

ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS

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WHEN MY WIFE insisted that I join her for a week-long *Yogic Detox* programme at the fabled Ananda in the Himalayas Spa, I admit to being initially less than enthused at the prospect. My idea of

a mountain holiday (or any holiday, for that matter) usually revolves around fine dining and copious amounts of alcohol. Seven days of holistic well-being and spiritual pursuit simply did not excite me in the manner it did my better half.

But after a little research, I came to learn that the good people at Ananda are fully committed to pampering guests and ensconcing them in luxury as they go about their business of health and healing. My enthusiasm grew at the thought of being coddled for a week at this world-renowned spa and was only a tiny bit tempered by what the *Yogic Detox* would entail.

We arrived at the magnificent Himalayan retreat after a circuitous ride through mountain roads from Dehradun airport, and at the heels of a rather heady weekend in Delhi. Mercifully, we were phased into our seven-day cleansing schedule with a detoxifying salt scrub, a vigorous rub-down with Himalayan salts infused with juniper, cypress and grapefruit oils, designed to draw out impurities from within. We returned to our well-appointed room tingling and buffed to a high shine and called it a night as the next morning we were to embark early on our attempt to harmonise mind, body and spirit.

At Ananda, I soon came to learn that you can cram in a serious amount of well-being during the course of a single day. Beginners Yoga takes place at 7.15 am daily and is followed by an hour of less leisurely Intermediate Yoga sessions. The assembly takes place at the splendid amphitheatre with verdant mountain views and in the company of prancing peacocks that makes surfacing so early in the mornings completely worthwhile.

Besides choosing from a staggering array of spa treatments, one can also participate in group meditation sessions, Vedic discourses, bird-spotting walks and even cooking classes. You are however free to join in as many or as few activities as you like. Being a firm believer in the maxim that less is always more, I initially sat out many sessions whilst my wife enjoyed a packed daily schedule.

After a consultation with the resident *Ayurvedic* doctor, I was declared to be of *kapha prakruti* and prescribed a diet best suited for my type. To my dismay, I was now no longer able to order liberally from the extensive and excellent *a la carte* menu but was restricted to partaking from the Ananda Wellbeing selection. But within a day I came to realise that all the food prepared here is fresh and delicious. I stopped feeling sorry for myself and looked forward to eating these healthy, nutritious meals.

It was in a state of ataraxia that I floated through the rest of the week, having now settled into a routine of holistic well-being. I awoke each morning with purpose and exhilaration and looked forward to experiencing new and varied treatments.



My first private yoga session was preceded by a consultation with the teacher to determine the ideal routine for me. Since I had no ambitions of swiftly attaining gymnastic bendiness, I opted for a series of gentle *asanas* that would facilitate flexibility in the long term. Greatly motivated and somewhat sore after my exertions, I made my way, post lunch, to the *Jal Neti* session. This is considered to be the simplest of the six *yogic* cleansing techniques collectively known as the *ksbat kriyas* and involves pouring warm, salinated water from the elongated nozzle of a *neti* pot into one nostril and allowing it to flow out through the other. Initially revulsed at the thought on irrigating my nose, I decided to stop whining and just go with the flow. The benefits of *jal neti* are legion. Regular practice of this technique has provided relief to chronic sufferers of sinusitis, headaches and allergies.

Next on the agenda was *Abhyanga*, the classic *Ayurvedic* warm oil massage, performed by two therapists in synchronicity. *Abhyanga* is known to impart a youthful glow to one's skin, improve eyesight, promote peaceful sleep and increase vigour and vitality. After a foot bath in a Himalayan pebbled platter, I settled onto the massage bed and was lulled by the sounds of the *Guruvandana*, a sanskrit prayer of salutation and gratitude to the divine teacher for removing ignorance and granting clear inner sight, recited by young therapists from Kerala.

Nuances such as this have earned Ananda multiple accolades and a reputation for being one of the finest spas in the world.

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After such incomparable bliss, it was hard to say goodbye to the Himalayas and the good people of Ananda, but I knew in my heart that I would soon return. A sceptic had been converted. A spa fiend was born.