



Kairali - The Ayurvedic Healing Village is surrounded by a lush jungle and farmland.

THE ART OF AYURVEDA

Embark on a wellness journey at Kairali - The Ayurvedic Healing Village, where Ayurveda, yoga, and meditation become a way of life. **TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY GUSTASP AND JEROO IRANI**

THE TRANQUILLITY OF THE WOODS seeped into our souls, just as easily as the Ayurvedic oil into our skin. We were performing yoga asanas in the middle of a jungle that rang with early-morning bird calls. The cool filtered air fanned us—a group of Ayurveda and yoga buffs—and we contorted our bodies. The participants were from a diverse age group. But after just four days, everyone seemed to exude a glow, and certain flexibility that perhaps only the winning combination of Ayurveda, yoga, meditation, and a good diet in an unpolluted environment can impart.

Kairali - The Ayurvedic Healing Village is located in Kerala's Palakkad district, and a typical programme

usually extends over 14, 21, or 28 days. We were happy to get a glimpse of how a 5,000-year-old Ayurvedic regimen and its complementary practice, yoga, could help one balance their doshas. According to Ayurveda, doshas are the three primary life forces, namely vata (ether and air), pitta (fire), and kapha (water and earth), which govern all physical and mental processes in the human body.

The healing village was set up in 1999 by husband-wife duo, K V Ramesh and Gita Ramesh, on the heels of their successful eponymous Ayurvedic treatment centre in



Delhi, which was launched 10 years prior. “Thirty years ago, no one talked or knew much about Ayurveda,” explained Gita, who is a biochemist. Her husband’s forefathers were Ayurveda practitioners. “This ancient knowledge was suppressed by the colonialists, which subsequently made people hesitant and even apprehensive. But once they started getting results, people grew more confident,” said Gita. “In the old days, vaidyas (Ayurvedic doctors) would go to the palaces and homes of kings and other royalty for 21-day treatments. Even today, people in Kerala practise Ayurveda in their daily life.”

With greater awareness of Ayurveda’s healing properties, many spas have sprung up around the world, offering a potpourri of therapies. The Kairali Ayurvedic Group, however, continues to implement the unadulterated traditional practice, and stays away from international influences. The formula has worked so well that the group operates 35 centres in eight countries (it even has a medicine and cosmetics division with a state-of-the-art factory in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu). At the 30-villa *vastu*-compliant property, guests are assigned cottages according to their zodiac signs, and these are surrounded by trees and medicinal herbs. A *valampuri* conch shell in each room is said to give off positive vibes, while a stream meanders by the villas done in the traditional Kerala architecture style. The



red-tile sloping roofs of the villas and the interiors with brick walls and soothing red oxide floors are in tandem with the vibe of the resort. Sitouts come with cane chairs that make birdwatching a delight. To us, this seemed like 50 per cent of the cure.

A sense of well-being is instilled by the 60 acres of palm groves, organic farmlands, and herbal gardens. The main therapy building smells of freshly roasted, fried, and pounded herbs and spices, which blend with the heady aroma of the flowers that bloom beyond. This is where friendships are struck and bonds forged over steaming cups of herbal tea. “Where are you from? What are you here for?” are oft-asked questions, answers to which might be an entire life history, a detailed

▲ Clockwise from top left: The resort serves only vegetarian food; one of the treatment rooms at the property; the interiors sport brick walls and red oxide floors.



lity of symptoms, and very often, a happy sigh of newly found wellness.

Rajiv Sharma, who lives in New York, is a fitness freak, plays tennis, jogs, and used to think that it was okay to eat spicy food, drink, and be merry as long as you “work it all out.” His most important takeaway from Ayurveda, as he told us, was that there is a price to pay for not controlling what you put in your mouth and that diet is as important as exercise. He was at the property for weight loss and to heal his knees that were damaged from playing tennis. He could not sleep without downing painkillers every night. When we met him towards the end of his stay, he had lost 5.6 kilograms and jettisoned his painkillers. An 11-day regimen of Ayurvedic therapies, diet, and yoga had made him a new man.

“Ayurveda aims to enhance the health of the healthy and cure the sick,” opined Priya Devi N, the in-house doctor. After a general overview, she took a pulse reading and recommended a few massages to us. And the rub-downs left us refreshed—the classic *abhyangam* with brisk rhythmic strokes untangled the tense knots in our bodies. During another session, herbal poultices were thumped on our joints, and the *shirodhara* or oil-drip treatment opened our ‘third eye’ and eased headaches and insomnia. The *kashaya dhara*—a massage followed by a gentle drizzle of medicated warm water all over one’s body—is said to ease joint pain, but the therapy inculcated in us the feeling of a foetus afloat in the womb.

Evenings were serene as sessions held at the meditation centre were like soothing balm for the mind, body, and soul. A varied group of people—a young girl from Israel, an NRI from Canada, a group of French women—were looking for respite



GETTING THERE

Coimbatore International Airport is the closest, from where the resort in Kodumbu, Palakkad district is a little over 1.5 hours away. Palakkad Railway Station is the closest railhead and is half an hour away.

STAY

Kairali - The Ayurvedic Healing Village has 30 villas and offers several packages including all meals and your line of treatment, which is generally decided by the resident doctors. Starts from ₹16,780 per head; ayurvedichealingvillage.com

▲ Clockwise from top left: Each of the luxury villas is based on the ancient edicts of vastu; the resort also features an outdoor pool; the presiding deity at Kairali - The Ayurvedic Healing Village.

from a spectrum of illnesses: cervical spondylosis, arthritis, skin problems, and symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. A light vegetarian diet replete with fruits, oil-free rotis, and dosas left us feeling satiated. Drumstick soup, raw papaya salad, sago vegetable soup, ash gourd curry, and vegetable jalfrezi dominated the menu. Meat, cigarettes, and alcohol are rightly eschewed here, and vegetables and fruits are always sourced from organic gardens.

On our last evening, we were filled with regret for having to leave after just four days of treating our bodies with fragrant oil-slathered massages and mindful eating. With the added heft of meditating sessions and yoga, we had replenished our store of positive energy, but we knew we’d be back for yet another therapeutic sojourn at this health haven. ✦