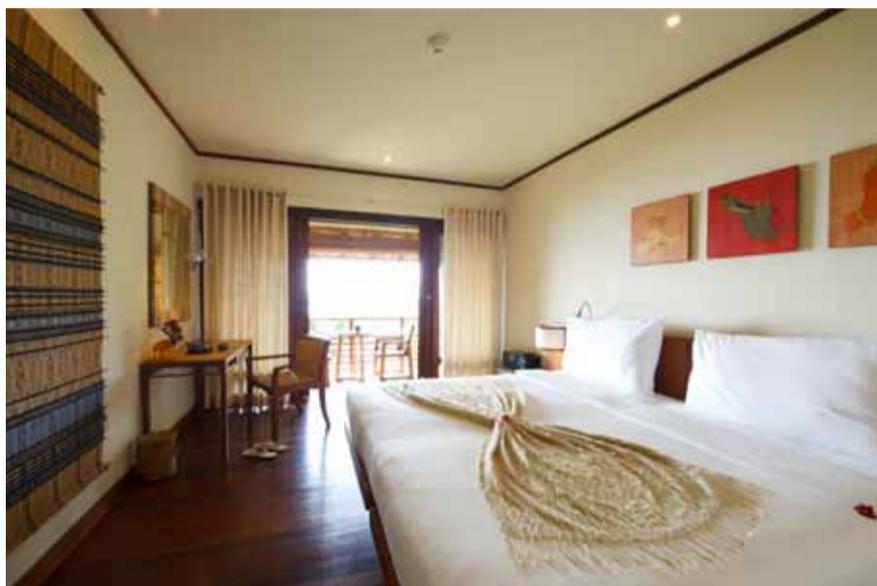


Wellness Inside Out

Are hour-long massages at fabulous resorts just not enough? Why not book a trip dedicated solely to rejuvenation and good health? *Reena Karim* rounds up yoga retreats, wellness spas, and Eastern and Western healing centres around the region.

THAILAND



KOH SAMUI Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary and Holistic Spa Resort

Facts Kamalaya means "lotus realm", a symbol of the unfolding of the human spirit. Set against the Samui coastline and filled with earthy touches, such as thatched roofs and locally crafted cement tiles, this multi-award winning sanctuary is built around a cave that was once used for meditation by Buddhist monks.

House specialty Kamalaya offers a wide range of medical detoxification programmes that address issues from stress relief and burnout to weight management and sleep imbalances. The spa uses a blend of therapies and treatments from the East and the West—Ayurveda, traditional Chinese medicine, naturopathy, and homeopathy—for both physical and emotional restoration.

Facilities The resort features an Indian-style, *ghat*-like swimming pool, with stone steps surrounded by lotus ponds and cascading waterfalls. The 59 tiled-roof rooms have wide sliding screen doors made especially to enjoy the cool ocean breeze. Also on the property are a fitness centre, a herbal steam room, an art gallery, a restaurant, a café, and a tea lounge.

Gourmet spreads Co-founder Karina Stewart and chef Kai Mueller base their menu on Eastern healing traditions and the latest nutritional findings. The produce is organic, and there is an extensive selection of vegetarian options and baked, steamed, and grilled dishes.

Price pinch The Introduction to Detox package starts at B56,100 for three nights per person, inclusive of treatments such as a detox scrub and wrap, lymphatic drainage massage, oil and foot massages, sauna, and a treatment based on the Taoist holistic health tradition of Chi Nei Tsang. kamalaya.com

KOH YAO NOI The Paradise

Facts This boutique beach resort and health spa is situated between a private beach and tropical hillside on an island between Phuket and Krabi—an ideal spot for a yoga sojourn.

House specialty With the main offering here being yoga, you can partake in two *hatha* sessions daily at the open-air *sala* overlooking Phang Nga bay, taught by medically trained instructors, who cover postures, *asana* combinations, alignment, and *pranayama* techniques. The spa also offers hot stone treatments, massages, foot reflexology, body scrubs and wraps, and Balinese, Maui Maui, Thai, and Indian head massages.

Facilities The resort features deluxe Jacuzzi studios and pool villas with modern amenities and Asian-inspired thatched roofs. In between yoga sessions and spa treatments, sign up for scuba diving, kayaking, mountain biking, jungle trekking, or rock climbing.

Gourmet spreads Their three beachfront restaurants serve Mediterranean, Thai, and vegetarian dishes. A nutritionist monitors cleansing programmes for detoxification, special dietary needs, and calorie control.

Price pinch Prices start from B19,500 for a deluxe studio on a shared basis for a five-night yoga vacation. The package includes full buffet breakfast, 10 yoga classes, two traditional Thai or aromatherapy massages, unlimited use of the herbal steam room, and a swim/snorkel excursion. paradiseyoga.asia

INDIA



UTTARAKHAND

Ananda in the Himalayas

Facts A short flight from Delhi to Dehradun, followed by an hour's scenic drive through the Himalayan foothills will get you to Ananda in the Himalayas. Awarded Best Spa 2012 by *Condé Nast Traveller UK*, this restored palace is dedicated to healing through a holistic approach.

House speciality Guests can choose between therapeutic treatments based on traditional Indian practices of Ayurveda, yoga, and meditation. There are also facials, body wraps, and aromatherapy. The spa also offers the latest European and Thai treatments.

Facilities Formerly a restored viceroy's palace, the resort features a spa, 75 deluxe rooms, suites, and three villas with sunken bathtubs overlooking the Ganges and the mountainside. The 24,000-sq ft spa houses hydrotherapy facilities, an outdoor temperature-controlled swimming pool, a gym, an amphitheater, a library, and one of India's oldest billiards tables.

Gourmet spreads The two restaurants and three lounges serve up Asian, Ayurvedic, and Western cuisines. Ananda offers its special "rejuvenation cuisine" that follows the principles of Ayurvedic diet, where individuals are categorised into body types, such as *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*, depending on their medical condition and lifestyle.

Price pinch Book Himalayan Bliss or Couples Connect for three nights, and get a complimentary visit to Rishikesh. Rooms start at USD580 per person per night, including accommodation at the Palace View room, individual wellness consultations with doctors and spa therapists, three special meals, complimentary airport transfers, use of all hydrotherapy facilities, and scheduled activities. anandaspa.com

HOW TO CHOOSE

5 questions to ask before you go

WHY Identify the purpose of your trip. Do you want to quit smoking? Reduce cellulite? Detox? Get radiant skin? If the resort offers consultations, give them a call to help you choose the right programme.

WHERE A day spa is great for one or two treatments and escape for a few hours, while a resort provides a range of treatments and wellness programmes over several days or weeks.

WHERE Can you afford to pay for the treatments, as well as the tickets to an overseas destination? If not, why not go local? Are there other attractions you want to squeeze into your wellness trip?

WHO Do your homework about the retreats and resorts. Don't just read their own websites. Read independent reviews online to get a full picture.

HOW MUCH Keep a budget in mind. Don't forget to include plane tickets, excursions, and other expenses.

BANGALORE

Shreyas Retreat

Facts An hour's drive away from Bangalore, this hidden gem was named one of the world's best spas by *Vogue India*. This is where you get to experience an ashram life through chanting classes, meditation, yoga, community service, farming, and a vegetarian diet.

House speciality Don't miss the chocolate-based exfoliating scrubs and body masks. The resort has a wide selection of Thai, Indonesian, Swedish, Ayurvedic, aromatherapy, and deep tissue massages.

Facilities The Shreyas features three en-suite pool and garden cottages along with eight rooms with tented canopies. The property also has an outdoor yoga and meditation hall, nature farming, swimming pool, Jacuzzi, a steam room, and a gym.

Gourmet spreads At Shreyas, the management practices a strict vegetarian diet for detoxification purposes. The meals are, however, cooked with flavours from India, other parts of Asia, southern Europe, and Mexico. Meals are served at specific times in the dining halls or on the lawns. Alcohol is neither served nor permitted. If you're looking for some *drinking-shinking*, this is not the place for you.

Price pinch 60-minute Rejuvenation massages start from USD65. You can also sign up for packages and retreats from three to 21 nights, customised for each guest's individual requirements. There's also a three-night Wellness for the Soul package with a pool or garden cottage at USD1,180. shreyasretreat.com

AROUND THE REGION



VIETNAM **Six Senses Con Dao**

Facts Located on one of the islands in the Con Dao archipelago, a 45-minute flight from Ho Chi Minh City, this retreat inspires you to appreciate the slow lifestyle amidst a nature reserve.

House specialty The Holistic Six Senses Spa offers the Vietnamese Spa Experience with a green tea scrub, a natural Vietnamese facial, and a massage. Their signature treatment includes a body polish using local almonds, oatmeal, and yogurt, and a nourishing body wrap, consisting of honey, milk, and white clay. Guests can also choose from an array of treatments focusing on health, beauty, and stress reduction.

Facilities Accommodation comprises 50 pool villas with outdoor bathrooms and private infinity pools. The heart of the resort has a market place and a traditional Vietnamese fishing village typically found in the countryside. There's also a gallery, an activity centre, a library, and a bar.

Gourmet spreads The resort has two restaurants that serve international and Vietnamese cuisines. Don't miss the BBQ with market fresh seafood, sirloin steak, lamb fillets, and organic duck breast. Arrangements for private villa barbecues can also be made upon request.

Price pinch Their signature Vietnamese Journey treatment is priced at B5,904 and green tea scrub at B1,135. Take a detoxifier package for B5,600, which includes Foot Soak, Herbal Detox Bath, a scrub and wrap, and Body Therapy massage. sixsenses.com

EW OR WOW?

Bizarre spa treatments from around the world

Geisha nightingale excrement facial

Get your face smeared with bird droppings, sanitised of course! Products made with the droppings allegedly cure acne and give flawless clear skin, and Victoria Beckham is said to be a fan. wawaza.com

Elephant massage in Thailand

Try relaxing with the 100kg leg of an elephant on your back. The elephants have been trained to give you back rubs and the occasional trunk tickles. See them in action at the Mae Ping Elephant Village, Chiang Mai. elephantvillage.com

Knife massage in Taiwan

Have multiple machete or butcher knives pounded on to you for stress relief. Feel the irony! Can be found at street corners in the Shilin night market in Taipei.

BALI, INDONESIA **COMO Shambhala**

Facts A 90-minute drive from Denpasar Airport, this residential wellness retreat is a flagship of the COMO Shambhala group, an award-winning global holistic health company. The estate, located a short drive away from Ubud town, is built into jungle clearings above the Ayung River.

House specialty The estate draws water from a natural spring that is known locally for its healing properties and used for treatments. Their specialty is a Balinese-inspired therapy, Warm Muscle Wrap, featuring hand-crushed rice and spices for breaking down cellulite. Also on offer are massages, facials, hydrotherapy, acupuncture, and Shiatsu.

Facilities Featuring 30 rooms and suites, the retreat also offers private villas, each with its own vitality pool. There are also water gardens next to the Ayung River with additional treatment pavilions, a swimming pool, a yoga room, a pilates studio, a sauna, a fitness centre, and an outdoor jungle gym.

Gourmet spreads Combined with local organic cuisine, the chefs prepare healthy meals with low fat and little salt at the resort's two restaurants. Also available are options ranging from south Indian to Italian, raw vegetables, and plenty of fresh produce.

Price pinch The Vitality Package (USD850 for two persons) includes a two-night accommodation at Terrace Suites with daily breakfast, one 60-minute massage therapy, together with daily activities like yoga, estate walks, and rice-field treks. comoshambhala.com