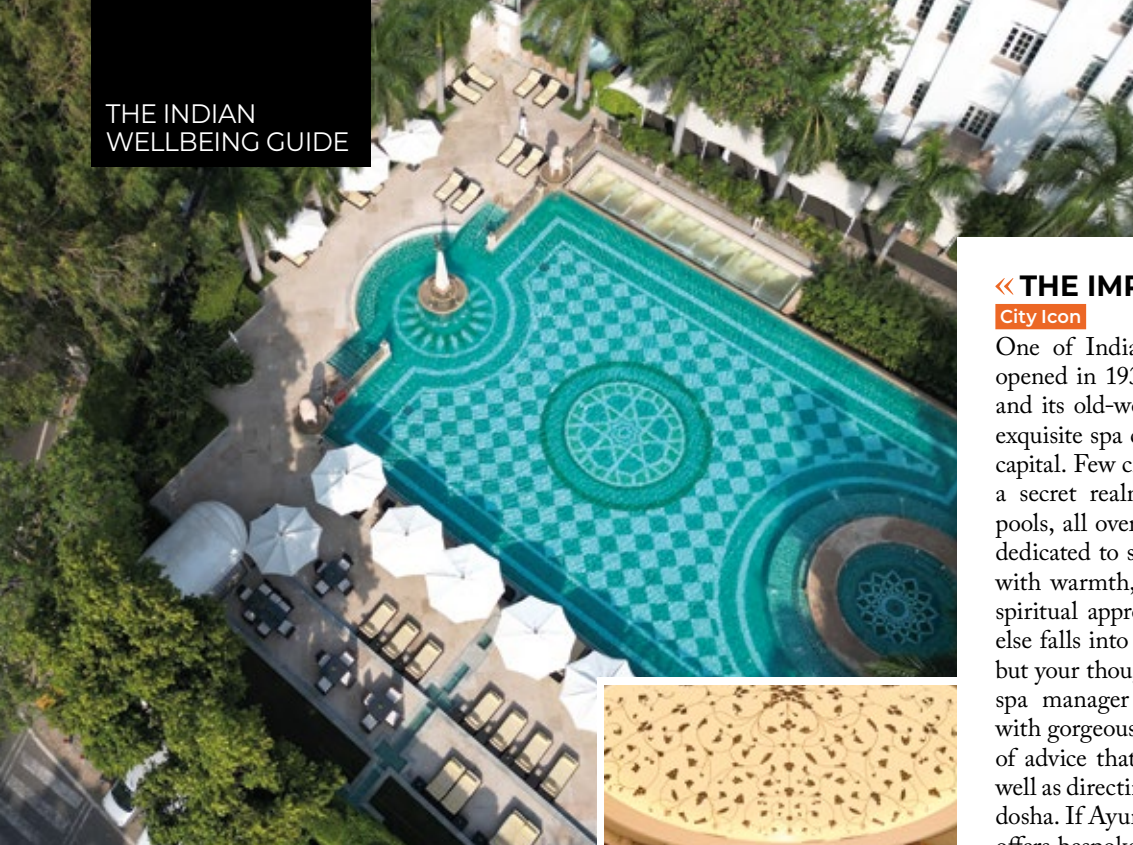


purgation (happy days) lunch replicates dinner and becomes a two-course meal. Expect beautifully presented vegetarian artworks, using ingredients mostly grown in the vicinity and served on a banana leaf. After dinner, there are evening lectures on Ayurveda, yogic chanting and trataka candle gazing meditations; education is key to integrating wisdom into a healthy lifestyle back home.

Ayurveda has recognised the brain-gut axis for thousands of years. A stay at Kalari is not just about weight loss, though double chins do disappear. True to India's life blood, the whole experience is more a journey of, and to, the inner Self. Yes, it is a physical purification, but is also about the subtle energies, the inner tantra, and coming into unity. For this to happen, the fetters of the mind and uncontrolled emotions are released within the safety net. Many guests cry on arrival, especially if they haven't been touched in years. As lead practitioner Dr Johaur says, 'the darkness is taken out, there is an internal atmospheric shift'. Is Panchakarma worth its pain points? Without question. I left Kalari feeling completely restored and reset, my energy up, my head cleared of cobwebs, my heart uplifted. In parallel to cleansing the digestive system, Panchakarma simultaneously declutters the brain and polishes the mirror of your soul. It leaves you purified, glowing and, crucially, ready to face a new future with vigour. Perhaps nothing is more precious or more needed in today's world. *DF*

BOOK IT: £6,035 for 14 nights. cgheartbayurveda.com/kalari-kovilakom

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

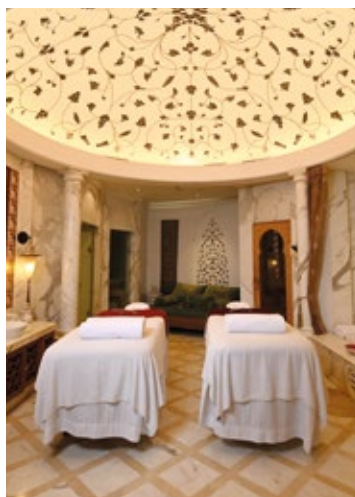


« THE IMPERIAL, Delhi

City Icon

One of India's Grande Dames. The Imperial opened in 1936 as the first hotel in New Delhi and its old-world charm, beautiful gardens and exquisite spa continue to provide a refuge in the capital. Few city spas are as atmospheric. Expect a secret realm of candles, scents, poetry and pools, all overseen by an invincible female team dedicated to supporting the traveller's transition with warmth, integrity and humour. 'Once the spiritual approach to life is in place everything else falls into place. We talk about organic food but your thoughts have to be organic too,' shares spa manager Sweety. A lifestyle consultation with gorgeous Doctor Sheema will reap snippets of advice that you will take home with you, as well as directing you to the best therapies for your dosha. If Ayurveda is not your thing, the spa also offers bespoke massages to suit the mood of the moment; oils range from black pepper, ginger, rouse and oud through to delicate Kashmiri nargis. The yoga teachers are equally exceptional and a new dedicated 'Yoga Sanctum', with a living wall of plants, provides the ideal space to practice. The Imperial matters, and with a tight and loving team at the helm, its future has never looked better. Goodbye colonial vestige, hello whole new era. *DF*

BOOK IT: £144 per night. theimperialindia.com



» THE TAJ MAHAL PALACE, Mumbai

Gateway of India

The penultimate place to stay in Mumbai, located bang opposite the Gateway of India in the beating heart of Colaba. 'The Taj', as it is simply known, is just as much a landmark as its namesake in Agra and, in its own way, just as beautiful. In fact, the hotel has never looked better or felt buzzier (just be sure to stay in the heritage wing, not the tower). To sit in the breezy courtyard beside the pool, perhaps under your own gazebo with a jazzy Caesar salad and coconut water, is to know that there is nowhere else in the city you would rather be right now. Ahh, but that's before you discover the new 'J Wellness Circle' spa. The menu includes all the usual Ayurvedic suspects but distinguishes itself with surprises like the city's first magnesium-rich flotation pool, as well as stand out Hamman treatments. Don't miss the hotel's Ayurvedic thread, even though it takes place in the older spa location near the gym, it's a gem. A massage with Rejitha is next-level and will unravel the tightest of shoulders. Be sure to mainline the signature 'Vishuddi Chai', an uplifting nectar of fresh lemon juice, holy basil leaves and organic jaggery. Divine. *DF*

BOOK IT: From £191 per night. tajhotels.com



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

Spiritual Journeys

Venture beyond the conventional spa break to feel the palpable truth of India's spiritual heritage, says *Harriet Compston*



PHOTOS: KERRY DEAN

Taking The Sacred Waters

THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

Everybody flocks to Rishikesh, but pilgrims converge from across the world to bathe in the sacred waters of this mesmerising temple at Amritsar, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs. Inside, priests continually chant from the holy book, the sounds broadcast across the complex. Outside, ringed by a marble walkway, is the Amrit Sarovar, the shimmering sacred pool, where the pilgrims bathe in the holy waters. Go at dusk to beat the colossal queues. goldentempleamritsar.org

History & Heritage

HAMPI

Mark out two or three days in your itinerary to visit this extraordinary UNESCO World Heritage Site. Spread across 16 square miles with the backdrop of the mighty river Tungabhadra, there are 1,600 surviving remains of the last great Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar – think forts, royal and sacred complexes, temples, shrines, pillared halls, memorials, water structures and more.

Spiritual Immersion

VARANASI

Varanasi is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world and one of the holiest for Hindus. It's a frenetic beguiling place: the flaming pyres lining the ghats of the Ganga River, the swirling ash thick in the air, and the holy men who have renounced worldly life. Stay in BrijRama Palace, with its rooftop terrace giving you front row seats to all the drama below. brijhotels.com

Hindu Pilgrimage

SRI RANGANATHASWAMY TEMPLE

Head south to Tamil Nadu and visit UNESCO World Heritage Site Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, the largest Hindu temple in the world, with 49 separate Vishnu shrines (whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5894). And don't miss another: the Elora cave temples. It's ancient Indian rock-cut architecture at its best, created over centuries by Buddhist, Hindu and Jain monks (whc.unesco.org/en/list/243).

Becoming Buddha

BODH GAYĀ

One of Buddhism's most holy sites – and for good reason. It is said that it was here, under the sacred bodhi tree 2,600 years ago, that Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became Buddha. The magnificent UNESCO World Heritage-listed Mahabodhi Temple marks this spiritual site, complete with a two metre-high, 10th-century golden statue of Buddha (whc.unesco.org/en/list/1056).

Seeing Shiva

EKLINGJI TEMPLE

Dedicated to Shiva, this 1,000-year-old Hindu temple complex, a half-hour drive from Udaipur, is a stunning complex of 108 temples. It is still very much a place of worship with the Rajasthani maharana visiting every Monday. Keep a look out for the gigantic four-faced marble idol which depicts the four different forms of Shiva. Stay the night at RAAS Devigarh, a beautiful fort palace tucked away in the Aravalli Hills (raashotels.com/devigarh).



Rabindranth Tagore (the first non-European writer to be awarded the Nobel prize for literature) put it best, 'the fundamental unity of creation was not simply a philosophical speculation for India; it was her life-object to realise this great harmony in feeling and in action. With meditation and service, with a regulation of life, she cultivated her consciousness in such a way that everything has spiritual meaning to her. The earth, water, light, fruits and flowers to her were not merely a physical phenomenon to be turned to use and then left aside. They were her ideal of perfection, as every note is necessary to the completeness of the symphony.'

Yoga For Your Intellect

VEDANTIC PHILOSOPHY

Experience a deep dive into the core concepts of India's profound Vedantic philosophy by listening to master teacher Joseph Emmett's podcast, *Yoga for your Intellect*. Joseph's discussions with his friend James Beshara are insightful and wise. A perfect daily practice. podcasts.apple.com

Spiritual Bootcamp

THE VEDANTA ACADEMY, Manali

A three-hour drive from Mumbai discover a trusted ashram which delivers a spiritual education for modern life. Come here to study the words of A. Parthasarathy, now in his 90s and affectionately known as 'Swamiji'. A self-realised master and author of 12 books on the ancient philosophy of India, transformative teachings provide a pathway to greater inner peace through knowledge of the Self and the truth of existence. Join resident students on the three-year rolling course and attend daily lectures and discussions which delve into what it means to be human. Topics range from harmonious relationships and freedom from stress to success at work and the art of giving. Designed to create an environment of psychological space, you'll sleep in simple but comforting accommodation and eat nourishing vegetarian or vegan meals. Akin to a softly delivered spiritual bootcamp, days start early with a 4am bell toll for self-study followed by yoga. If you want to stay, a donation of \$100 a night is suggested. You can also join the e-learning course. DF.vedantaworld.org

FIVE GOLDEN VEDANTIC PRINCIPLES

- 1** Life is to give, not to take. **2** Raise yourself by yourself. **3** Whatever is forced is never forceable. **4** As you think, so you become... **5** Rise in love not fall in love.

NEED TO KNOW

All the big news – here and far – for
Indophiles, plus the best of Indian beauty

FLIGHT FREE AYURVEDA

Check out the UK's two Ayurveda big hitters: Clover Mill (theclovermill.com), a renovated 17th-century mill in the Malvern Hills, and the Scarlet Hotel (scarlethotel.co.uk), an eco-friendly cliff-top bolthole in Cornwall for adults only.

Lime Wood has announced a collaboration with Ayurvedic therapist and Reiki healer Sheena Chandra. She will bring her magic to the Herb House spa, offering Shirodhara (a deeply relaxing head massage), the full-body Abhyanga massage with oil, and lumbosacral therapy Kati Vasti (limewoodhotel.co.uk).

PLUS THREE UK STARS FOR YOUR BLACK BOOK ...

1 JILLIAN LAVENDER AND MICHAEL MILLER

Learn Vedic meditation with Jillian Lavender and Michael Miller, a couple who met in India while on retreat. Together they distil the sanctity, practicality and effectiveness of a daily practice with the potential to change your life. londonmeditationcentre.com

2 CORNELIUS O'SHAUGHNESSY

Warm and witty, much-loved Cornelius O'Shaughnessy teaches India's Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist wisdom. Join his daily online meditations at 7:30am at bodhimaya.com, and watch out for his forthcoming two-night retreats in Berkshire.

3 ANNE MCINTYRE

Appointments with medical herbalist and

Ayurvedic practitioner, Anne McIntyre, based in the Cotswolds, are like gold dust. Her garden is home to over 150 species of herbs and her office is packed with enticing bottles of homemade elixirs, herbal mixes, teas and potions. She also offers numerous riveting courses, many of which include exquisite natural lunches in her home. annemcintyre.com

NEW STAR SPAS

Keep a watch on Anopura, a magical rural escape just outside Jaipur, which is opening a new spa next year (anopura.com). The Leela Ashtamudi, nestled in the pristine Kerala backwaters of the Ashtamudi lakes, opened in October 2023, with a beautiful spa, offering an extensive menu of rejuvenating massages, Ayurveda therapies and detox programmes inspired by traditional techniques (theleela.com).

GO WILD

Celebrating its 10th anniversary, SUJÁN's pioneering Jawai Leopard Camp, deep in the wilderness of Rajasthan, continues to hit all the wellbeing high notes, with a lakeside spa, invigorating yoga sessions and cycling expeditions traversing spectacular terrain. thesujanlife.com/jawai

TIME FOR TEA

Don't miss Glenburn Tea Estate, a former planter's bungalow set on a working tea plantation in Darjeeling. Alongside eight colonial-style bedrooms with terrific mountain views, there's a fantastic spa, with full body massages, using Darjeeling Green Tea Oil, and Green Tea baths. glenburnteestate.com

BOOK NOW

Nab a spot on Jasmine's Hemsley's 'East by West' Ayurvedic-inspired retreat at Britain's The Vedanta (15-15 Sept; thevedanta.org). Or at Bujera Fort near Udaipur for impactful yoga with Julie Montagu (5-11 Nov; kurudiproject.com/juliemontaguindia).

PHOTO: KERRY DEAN



AYURVEDA COMES TO EUROPE

The Ayurvedic approach is going from strength to strength in Europe. Newcomer Datu (datuwellness.com), set against the beautiful nature-filled backdrop of Tuscany, offers retreats bringing together leading practitioners from the worlds of Ayurveda, Yoga, and other Eastern healing techniques. Also, new to the scene is Engel Ayurpura (ayurpura.hotel-engel.com), a brand new boutique hotel high in the Dolomites, which is dedicated to Ayurveda complete with a double-height Ayurvedic restaurant opening out onto a large terrace. Across the border, golden oldie Ayurveda Parkschlösschen (ayurveda-parkschloesschen.de) has an impressive array of Ayurveda programmes, including the hard-hitting Panchakarma. Finally, Ayurveda Resort Mandira (mandira-ayurveda.at) in Austria's green heart of Styria Styria, has launched the ultimate solution to fight against fatigue, with a five-night programme, combining Ayurveda and conventional medicine, designed to boost energy, increase performance and help recovery.

AUTHENTIC PANCHAKARMA OUTPOSTS

For professionalism in pretty surroundings Nattika Beach Ayurveda Resort (thenattikabeach.com) is garnering strong reports, so too Vaidyagrama, a proper Ayurvedic hospital which delivers results and care in equal measure (vaidyagrama.com). Meanwhile, in Hyderabad, check out the Raju Ayurveda Centres (drraju.com) where family wisdom has been passed down through generations of 'vaidyas'.

INDIAN BEAUTY BUYS

Rooted in tradition but packing a modern punch



KAMA AYURVEDA Kumkumadi Revitalising Facial Oil
Powered by the miraculous botanical of saffron, this nourishing face oil restores a healthy glow. £124, kamaayurveda.com



TRI-DOSHA Vata Relax Massage Oil
With 100 percent natural ingredients, Tri-Dosha's body oils make for a wonderfully scented self-care ritual. £23, tri-dosha.co.uk



SAMAYA Renewing Exfoliant
Rooted in the three doshas, this exfoliant comes in varieties tailored to your body type and it will leave your skin super soft without stripping the skin barrier. £69, samayaayurveda.com



MAULI RITUALS Supreme Skin Face Serum
This lightweight serum diminishes oxidative damage, stimulates cell renewal, and leaves your skin looking supple and radiant. £37, maulirituals.com



FOREST ESSENTIALS Soundarya High Performance Cream with 24ct Gold & SPF 30
This rich day cream harnesses the power of pure 24ct gold, Bhasma, Ayurvedic herbs and cold pressed oils. £55, forestessentials.co.uk