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Harold Hamm



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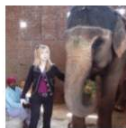


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Absolute Serenity: Where To Go For Wellness/Pampering In The Himalayan Foothills

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I came to Dehradun, an Indian city in the Himalayan foothills, to try out [Yana, Malsi Estate](#), a multi-discipline wellness retreat (Ayurveda, Tibetan healing, Traditional Chinese Medicine, etc.) that opened in January on a 21 acre estate. Unfortunately, my first impression was that the modern, epic in scale and all beige architecture —intended as a contrast, no doubt, to the riot of color that is everywhere in India—was cold and more intimidating than soothing, modern art installations notwithstanding. Even more unfortunately, my first impression was pretty much my only one when a change of season flu spreading in India claimed me as a victim. So while I heard good things about the acupuncturist and Tibetan doctor from my healthier companions (and did experience great care by the staff), I found out more about the hospital next door, one of the [MAX Healthcare](#) group owned by the same family that owns Vana. And it was a true revelation.

India has become one of the major players in medical tourism in recent years because in contrast to the usual image of crowded, poorly staffed back country medical facilities, there are hospitals like this—recently built, totally modern and staffed by often Western educated, completely English speaking doctors and nurses who are sharp, professional and have great bedside manner. And then there's the cost: my emergency room visit and blood tests were a mere \$15, the three prescriptions that cured me in 48 hours were \$1.70 total. No wonder, as they explained to me, patients flew in from all over the world to be treated here, especially in neurosurgery, this hospital's specialty, at a fraction of the cost at home.



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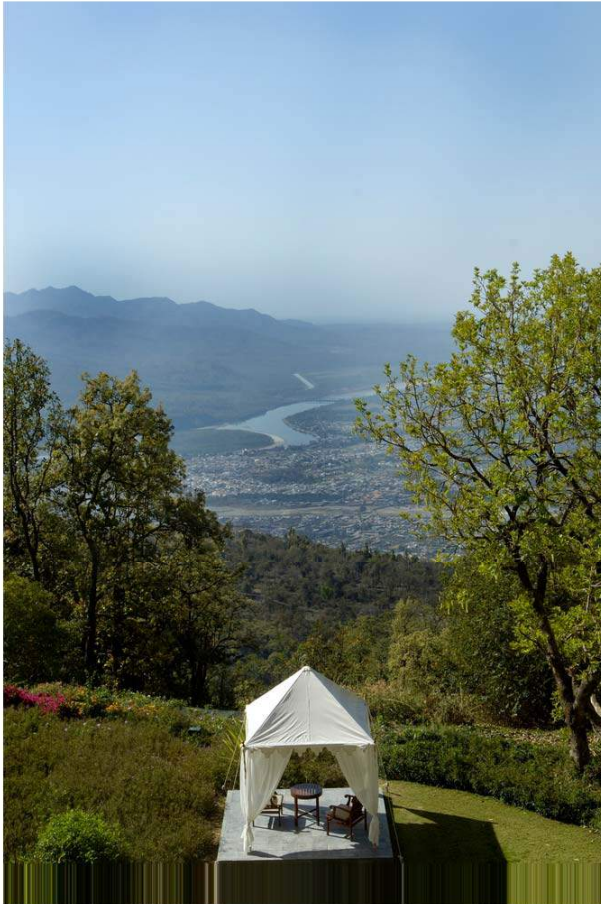


The imposing entrance to Ananda, a former viceregal palace, in the foothills of the Himalayas

In much better shape, I went up the mountain in the other direction from Dehradun to [Ananda in the Himalayas](#), the award winning 14 year old ayurvedic/yoga retreat. The first impression here is of a staggering view, overlooking the forests on adjacent hills, the winding ribbon of the here pristine Ganges and the spiritual center of Rishikesh, site of the Beatles' pilgrimage to see the Maharishi all those years ago. Then the elaborate gates open, leading to the Viceregal palace of the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal where reception takes place. Since we arrived in the late afternoon, a high tea spread laden with French pastry was placed in the center of the Art Deco salon—a perfect fusion of gluttony and spiritual renewal. (I wondered what Oprah, a recent guest, made of that dichotomy.) And then the experts go to work.



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The view from Ananda of the Ganges and the town of Rishikesh



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Before you engage in any treatments, the ayurvedic doctor analyzes your body constitution to determine which treatments, activities and meals should comprise your program over the course of your stay—preferably one week minimum. I was directed to the fusion massage, combining elements of Thai, reflexology, Aromatherapy, deep tissue, Tibetan plus Ayurvedic oils, Tibetan poultices, etc. along with the purely Ayurvedic and more effective Abhyanga, a four handed rhythmic massage using herbal infused sesame oil, which is meant to be relaxing, detoxing and anti-aging. And there are 70+ more body treatments, specific yoga disciplines, meditations, baths, scrubs, facials.



In this bastion of yoga, every guest does a few poses during his or her stay

The restaurant experience is equally varied, with choices geared to your body composition (and waiters are tipped off about what you're supposed to eat so you can't cheat) but there is also a regular a la carte menu with European, Indian and Asian choices. All are delicious with items on the a la carte menu such as red wine braised lamb shank with mascarpone polenta and wild mushroom and chicken risotto with grilled artichokes and parmesan that was so good I had it twice. But if you stick to the program and choose the ayurveda menu, you're not really suffering with dishes such as gazpacho of organic mangoes with coriander, cumin crusted New Zealand lamb chops and miso marinated red snapper with ginger.



There are more noble choices keyed to your body type in the restaurant but at tea time in the palace, it's all about pastry.

Once you check in, there's very little motivation to go off the 100 acre grounds; there are even golf holes on the property (although no one was playing when I was there; they were all being used for yoga lessons.) Some guests do venture out, though, to go white water rafting in the area and in the evening, down the winding roads to Rishikesh to watch the Ganga Aarati, a ceremony at sundown on the banks of the Ganges involving the lighting of lamps as a demonstration of the illumination of truth. It's surprisingly moving even for those who don't follow the religion, particularly since it's led by the charismatic and much awarded [Swami Chidanand Saraswati](#) who, judging by the books given out by his ashram, has met every world leader of the past 20 years. Ananda can arrange for guests to take part in, not just observe, the ceremonies and to have a Q&A session with the Swami, bringing the experience much more to life.



At sundown, the famous Swami of Rishikesh below Ananda conducts services that are moving, even to nonbelievers.

Afterward, you thread your way back up the mountain with an increased energy to improve yourself. You might even agree to order the items on the menu you're supposed to eat, not the ones you really want.

Getting there: I asked [Turkish Airlines](#) for flights through Istanbul to Delhi because I've always found their service to be really professional, the lie flat seats particularly comfortable and the international WiFi a real bonus. The airline has a wide ranging international network and connections are easy in Istanbul and but I generally hope for longer connection times so I can spend time in their lounge, one of the best in the world with grill stations, pastry stations, a mezze bar, screening room, car racing, virtual golf, etc. For those who want to venture outside the airport, though, if you have a layover longer than six hours, the airline will take you on a sightseeing tour. Or you can break the trip in Istanbul and stay over in the city—always a good idea.

Flying within India is another story, with long lines at airports, extra security screenings, sometimes confused airline personnel. When buying tickets, I thought I'd try one of the new low cost carriers but the price was the same as [Jet Airways](#), which I've frequently used and found uniformly professional. They also give out hot meals to coach passengers on one hour flights—service unheard of in the U.S.

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