

# traveller

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## HIGHER GROUND

### SUMMER HILLS SPECIAL

- GANGOTRI
- NAG TIBBA
- WAYANAD
- COORG
- MUSSOORIE

The stunning route to Gannukh

PHOTO ESSAY  
**CAPPADOCIA**

SOMEWHERE ELSE?  
**VIETNAM**

PENELOPE CRUZ ■ ASHOK DILWALI ■ LUTHER 2017 ■ SHREYAS YOGA RETREAT ■ SUMMER GEAR



Spa reception and lobby of the tranquil Shreyas Yoga Retreat

[CHECK OUT]

## NO ROOM FOR SIN

At Shreyas Yoga Retreat, Zac O'Yeah finds himself stretching muscle and mind to a new tune

**T**he winter sun is gentle, palm fronds rustle, and I'm lying on my back wrapped inside a thick layer of banana leaves as I chew on things in my head.

A meditation teacher has just told me that my mind is a drunken monkey. How did he know?

The Shreyas Yoga Retreat experience is conducive to third-degreeing oneself—in case of doubt, their slogan on the gatepost reads, “journey of self-discovery”. Here, I'm lifted out of my natural circumstances of unthinking non-veg hogging and brain-numbing boozing to be inserted into a veggie utopia as far from a bar as the sun is from the moon. There's nothing to do other than observe myself, “witness” as the guru put it, and figure how to improve my life.

One of the in-house naturopathy doctors at the new Anaha Spa devises a plan for how to deal with my obesity, bad habits and hypertension, and gives me a colour-

ful timetable that chronicles my hours for the duration of my stay. Not only am I signed up for three to four massages each day, but also twice daily yoga and meditation, plus there's the gym and swimming pool to deal with. I never thought resort life could be so hectic.

Luckily, my first treatment is a stress-reducing mud wrap of cool clay that's been dug up from six feet below ground and that is expected to lower my BP. Afterwards, I'm ushered into the meditation hall to meet the guru who is to tweak-freak my mind. We start with chakra cleansing-balancing. It is quite hypnotic and an hour goes fast. He asks how it felt.

“Terribly hard,” I blurt out. “Whenever I try to think about what you tell me, my mind thinks of something else.”

“That is because your mind is like a drunken monkey. It jumps whichever way it fancies.” I am somewhat deflated but my spirits rise after the synchronised *choorna pinda swedam*—a traditional

massage for reducing weight by the use of herbs bunched together into poultices that I'm gently pummelled with by two masseurs. Mealtimes are great for chilling. And the home-style Indian dishes are delicious: never too greasy or spicy and full of the flavours of fresh organic veggies such as bottle gourds, ridge gourds, okra and squash. Alternate meals are Conti or world cuisine such as Tex-Mex or Levantine. Desserts are sublime and a serious risk for untalented weight-watchers like me: home-baked orange tarts, apple brownies, stewed pears and carrot halwa.

I share a table with an English family, who spend a month every year at Shreyas because the therapies have worked miracles and they hope to be able to cancel multiple knee-replacement surgeries. They caution me that *astanga* yoga is only for the seasoned alumni, but any idiot can survive the *hatha* yoga. I get pulled in by their enthusiasm and set my alarm for 5.30am to do what I've never dared do in

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my entire life before: yoga.

The first half an hour goes smoothly as the movements involve stretching exercises interspersed with deep breathing. Then we reach the *surya namaskaar*—which stretches every limb like medieval rack torture and it is forcefully brought home to me how poorly equipped my body is to handle anything more complex than a computer screen. The yoga is followed by a healthy breakfast of scrambled tofu on toast, spinach dosas, sweet potato tikkis, dates and juice, after which there's half a day of karma yoga or community service during which a few of us guests harvest organic vegetables from the hotel garden, chop buckets of potatoes, tomatoes and cauliflower, and go to a nearby orphanage to serve food to 40 children.

After lunch I continue with various rejuvenating banana wrap (*athapa mana*) which involves being smothered in medicated oils and turned into a leafy green mummy left out to cook in the sun; followed by underwater hydrotherapy and finally a relaxing head massage combined with *udwarthanam*—a reverse

deep-tissue body rub using powdered herbs to grind off excess fat by eliminating adipose deposits and make my skin, in general, less saggy.

In the relaxation area, I meet a European man who landed the same morning looking doubtful but who now wears an angelic smile on his lips. To be polite, I ask, “Enjoyed your treatment?”

“I don't even know where I am anymore,” he says euphorically. “How about you?” “I'm not sure who I am anymore,” I reply, and indeed feel unsure about whether I shall be able to go back to my usual unhealthiness after this.

The retreat is set in a place with coconut trees and frangipani, and accommodation is either in wheelchair-accessible, soundproofed, poolside rooms or tented cottages that allow nature's sounds to enter one's dreams. In keeping with the retreat model, there's no TV but instead a copy of the Bhagavad Gita on the bedside table. For those who crave cable news or a flick, there's an on-campus cinema with a collection of Hollywood, Bollywood, and yoga videos starring Shilpa Shetty.

So did I get results? After treat-

ments of approximately ₹30,000-₹35,000, I experienced a curious absence of body ache, BP was down from 146 to 123, bowel movements that used to be shitty were seraphical, but I lost no weight. On the other hand, the recommended slimming programme, runs for 21 days of aerobics and so on, to give an estimated 5.5kg weight reduction at a cost of ₹6,10,000, which I make a mental note of trying as soon as I can afford it.

**THE INFORMATION**

LOCATION Shreyas Yoga Retreat is 50 minutes from Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru.

TARIFF Rates start at about ₹24,000 per night incl. taxes, service charges, gratuity, three meals, doctor consultations, yoga classes, meditation and access to all facilities. The package deals go from three to 21 days. Although the resort is very health-oriented, it has designated smoking areas.

CONTACT +91-807737102, +91-9916117773-6; shreyasretreat.com