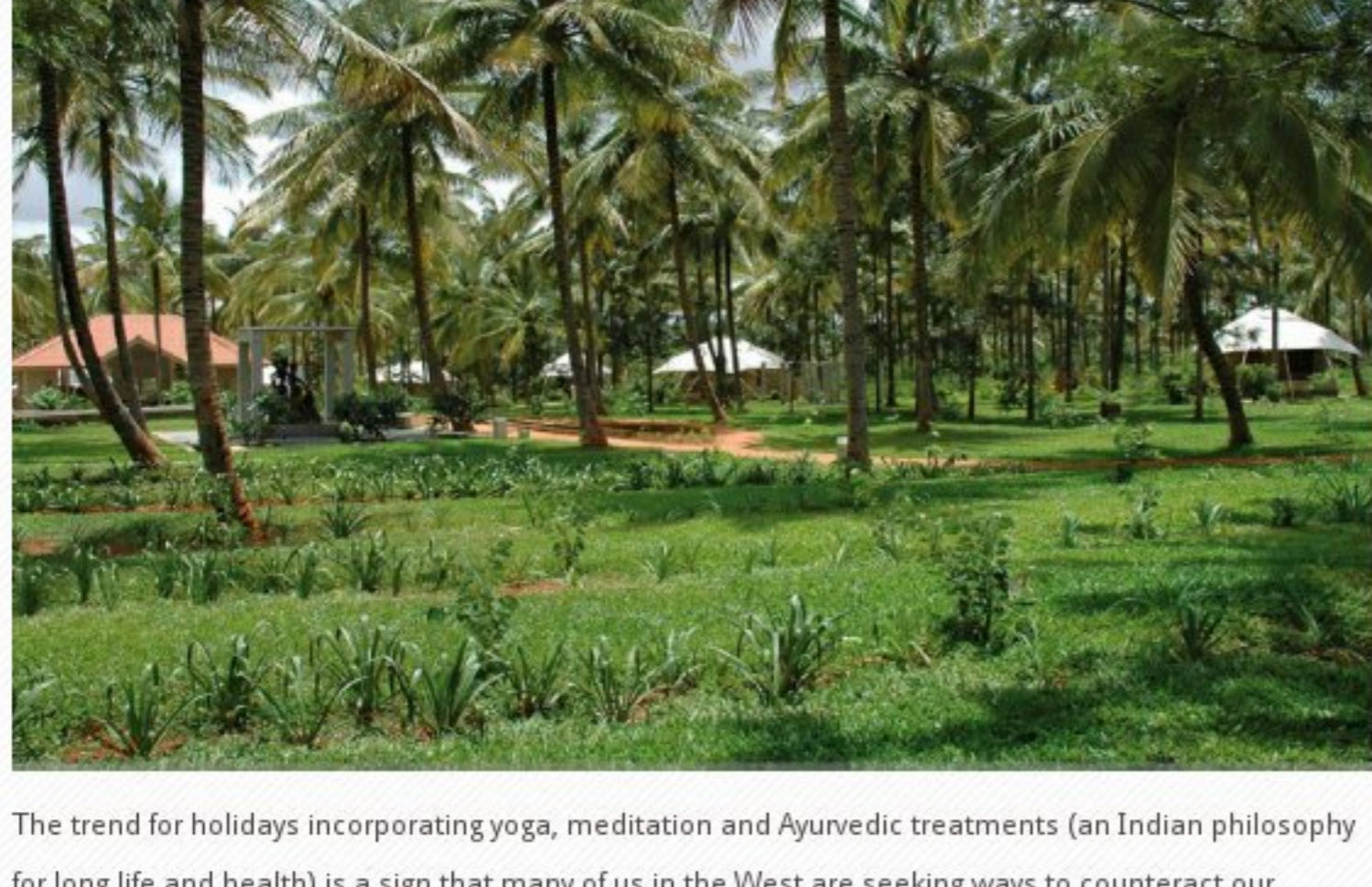


Home » Home Page Slideshow » A Journey of self-discovery

A journey of self-discovery

Posted by Catherine Beattie on Apr 25, 2015 in Home Page Slideshow, India, Spa Reviews, Worldwide Spas | 0 comments



The trend for holidays incorporating yoga, meditation and Ayurvedic treatments (an Indian philosophy for long life and health) is a sign that many of us in the West are seeking ways to counteract our stressful lifestyles.

I had travelled up-state to the Shreyas Retreat at Karnataka, a luxury private yoga retreat considered one of the best in the world, and which promises to take guests on a journey of self discovery through ancient Indian wisdom.

The retreat is located around one hour from the IT hub of Bangalore, from where one of the team (recognisable by a crisp white cotton gown and peaceful aura) transported me into a spiritual haven.

Tucked miles away from sight or sound of a suit or call centre phone, my chauffeur explained that 'Shreyas' stands for all-round excellence, and the manifestation of this is considered the purpose of our lives. He continued that Shreyas is all about harnessing, refining, purifying our body/mind energy and spiritualising our actions and emotions.

Developed by an investment banker who set up the retreat with his guru to pursue his own spiritual practice then decided to help stressed out Westerners do the same, it is a stylish and tranquil haven, 'modelled' on an Ashram (a centre where devotees go to follow their spiritual path, living in basic and traditional communities). However, rest assured, at Shreyas, they don't subscribe to austerity or abstinence, aside from being a non smoking and non alcohol retreat.

Settling in

I completed my medical questionnaire over a freshly prepared pineapple juice and was shown to my beautiful tent styled accommodation. There are just 12 cottages (pool side, garden tents and bedroom cottages) and only ever a maximum of 25 people staying there, which gives a feeling of intimacy.



My accommodation was superb, including a terrace with wooden carved sun lounger and table. Inside, the bed was larger than my kitchen at home, and I couldn't wait to dive into the crisp white sheets after my long journey. The bathroom opened up to the star spangled sky - with blinds that discreetly shut off the light and provided

essential privacy.

At Shreyas everything is very carefully considered. I received sweet smelling flowers upon arrival, a red rose and home baked cookies for my journey home, my bathroom was stocked with natural and home-made soap and toiletries, known-brand toothpaste and brush, good quality mosquito cream, ear plugs, multi-extension leads for UK plugs, as well as a thick comfy yoga mat for guests' use and a couple of thoughtfully placed books to inspire.



A spiritual daily routine

The suggested daily structure was: 6.30-8am yoga, 8.30-9am breakfast, 9am till 10am, meditation and chanting, 10-1pm free time, 1-2pm lunch, 2-4pm massage/treatments or free time, 4-5pm yoga then nature walk, 7-9pm dinner, and afterwards, should guests be missing digital entertainment a 9pm film screening in the home theatre room.

The programme is simply a model; guests who don't wish to participate can enjoy the idyllic surroundings and choose their own activities such as taking the jogging/walking track amid 25 acres of lush green landscape, snuggling down to watch movies, borrowing books from the retreat's extensive library, working out in the gym or simply relaxing beside the 25 metre pool at the heart of the retreat. Encircled by large canvas umbrellas, beige wicker loungers/chair, cream cushions and palm trees, it exudes an air of European chic..

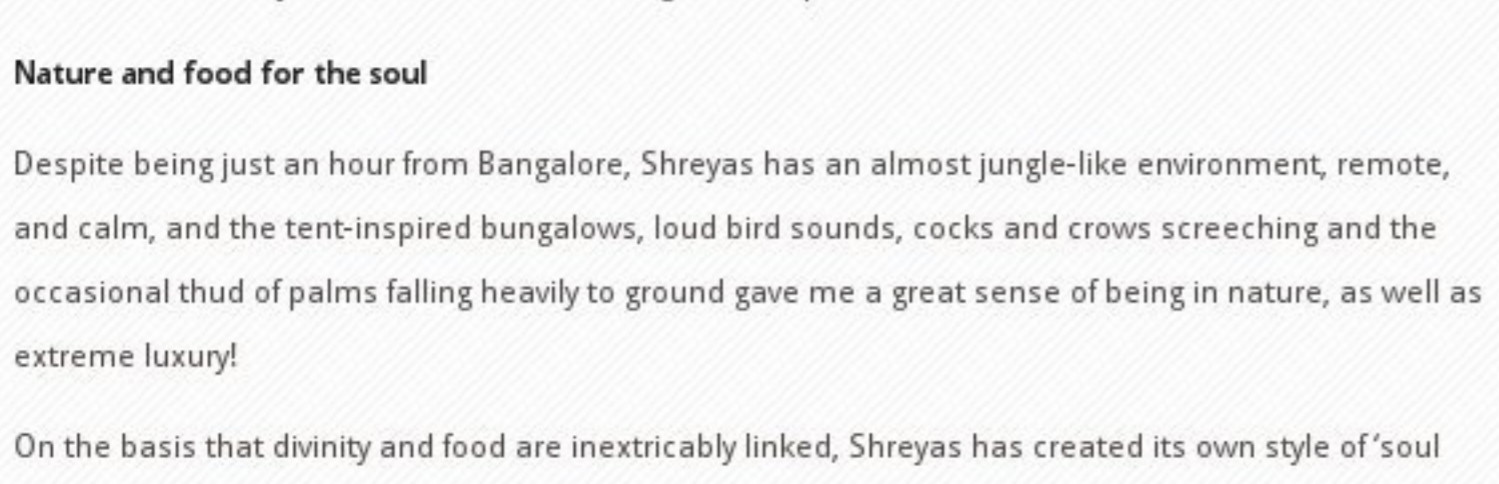


That said, the location (an oasis of green), and everything on offer provides the perfect opportunity for self-discovery including community service to enjoy the experience of giving. The surroundings are inspirational, calm and peaceful, the waft of incense soothes the soul and the flowers and general ambience is wholly conducive to surrendering to introspection.

Nature and food for the soul

Despite being just an hour from Bangalore, Shreyas has an almost jungle-like environment, remote, and calm, and the tent-inspired bungalows, loud bird sounds, cocks and crows screeching and the occasional thud of the palms falling heavily to ground gave me a great sense of being in nature, as well as extreme luxury!

On the basis that divinity and food are inextricably linked, Shreyas has created its own style of 'soul food' (and published a beautiful book filled with delicious recipes and photography). On my first evening I settled down to some of the best cuisine I've ever tasted. During my time there, I enjoyed a delicious combination of wholesome home-cooked Indian and Western vegetarian dishes lovingly prepared from the retreat's organic garden coupled with Italian salads, pasta and pizza.



What's more, guests "retreating" alone need not worry about the embarrassment of a 'table for one'. At Shreyas they seat guests together, in twos, or on a larger group table to encourage sociability.

Ayurvedic treatments

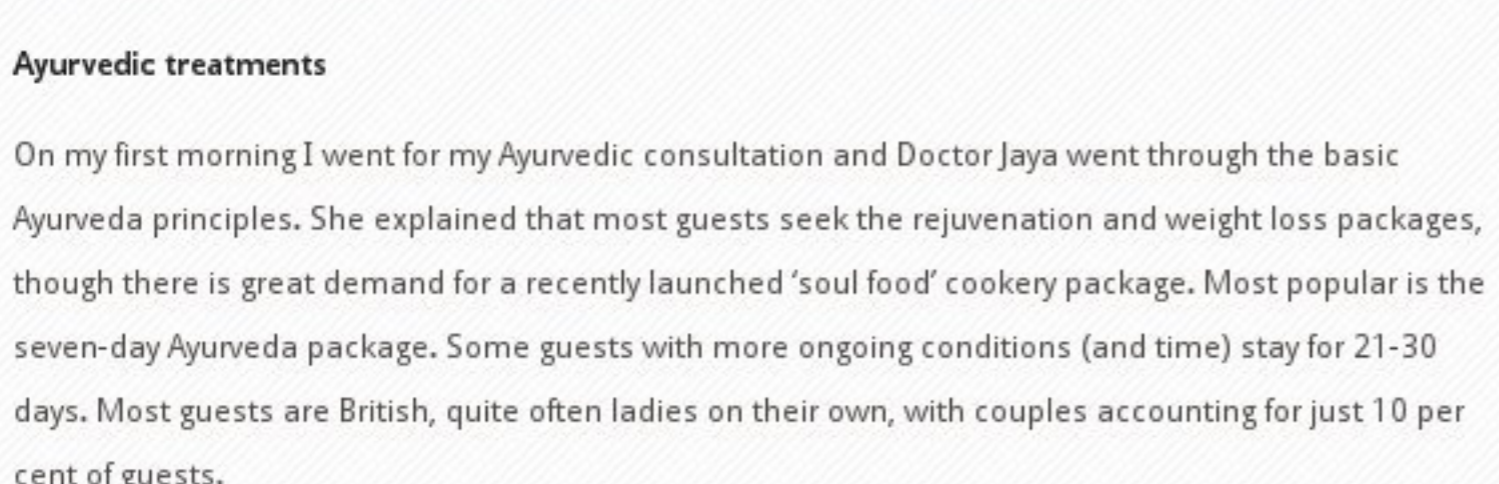
On my first morning I went for my Ayurvedic consultation and Doctor Jaya went through the basic Ayurveda principles. She explained that most guests seek the rejuvenation and weight loss packages, though there is great demand for a recently launched 'soul food' cookery package. Most popular is the seven-day Ayurveda package. Some guests with more ongoing conditions (and time) stay for 21-30 days. Most guests are British, quite often ladies on their own, with couples accounting for just 10 per cent of guests.

According to Ayurveda there are three distinct types of character and we are influenced by the elements of air, fire, water, ether, and earth. The doshas, also known as tridoshas, correspond to individual organs and parts of the body and are dominated by an element or sometimes two.

Our predominant dosha is predetermined at conception and while we may be this one main 'dosha' all of our lives, we are also comprised of the other two doshas which can change and alter, and it is when imbalance of these tridoshas occurs that the body becomes susceptible to disease.

Dr Jaya prescribed Choorna Pinda Swedam, an Ayurvedic massage using local herbal powders so I headed down to the Rejuvenation Spa.

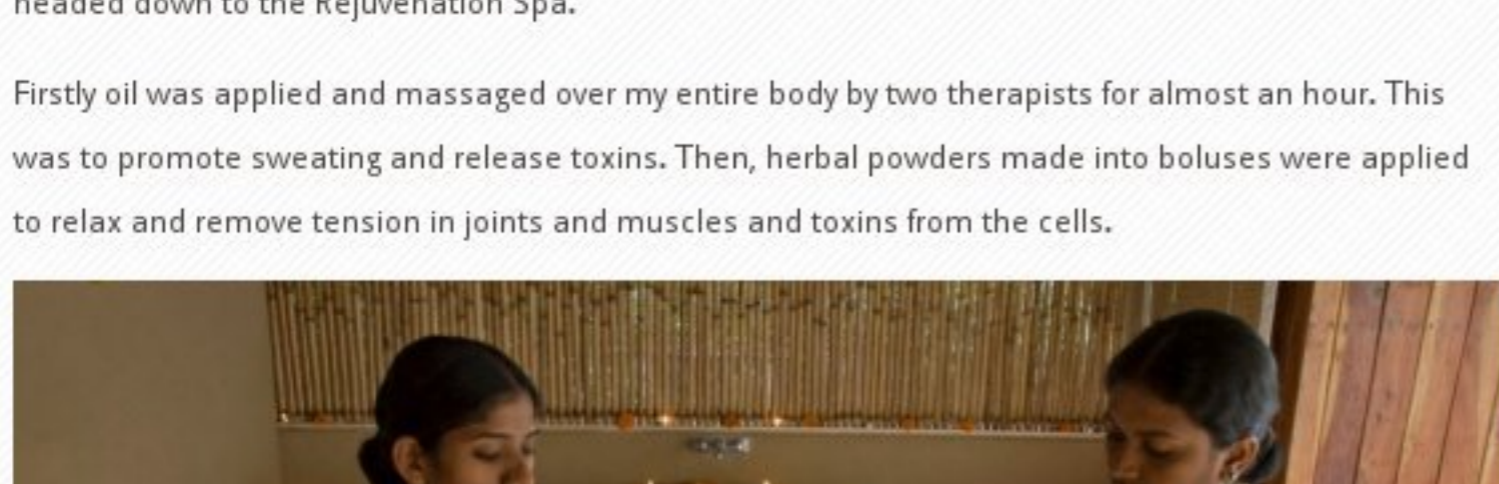
Firstly oil was applied and massaged over my entire body by two therapists for almost an hour. This was to promote sweating and release toxins. Then, herbal powders made into boluses were applied to relax and remove tension in joints and muscles and toxins from the cells.



The whole experience was absolutely amazing and I was floating on air when I left the spa. But my treatment wasn't finished. I was led into the steam room for 15 minutes so the benefits could seep even deeper and afterwards my skin felt superbly clean and soft and my shoulders very loose and relaxed.

Yoga and the art of giving

In the mornings the yoga tended to be dynamic while the evening yoga was more relaxing, slower paced and included a yoga nidra (deep meditative journey for relaxation and inner balance). I especially enjoyed an expertly tutored Ashtanga yoga session with teacher, Ramakant.



The morning meditation sessions took place in a small stand alone hut, recognisable by the wafts and puffs of Sandalwood incense blowing in the breeze, and surrounded by coconut and chickoo trees. The session involved some chanting and breathing techniques. Afterwards, guests walked silently as if in a daze to the pool area, to allow this spiritual awakening settle in their mind, body and soul.

Shreyas supports local charities and offers community service to guests so that they can experience the ancient art of 'karmayoga', selfless service. A definite highlight for me was going with one of the Shreyas team and another guest to visit the nearby children's orphanage that the company donates to. We met the children then served them the organic vegetarian food that had been prepared by chef, and with help from some of the guests.

The retreat appears effortlessly manicured but a constant workforce is at work, sweeping away fallen leaves from paths, bringing fresh coconuts (a natural rehydrating drink) to guests as soon as they arrive at the pool, clearing debris from the pool and filling in the paving stones if rubble spills out on to the track.

The white robed Shreyas team seemed to effortlessly float about the retreat, ever ready to cater to guests' every requirements, and their greeting was always the same; 'namaste', a Sanskrit word which roughly translates to mean hello/goodbye as well as I salute the light in you.

I totally relaxed in the Zen-like atmosphere. Shreyas have created the perfect formula of luxury and simplicity so this is a great choice if you want to begin a journey of self awareness or to develop your spiritual practice further in an authentic yet five star environment.

Shreyas Yoga Retreat

Santoshima Farm, Gollahalli Gate, Nelamangala, 562123, Bangalore India.

Tel: +91 80 2773 7102/31 Email: reservations@shreyasretreat.com.

Visit www.shreyasretreat.com and www.mahoutuk.com/ to find more private heritage hotels/properties in India.

Sarah flew with Emirates. Return flights from London Gatwick to Trivandrum (via Dubai) cost from £432 including taxes. Visit www.emirates.co.uk. Shreyas Yoga Retreat is a one hour transfer from Bangalore International airport.

Prices

From 1 October to 31 March the nightly rate in a garden tent is US\$430 double and US\$330 single; from 1 April until 30 Sept the nightly rate is US\$380 double or US\$280 single.

The seven night Ayurvedic Rejuvenation package taken between 1 October and 31 March costs US\$5190 double and \$3470 single; from 1 April to 30 Sept the package costs US\$4920 double or US\$3240 single.

Other packages include; wellness for the soul, weight management, yoga retreat, the joy of giving and silent retreat with each package customised according to guests' preferences.

In the Rejuvenation Spa Sarah sampled the Choorna Pinda Swedam, 90-minute Ayurvedic double therapist massage to remove toxins, and relax joints/muscles, US\$85. Other treatments on the menu besides Ayurveda include Balinese, Thai or Swedish massage and beauty treatments using natural products such as honey and coconut scrub, coffee or chocolate body scrub or face mask.

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