

travel

Undiscovered India: Kerala gets the spa treatment on a healthy retreat

By [Anjum Anand](#)

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When you visit Kerala it feels as though you're in an undiscovered part of [India](#). It's so uncommercial, and everywhere you look seems to be green. Travelling from the airport to our hotel, we felt that we were seeing a 'real' part of the country, not somewhere just for the tourists.

I was visiting with my husband Adarsh and daughter Mahi, three. It was going to be a family holiday with a difference.



Sea of calm: The Leela Spa Hotel in Kerala overlooks the Indian Ocean

I am interested in ayurveda, the Indian traditional medicine that dates back 1,000 years, and had picked our hotel, the Leela because it is well known for its spa with ayurveda treatments.

While we enjoyed the usual elements of a family holiday - being by the pool and walking along the beaches - each day I slipped away to the spa to learn more about the ancient medicine. And, as it happened, a lot more about me.

We arrived at the hotel and it was breathtaking. Our room overlooked the [Indian Ocean](#) and everything was so lush. There were lots of coconut trees in the gardens and we were often given fresh coconuts and could drink the water out of them.



Eating well: Anjum dined on a feast of vegetarian food at the Leela Spa

On the first morning, I went over to the spa and met the ayurveda doctor. It is his job to tell you what your body type is and figure out where you're going wrong with your lifestyle.

I was not a straightforward case. The doctor told me that I was a certain body type living the life of another body type. This was making me extremely imbalanced.

There are three different body types in ayurveda: kapha, vata and pitta. A typical kapha person - like myself - has good skin that tends towards oiliness. They have lustrous hair, bright eyes and strong nails but they can be heavy-set and overweight, with slow metabolisms.

Vata people will be thinner with dry skin and dry hair, and their nails will be quite brittle.

Pitta people are the luckiest of all - usually lean and athletic with good digestive systems. However, they tend to be quite fiery by nature. My husband happens to be pitta.

Having diagnosed me as kapha, the doctor said I was living a vata lifestyle: rushing about, being extremely busy and active all the time. I was not being true to myself.

He pointed out that many people look at their bodies only from the outside. But ayurveda looks at the body from the inside. What is particularly important is what you eat and how that affects your body on the inside. That is what people in the West tend to forget.

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We ate ayurvedic food to suit our body types, although my daughter is too young to be diagnosed as a particular type. Every day the chef would prepare different meals for us.

We were served only vegetarian food. This, we were told, helps treat your imbalance and you do not need to worry about weight. Dishes were made up of such things as rice, lentils, pesto, roasted vegetables and tofu.

But we were never given pudding as that is not considered ayurvedic. They're big on massages at the Leela spa. They are good for your circulation, so I was put on a course to reduce the dryness of my body that had been caused by my imbalance. They were wonderful and I had two a day.



Voyage of discovery: Anjum Anand de stresses in Kerala

I was also recommended a couple of herbal medicines: one to balance my hormones and another to balance my digestive system. If this is not strong, I was told, you do not get the nutrients from your food.

I tried meditation, yoga and breathing exercises called pranayama. I did yoga pretty much every day and each session ended with pranayama.

Obviously, you're always more relaxed on holiday, but I began to feel much more so. The breathing exercises were so calming. I started looking at the world around me differently. My brain stopped whizzing with a thousand thoughts and, even though I felt calm, I also felt a buzz after each session.

During our eight days in Kerala I soon got into a routine of waking at 6.45am, going to the spa at 7am, eating breakfast with the - family, taking my daughter to the kids' club, going back to the spa, then being together in the afternoons.

The kids' club was great: they had lots of toys, drawing, painting and dance. There was a treasure hunt one day and a magician.



Room with a view: Leela Spa provides a calming backdrop for a family holiday

Although there was a bar, we did not drink alcohol as it does not fit in with ayurveda, which is all about feeding your body good things. I would have a cup of masala tea every morning but didn't drink any more caffeine.

We hung out by the hotel's private beach and went for walks on the public beach, which was very atmospheric - the resort of Kovalam is a bit hippy really, not touristy in the traditional sense.

My husband did not go for massages or meditations, but he did go on a detox. Each morning he drank a tea medicated with certain herbs which helped mobilise lots of toxins in his body.

This made him tired, and I kept on saying: 'That's because it's working. You're detoxing.' At the end, he felt great. I felt much better, too. I'm certain that the week worked for us and when we left, I felt much more focused. The treatments were not overwhelming or overly serious. Everything happened naturally and it was no boot camp. The pranayama continues to help me with stress.



Winding down: Treatments include oil head massage

Back in [London](#) in our normal lives I can be stressed out throughout the day. But I've learnt that stressing does not help: you do not have more time to do things if you stress. Everything will happen, if you just stay calm - and all it takes is five minutes a day.

I'm not getting stressed about things as much as I was, and I'm very happy about that.

Anjum Anand was talking to Tom Chesshyre.

Travel facts

Cox & Kings (020 7873 5000, www.coxandkings.co.uk) offer seven nights at the Leela Kempinski Kovalam Beach hotel from £1,295 per person including return flights with Gulf Air, breakfast and private transfers.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1206873/Undiscovered-India-Kerala-gets-spa-treatment-healthy-retreat.html#ixzz0R3akcfNx>