



The way to wellness

Time to relax: Health of the mind and the body comes first, and look no beyond India's own backyard for healing options



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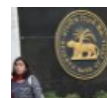


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Everything in our daily lives is more stressful and fast-paced than it was even a decade ago. And it only seems to be getting more so with every year. Increased conveniences have brought with them their own set of problems along with the solutions – from smartphones to packaged foods, every single thing that has made our life easier has also made it prone to some form of harm or the other. Then there is the pollution and contamination in the soil we grow our crops in, the water we drink, and the very air that we breathe. Not to forget the pressures we put on ourselves to do better than our neighbours, colleagues, friends – if not in reality, then at least on Facebook status updates and Instagram photos.

As a wise physician friend once remarked, “These days, we don’t have lives, we have lifestyles.” And with these lifestyles we have chosen to embrace and

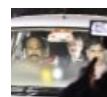
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pursue, there are lifestyle ailments on the increase at an alarming rate: hypertension, diabetes, anxiety and depression, and so on.

In the middle of our busy schedules, there is barely any time to eat well and exercise well. The diet always begins tomorrow and the gym membership always goes unused after the first week. At least, this is the case with a majority of us today; there are always those dedicated health and fitness devotees who treat their bodies as temples, and the food they eat as offerings to their bodies.

But even for them, there is an occasional need to just get away, to switch off both smart gadgets and stressful thoughts, and just let go. Breathe in fresh air, eat light and on time, and follow a simple daily routine. It is no surprise then that more and more people are seeking wellness breaks even in the midst of their jobs, travels and domestic duties.

India being the birthplace of both yoga and ayurveda, has no paucity of healing and wellness retreats. While these range from basic yoga centres to fancy ayurveda resorts, they all promise one thing: a healthier you. And this means both a healthy body and a healthy mind.

The best thing about the focus on wellness among Indians means that irrespective of the time in hand, there is an option available: from a weekend of rest and relaxation to a fortnight of complete detox and rejuvenation, it is possible to take time off. There are wellness options within cities (or just outside) that let you stay for a long weekend as well as ones located in the relative isolation of the hills or the backwaters that are ideal for longer stints.

The first step while reaching out for a wellness break is to understand your motivation and aim for seeking this. Is it a chronic medical condition that needs to be addressed? Is it just a need to get away from the stress of city life? Or is it a long-term need to learn the principles of healthy living?

Then decide if you want to focus on a particular area of treatment (for want of a better word). Do you think ayurveda is the answer? Do you want to learn yogic practices, including breathing techniques that you can continue even when you are back home? Is a food-based naturopathy form of therapy your best option? Or a combination of all these?

To understand these better, here is a primer:

Ayurveda: Meaning the science of life, this ancient system of medicine has been practised in India for several millennia now. This treatment will include oral medication in case of health problems (this is a choice you need to make — whether to take medicines or just go for external treatments), an ideal diet to

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suit your body type, and a combination of massages and panchakarma treatments that aim to detox the physical system.

Yoga:

In parallel with ayurveda, yoga is another of ancient India's gift to the world, one that even the most advanced societies acknowledge to be the best form of relief for the most severe physical and mental stress. Combined with *pranayama* and meditation techniques, there is no doubt that yoga can be a panacea to many of the ills of modern life. Most yoga retreats also combine some other form of wellness in their offering, in the form of sattvic food or massage therapies.



Naturopathy:

Traditional Indian texts on health have always maintained that food is the best medicine. In the commotion of getting through our daily lives, we have mostly forgotten the basic principles of healthy eating, such as eating light, eating locally grown food and eating on time. Naturopathy aims to correct disturbances in the mind and body just through a diet that has been tailored to your specific requirements. Added to the diet usually are treatments based on the five elements of water, air, earth, fire and ether (think mud packs and breathing techniques).

Once you have a basic understanding of the state of your own body and mind, then try to find the place that will understand your unique needs and will customise a course for you, whether over two days or two weeks.

The choices are aplenty now, all over India. Shoba Mohan, partner and founder at Rare India, a travel company that works to promote small boutique properties that follow sustainable practices across the country, says, "It is almost mandatory for hotels to have a spa now. When I started the company, at least the forest lodges did not bother with a spa, but now, thanks to the high-end travel segment, features like a spa, gym and pool have become important everywhere."

Here are some of the wellness retreats in India:

Ananda in the Himalayas

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One of the first choices for both Indians and foreigners, this upmarket retreat is the repurposed former palace of the Maharaja of the Tehri Garhwal region. It is spread over nearly 100 acres and located in the pristine foothills of the Himalayas overlooking Rishikesh. Whether mental rejuvenation or focussed weight loss, detox or de-stress, the offering at Ananda is a combination of ayurveda, yoga, diet and the spiritual principles of Vedanta philosophy. The spa alone is spread over 24,000 square feet and offers the ultimate in pampering massages and signature treatments.

More info: www.anandaspa.com/

Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala

This centre in the heart of Kerala can rightly be considered the first among equals when it comes to the ancient healing science of ayurveda. What began as a village clinic set up in 1902 by physician and philanthropist, the late Vaidyaratnam P S Varier, is now the gold standard in ayurveda treatment in India. They make their own medicines, mostly using ingredients that they cultivate locally, and also sell these through their pharmacies across the country. Although there are outposts of AVS in Kochi, New Delhi and Baddi in Himachal Pradesh, the original one at Kottakkal is the best suited for people with medical conditions.

More info: www.aryavaidyasala.com

Shreyas Yoga Retreat

Less than two hours' drive from Bangalore, and spread over 25 acres of elegantly maintained grounds, Shreyas is in every way the quiet retreat that it promises to be. The focus here is on overall wellness rather than the mere practice of bendy postures that go by the name of yoga in several new places. Along with yoga practice, Shreyas also offers massages rooted in ayurveda as well as a simple diet where produce from the retreat's organic garden is used as much as possible. Shreyas also offers the highly rejuvenating option of following a vow of silence for as long as you choose.

More info: www.shreyasretreat.com

Niraamaya Retreats Surya Samudra

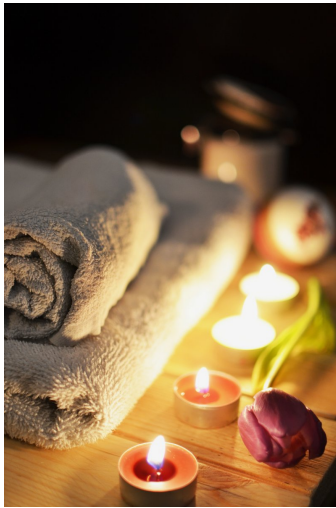
If you seek wellness with more than a hint of luxury, then look no further than this resort set in a spectacular clifftop location in Kovalam, near Trivandrum. Niraamaya specifically focuses on ayurveda, with an in-house physician who recommends the correct course of treatment, depending on an analysis of body type and health condition. The resort is known for its wellness packages lasting from 5 to 14 days: stress management, weight loss as well as a comprehensive yoga programme. If nothing else, even a weekend break at this wellness resort with its almost private beach and excellent spa are enough to feel renewed and refreshed.

More info: www.niraamaya.in

Soukya

This popular retreat in the affluent Bangalore suburb of Whitefield describes itself as a holistic health centre. And this is a perfect description, given that the wellness therapies here are usually a combination of ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy and where needed, homeopathy. Soukya is particularly known for its panchakarma treatments, meant to work on the specific dosha imbalance (vata, pita and kapha) in the body. The packages here include a wide variety from Sundar (anti-aging) and Shareera (weight loss) to Sukha (de-stress) and Santosha (rejuvenation). It is not for nothing that *Forbes* magazine has recently included it in a list of top five wellness retreats in the world.

More info: www.soukya.com



Mekosha Ayurveda Spa Suites

This new kid on the wellness block offers that rare opportunity to indulge in as many treatments and therapies as you wish while staying there, all under the guidance of a qualified ayurveda physician. The location itself is idyllic, right by the banks of the calm Vamanapuram river just outside Trivandrum and surrounded by lush greenery that soothes the mind instantly. Apart from standard health packages, Mekosha also has a long-stay option for 28 days, making it perfectly suited for those who seek a dramatic change in their current lives. All the suites come with their own small spa area, where certain types of massages can be performed, without having to go all the way to the common therapy area.

More info: mekosha.com

Vana

In just four years, Vana at Malsi Estate near Dehradun has won acclaim as a wellness retreat that is willing to go the extra mile. The therapies here at this 21-acre estate include not just the usual suspects such as ayurveda and yoga, but stretch to modern aqua therapies, reflexology and Sowa Rigpa, a traditional Tibetan system of medicine. The team at Vana equate entry into this healing space to vanavas, or the practice of entering the forest to reconnect with oneself. This is done not just through massages and meditation, but also by actively slowing down every aspect of life.

More info: www.vana.co.in

Kaivalyadhama

This yoga ashram near Lonavala, close to both Mumbai and Pune, is one of the most respected names among those interested in yoga. The centre is devoted to not just the teaching of yoga, but also immersive research into yogic science, and caters to both beginners and advanced students of yoga. As with other such places, Kaivalyadhama has complementary therapies in the form of both naturopathy and ayurveda, along with simple vegetarian meals. There is also a yoga college within the premises that offers comprehensive courses and diplomas for serious aspirants.

More info: kdham.com

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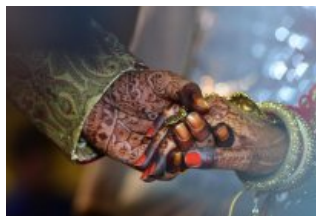
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