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5 EASY TRIPS



The open-air gazebo is perfect for that afternoon nap

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Shreyas Yoga Retreat, Karnataka, Give peace a chance

WHY GO

The next time you're overcome by the need to introspect, or to get away for some peace, take yourself to an enchanted garden, tucked far in a secluded little village outside Bangalore. Here, you can leave all the chaos and grime of the world behind. Shreyas Yoga Retreat sprawls across 25 acres of green tranquility. In its little cottages nestled among palm groves, the sheer quiet – broken only by bird calls – will work on you, easing the stress just a bit.

The day comes alive bright and early, with the first yoga class beginning at 7am in an open-air atrium next to the outdoor amphitheatre (classes 7am-8am and 4pm-5pm). No pressure if you're a beginner; they teach you basic Hatha Yoga, which concentrates on easy stretches and breathing techniques. A word of warning though: if you're not used to yoga, after a few days, all those stretches may have your body screaming back at you for

discovering joints you weren't quite aware of. Later, get yourself scrubbed clean with one of their edible-sounding body scrubs (chocolate scrub, anyone?) or pamper yourself with one of their feel-good Balinese, Thai or Swedish massages (₹ 2,200 for a massage, ₹ 2,400 onwards for body scrub and massage). You can spend the rest of the day exploring the Zen grounds and organic gardens or even volunteer for a bit in them. Keep your eyes peeled for a

brilliant flash of blue in the form of a kingfisher or a shy egret, maybe even that elusive drongo. Go for a nice long swim, or ease off in the steam room. Enjoy some herbal tea in the easy chair outside your room, or simply sit back, and relish doing nothing. The library houses an eclectic collection of fiction and self-help books which you could read by the gazebo at the poolside, before dropping off into that afternoon siesta. While breakfast and lunch at Shreyas are unfussy, dinner is served *al fresco* by the pool, with candles

GREAT FROM Bangalore



Shreyas grows and harvests organic veggies that are used in your food
 Top left: The children at the orphanage are always happy to make new friends
 Top: Curl up in the library and enjoy its eclectic collection of books
 Left: Yoga class is worth waking up early in the morning for

GO NOW
 To recharge your peace chakras

and little fairy lanterns strung about the place.
 Admittedly, the explosion of rose petals and jasmine flowers in every nook and corner could have you feeling like you've invaded someone's honeymoon, but those floral offerings are only part of the meticulous attentiveness that seems second nature to the friendly,

soft-spoken men in white who look after the otherwise-austere resort. Look away for a second, and your slippers will be turned the right way around; step out for a bit, and your bed will be

The spa at Shreyas uses Ayurvedic products



remade, with the shutters adjusted just right.

But though this retreat will be all about renewal of body and mind, it doesn't need to stop with 'you'. Even if just for an afternoon, help out at the local orphanage, **Kaveri Vanita Seva Ashram**, the resort works with – take some food for the children and spend a little time with them. The kids will sing for you, talk excitedly and laugh loudly with you; it's wonderfully unpretentious. The kids seem genuinely happy to meet you, and it is

a heartening reminder of the pleasures of looking beyond yourself (*community service programme ₹ 4,000*).

And while you may not make that mythical journey to 'inner peace' that the resort's tagline promises, you will come away feeling refreshed, with some measure of calm. It comes from, as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow put it, from having "some time to stand and stare".

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5 EASY TRIPS

FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Bangalore (35km); about an hour's drive away. The roads get bumpy, and you may have to stop once in a while to weave your way through cattle, but the paddy fields are pretty and there are literally rows upon rows of coconut trees to stare at. The retreat will organise your airport or railway station transfers (*one-way ₹ 2,200 plus taxes*).

Closest airport: Bengaluru International Airport (45km; bengaluruairport.com) is superbly connected to Indian metros through the whole gamut of domestic airlines. Early birds will find return economy fares as low as ₹ 5,500.

Closest railhead: Bangalore City Railway Junction (40km; code: SBC) is a big hub on the South-Western Railway and trains from most cities stop here.

GETTING AROUND

Shreyas will organise a car for you to go into Bangalore for the day or pretty much wherever you feel like going (₹ 4,000 for a city tour).

WHERE TO STAY

Shreyas Yoga Retreat:

The understatedly-elegant rooms are striking in their simplicity and detail. Each artefact looks like it has been carefully selected; there are charming lotus lamps and quirky Tibetan-style wooden cupboards. And they all come equipped with your regular creature comforts. The open-air bathroom in the tented garden cottages will have you wishing you had one back at home. (00-91-80-27737102; shreyasretreat.com; Santoshima Farm, Gollahalli Gate, Nelamangala; ₹ 14,000 onwards plus taxes for the garden or poolside cottages, includes all meals, daily yoga classes, sound meditation, wellness consultation and the use of facilities like the steam, open-air



jacuzzi, gym, etc). Should you wish to stay longer, the website offers a range of packages to choose from.

WHAT TO EAT

They call it 'organically grown gourmet vegetarian' but simply put, the food is fresh, wholesome, delicious and reminds you of home. You're served a fixed menu ranging between Indian and western in the dining hall (breakfast 8.30am-9.30am, lunch 1pm-2pm, dinner 8.30pm-9.30pm). If you find a dish particularly pleasing to your palate, the chefs are happy to

share their secrets (*cooking demonstrations ₹ 3,000 for an hour for three to four dishes*).

WHAT TO PACK

That book you've been wanting to read, a swimsuit, walking shoes, and comfortable clothes for yoga. The staff at Shreyas thoughtfully puts out little tubes of mosquito repellent everywhere and a torch in your room should you feel like wandering about in the dark. A big black umbrella straight out of your grandfather's closet will appear in your room if storm clouds threaten.

SHOPPING

There's nothing to buy at the retreat, but if you mention you like one of their home-grown herbal teas or their (addictive) roasted flax seeds, you will promptly be given some to take home with you. If you feel the need to splurge, head to Bangalore's Brigade Road to buy pretty much everything under the sun – from silk saris to sandalwood and electronics.

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

It's slim pickings as you make your way through little villages to get to Shreyas. It's best to use the loo at the airport and hold on till you reach.

SAFETY

You're safe enough at the retreat, but like everywhere else in the great outdoors, watch your step and try not to pick up fascinating-looking insects.

MEDICAL AID

The resort has an Ayurvedic doctor on call who knows her first aid kit inside out, and the nearest hospital is about 7km away (**Harsha Hospital:** 00-91-80-27724003; Nelamangala). For the more serious stuff, you will need to head to Bangalore.

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Little ones are quite welcome at Shreyas; there's a home theatre room with a stellar movie collection, and they will organise a movie on request or cricket at the nets. They're happy to organise yoga 'games', where they make the exercises easy and fun for the kids. That being said, it's a retreat; they like quiet, and frown upon any great disturbance of the peace.

GOOD TO KNOW

- Leave that cell-phone at home; network signals are pretty strong and you don't want disruptions in your quest for inner peace!
- You're required to remove your shoes before entering any of the rooms/ dwellings, in keeping with the principles of yoga.
- There's no alcohol or non-veg allowed and preferably no smoking, either.