

India has captivated the hearts of travellers for centuries with stories of stately Maharajas and opulent palaces; a pantheon of gods and goddesses; and colours and textures so rich and vibrant that a Jackson Pollock would pale in comparison.

India is fast emerging as a health holiday destination, and the ancient Indian science of life called Ayurveda, is undoubtedly a wellness experience not to miss. Regarded by scholars as the oldest healing system in the world, Ayurveda offers a system of treatments based on the body's inherent ability to rejuvenate, to heal and to restore its natural balance.

Unlike the north, the flow of life in the south of India is slow and relaxed with beautiful beaches in Goa, palm-lined backwaters and sleepy villages in Kerala, and heritage temple sites in Tamil Nadu. Southern India's ancient healing traditions and natural bounty are rich in promises of health and wellness, making it a haven for rejuvenation and relaxation. While travellers can enjoy five-star luxury in southern India, Ayurveda is routinely practiced in a hospital setting and as such, wellness seekers can expect to find variance in service, design and ambience in this emerging industry. Definitely don't miss the opportunity to experience the authentic therapeutic and rejuvenating benefits of Ayurveda that are crafted to perfection in Southern India.

# FINDING ZEN IN SOUTHERN INDIA

Writer Danielle Rippingale



## tamil nadu

### BODHI TREE AT THE RADISSON

Rich in cultural pride, Tamil Nadu seduces travellers seeking history and the allure of beautiful ancient temples. Stepping off the plane in the state capital, Chennai, you are minutes from body bliss at the new Bodhi Tree day spa. The ambience of the subterranean spa is refreshing and welcoming with subtle illumination and natural elements to ground the senses. Offering Indian and Western therapies, the DNA Energising Facial using Remy Laure DNA embio-vital serum from France hydrates, revitalises and tones.

[www.radisson.com/hotels/indma/services/4](http://www.radisson.com/hotels/indma/services/4)

### SERENA SPA AT GRT TEMPLE BAY

The Bay of Bengal provides a beautiful backdrop to the brand new Serena Spa at the GRT Temple Bay Resort. Just 60km south of Chennai, the seaside town of Mamallapuram is famous for turtle spotting and exquisite UNESCO world heritage temples where luxury mingles with history. With elements of wood and stone, the simply decorated treatment rooms at Serena are built around an inner sanctum, and are home to an evocative treatment menu. After your treatment, take a steam sauna, cool plunge pool or rest in the beautiful lounge overlooking a bamboo mist garden. This resort is also home to an Ayurveda Clinic for those wanting a taste of the traditional. [www.serenaspa.com/serenaspaindia.html](http://www.serenaspa.com/serenaspaindia.html)

THIS PAGE: Yoga at The Divya Spa at The Leela Kovalam. OPPOSITE PAGE: The massage room at The Divya Spa at The Leela Kovalam; and Jiva Spa at Taj Malabar Ayurvedic treatment.

Like the elements of nature, your body is also composed of the elements of earth, fire, water, air and ether. The unique understanding of this delicate balance of nature and our own natural elements is the foundation of the ancient Indian science of life, Ayurveda.

Ayurvedic treatments are common to most spas, but unlike western massage, use heavy oils decocted with medicinal plants specific to your prakruti (born constitution). Most Ayurveda packages include a free consultation and guidance by an experienced doctor.

'Shirodhara' relieves mental tensions and insomnia. After a general body massage with warm medicated oil, more warm oil is drizzled from a brass or clay vessel hung over the forehead for a period of time followed by a gentle head massage.

'Abhyangam' – a body massage using warmed oil and long rhythmic strokes that put pressure on the different vital points of the body providing relaxation, heat and rejuvenation.

'Udvarthanam' – a body massage with warm medicated herbal powder followed by a deep warm oil massage to tone the body and bring health to the skin.

'Kizhi' – uses poultices of herbs or powders dipped into warm oil and gently pounded on the body to relieve joint and muscular pain

'Pizhichil' – a continuous and rhythmic body massage by two therapists using warm medicated oil relieving arthritis and nervous disorders.

## kerala

### THE DIVYA AT THE LEELA KOVALAM

Spectacularly situated on a cliff with an infinite view of sky meeting sea, The Leela Kempinski Beach Resort in Kovalam is the seductive location of the award winning Divya Spa, specialising in Ayurveda.

Kerala is heralded as "God's Own Country" and Divya helps you understand why, with stunning treatment rooms in full devotion to the Arabic Ocean and the mesmerising sound of breaking waves.

Guests can enjoy single treatments or longer individualised programmes aimed at prevention, treatment and wellness.

The Pathra Podala Swedam massage has therapeutic benefits without falling short in relaxation. The journey begins with a coconut oil head and shoulder massage, followed by streams of warm medicated oil drizzled and massaged over the entire body in long soothing strokes. Medicated herbal pouches designed to relieve stiffness and aches are warmed in oil and gently pounded over the entire body to create an experience so sublime, it feels almost spiritual. Divya's signature treatments include Udvarthanam, Shirodhara, and Navarakkizhi.

[www.theleela.com/hotel-kovalam.html](http://www.theleela.com/hotel-kovalam.html)



### MAYA SPA AT THE ZURI KUMARAKOM RESORT AND SPA

Don't let the décor fool you, the Maya Spa is one of southern India's largest spas and offers an equally extensive treatment menu with experienced therapists. The resort sits on the edge of the beautiful Lake Vembanad and backwaters made famous in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*.

The potent and popular Green Coffee Body Wrap is specifically designed to slim and tone your body and begins with a relaxing

exfoliation using creamy micro wax beads, followed by a steam bath. The coffee wrap is applied to the entire body before you are wrapped and left to float weightlessly on the warm Nuvola bed. When you emerge from the cocoon soft, supple and oh so, r-e-l-a-x-e-d, you'll float effortlessly throughout the rest of your day. For a special experience, travel and stay on the Zuri's own luxury house boat (complete with butler, chef and Jacuzzi) where you will witness the lives of all who live, fish, paddle, bathe and play along the backwaters.

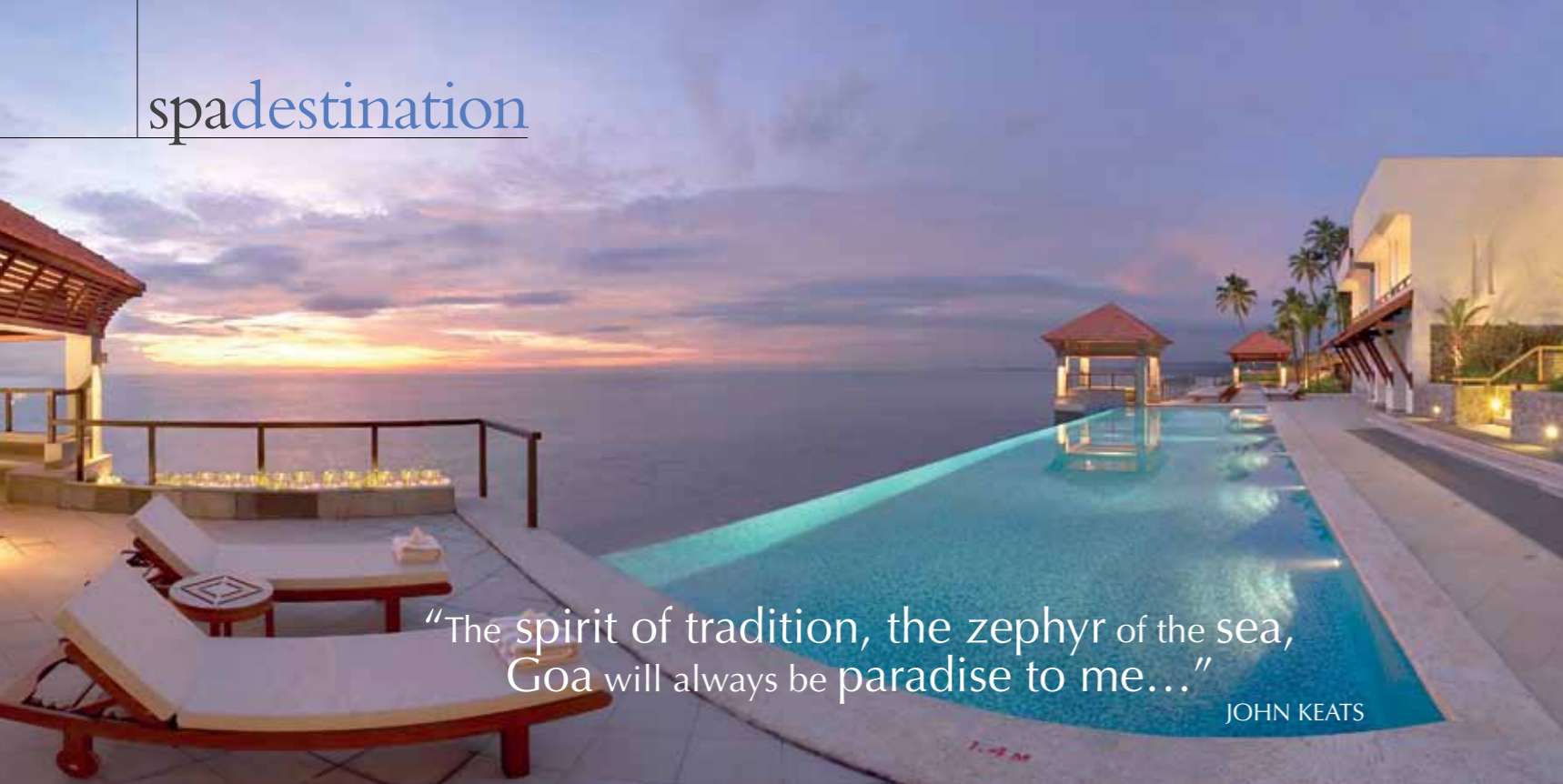
[www.thezurihotels.com/Maya-Spa.aspx](http://www.thezurihotels.com/Maya-Spa.aspx)

### JIVA SPA AT TAJ MALABAR

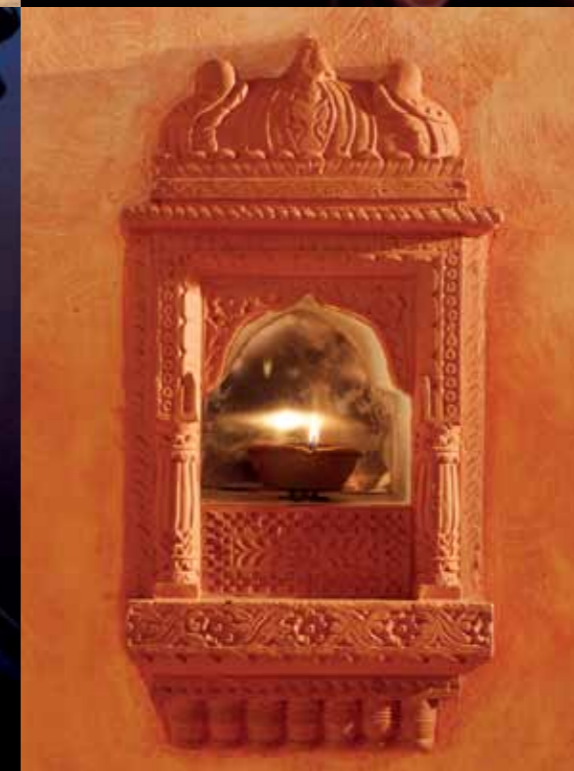
Once a Portugese colony, the ever so quaint Fort Cochin is home to trendy cafes and the sensational sunset walk where Chinese fishing nets crane with their catch. Neighbouring Fort Cochin, you'll find the Jiva Spa situated on the northern point of Willingdon Island. The infinity pool at the spa's entrance appears to merge with Lake Vembanad where fishing boats, ships and liners cruise by from the Arabian Sea. Built in 1935, the timeless elegance of the dark teak floor and architecture is reminiscent

of times past. Unwind after your long walks through Fort Cochin with the two-hour signature Jivaniya invigorating massage. This unique massage comes right out of the Indian kitchen using many of the aromatic spices used for masala chai to detoxify, increase circulation and restore tired muscles. You need to try it to believe it, but it's guaranteed you will never view an Indian spice market in the same way again.

[www.tajhotels.com/jivaspa](http://www.tajhotels.com/jivaspa)



"The spirit of tradition, the zephyr of the sea,  
Goa will always be paradise to me..."  
JOHN KEATS



## goa

The gentle undulating waves, stretches of golden sand, soothing tropical greenery and rugged hills clearly make Goa a place where the Goddess of Wellness resides. Whether you are seeking reprieve from the party scene or looking to nourish your body and spirit, you'll find award-winning spas within the tranquil refuge of this seaside state.

### THE SPA AT LEELA KEMPINSKI, GOA

A serene sanctuary for the senses, The Spa offers treatments and programmes that promote wellness, fitness and relaxation, and is set amongst 75 spectacular acres of lagoons and lush tropical flora and fauna including an extensive spice and herbal garden expounding the healing virtues of the botanicals.

Offering both Indian and Western spa experiences, The Spa's dark wood accents contrast creamy marble and provide a clean and simple ambience that sets the tone for a peaceful journey within. All treatments begin with a time honoured cleansing foot ritual *Atithi Devo Bhava* which means 'The Guest is God'. The signature Hot Stone Treatment offers fragrant strokes of geranium-infused sesame oil for rejuvenation and cell repair and rose for a sensual lift. The hot smooth volcanic stones melt the tension while the therapist provides extra TLC to work tired and tense muscles into softer forms. The stones are left on specific points to warm and give further release. Don't miss the exquisite Jamavar restaurant offering Indian and local Goan cuisine including mouthwatering Goan sweet, dessert.

[www.theleela.com/hotel-goa-spa.html](http://www.theleela.com/hotel-goa-spa.html)

### SNIP, CALANGUTE

In relaxed Goa where beach massages abound, day spa SNIP is nothing short of a breath of fresh air. With a warm Southeast Asian inspired design and a unique menu that draws upon different Asian traditions of massage, facials and body scrubs, you'll quickly surrender to the expert touch of the therapist. The signature Indonesian massage is given using a firm hand and stroke using your choice of scent. With Indonesian gamalong playing in the background, it is easy to drift to

the distant islands inspiring this massage. The treatment ends with a private steam sauna conveniently located in the massage room and a delicious herbal butterfly pea flower tea.

[www.snip.co.in](http://www.snip.co.in)

### PARK HYATT GOA RESORT AND SPA

Inspired by small Goan villages, the Indo-Portuguese style architecture of Park Hyatt Beach Resort looks majestic, situated on Arossim beach at Cansaulim. The 46 acres of vast gardens, cobbled walkways and lagoons are linked by boardwalks and small bridges that guide you to the Sereno Spa where authentic experiences based on the life sciences of Ayurveda and yoga can be found.

The 36,000 square foot and 16 treatment room spa borrows inspiration from nature with dark woods, open air passages and secret gardens. Treatment rooms are named after spices and herbs and marry with the scent in the room. Nine of the single and double spa suites contain outdoor plunge pools and another seven suites take you into the outdoors with views of the Arabian Sea.

Under the guidance of two talented Ayurvedic physicians, guests receive customised treatments. Try the Shamak therapy (meaning pacifying) which is synchronised with the time of day that your dosha predominates and includes a consultation with the doctor, three customised therapies, a steam/shower, herbal tea and home care guidelines designed to keep your dosha balanced.

Samudra means "ocean" and this signature marine ritual is three and a half hours of heaven using micronised marine algae and minerals to tone, detoxify and firm the skin. The final touch is a collagen-building detox facial that leaves your face radiant and smooth.

[goa.park.hyatt.com/hyatt/pure/spas/](http://goa.park.hyatt.com/hyatt/pure/spas/)

THIS PAGE: The Club infinity pool at The Leela Kempinski, Goa. OPPOSITE PAGE: (top left) Backwaters houseboat; (top right) Surya Samudra Beach Resort seaview; (bottom left) Bodhi Tree at the Radisson; (bottom middle) candle and all photographed by Danielle Rippingale; (top middle) Jiva Spa at Taj Malabar; (middle left and adjacent) Sereno Spa relaxing foot zone massage and Ayurvedic treatment; (middle far right) The Club swimming pool at The Leela Kempinski, Goa; and (bottom left) spa detail at Vivanti by Taj - Panaji, Goa.



**NIRAAMAYA SPA AT SURYA SAMUDRA PRIVATE RETREATS**

The roads of Kovalam are lined with signs pointing the traveller towards Ayurveda treatments, however it would be your loss to drive by the new Niraamaya Spa at Surya Samudra Beach Resort. This newly renovated property has its own private beach and charming stand-alone bungalows that honour the traditional Keralite style with a touch of modern luxury, including a beautiful outdoor bathroom.

The brand new Niraamaya spa has eight treatment rooms and offers a seriously divine spa menu with both Ayurveda and Western treatments for single or customised treatment packages. Poet, Rudyard Kipling once wrote, "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet". He obviously never had the Spice Magic massage that skillfully marries Swedish massage with Ayurveda and the exotic scents of ginger and lime. The oil massage is followed by application of medicinal pouches containing ginger spices and lime heated in oil and worked into the body to relieve muscle and joint stiffness creating a feeling that is nothing short of bliss. Your body and mind will harmonise to the rhythms of nature relaxing by the pool with the million dollar ocean view.

[http://www.suryasamudra.com/pages/spa\\_niraamaya.html](http://www.suryasamudra.com/pages/spa_niraamaya.html)

**KADAVU AYURVEDA CENTRE**

A spice trading port since the Middle Ages, your entry point to Calicut on the north coast of Kerala is just a short drive to Kadavu Ayurveda Centre. The science of Ayurveda has been perfected in Kerala and the experienced therapists at this resort do the tradition proud. Don't expect pure luxury, but the self-contained treatment rooms will leave you feeling as though you have stepped back in time with a traditional *bati* (Ayurvedic massage table) and steam box. The centre primarily offers treatment packages (seven day minimum), however those seeking a single treatment can enjoy rejuvenation therapies such as head massage and Ayurveda face pack. Your consultation with the Ayurvedic physician will identify your *prakruti* (constitution) and the necessary treatments to bring your body back to its natural state of balance.

[www.kadavuresorts.com](http://www.kadavuresorts.com)

**JIVA SPA AT TAJ VIVANTA, PANAJI**

Home to the savvy and new Taj Vivanta Hotel, the capital of Goa, Panaji, is infused with an old-world charm with its colonial architecture and seaside locale. With only two treatment rooms this spa has dedicated its menu to Indian spa therapies that suit the business traveller and those looking for respite from the beaches and shopping. Equipped with a dry sauna and steam room, your warmed body is receptive to the customised signature Samardana massage. Senior therapist, Anand will confidently massage tired and sore muscles with this deep tissue massage using pleasingly fragrant signature oil blends of peppermint, eucalyptus, and ginger. Working on deep-seated stress, your calm mind drifts in and out, submitting to a deep sense of peace and harmony. The treatment ends with a face massage and the application to the third eye of sandalwood paste to cool and purify, and rice grains to recognise the spiritual journey.

[www.tajhotels.com/jivaspas](http://www.tajhotels.com/jivaspas)

Warm thanks to Tiger Paw Adventures for their assistance  
[www.tigerpawadventures.com](http://www.tigerpawadventures.com)

**guru**

**DR SUBHASH OF AYURDARA AYURVEDA**

The Chinese fishing nets dotting the shoreline attest that Vypin Island is home to communities that have built their lives around the sea. If you are seeking detox, rejuvenation or perhaps treatment for a particular condition, you'll be glad you found internationally renowned Ayurvedic practitioner, Dr Subhash. A mere stone's throw from Fort Cochin, he operates out of his home and offers authentic Ayurveda that caters to English speakers and those seeking treatment programmes ranging from a week to 28 days. Dr Subhash makes no qualms that his practice is built on giving his clients a personalised approach to wellness and healing, not a spa experience. Designed to reduce pain in joints, the *Navarakizhi* starts with a head massage, followed by a medicated warmed oil massage and glorious strokes and dabs with pouches filled with a decoction of Kerala rice and medicinal herbs soaked in heated cows milk. The final wrap leaves you relaxed and free from joint and muscular pain – who would believe that something so blissful could also be so seriously good for you? [www.ayurdara.de](http://www.ayurdara.de)

THIS PAGE: Rejuvenation massage at Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort; Ayurdara Ayurveda treatment room; and Vivanta by Taj – Panaji, Goa photographed by Danielle Rippingale. OPPOSITE PAGE: Surya Samudra beach; Kadavu Ayurveda Centre; and Jiva Spa at Vivanta by Taj – Panaji, Goa.

**retreats**

**SOMATHEERAM AYURVEDIC HEALTH RESORT**

South of Kovalam, Somatheeram specialises in long term Ayurvedic treatments and has garnered a reputation among their international clients who have been converted to the science of Ayurveda. Nestled amongst lush greenery that rolls down to the Arabian Sea, Somatheeram is serious about wellness and with over 75 experienced doctors and therapists you can be sure you are in good hands.

All retreat guests are provided with a scarlet robe, to avoid staining from the therapeutic massage oils famous in Ayurveda. Not for the modest, Ayurveda uses deliciously heavy oils and long massage strokes that necessitates a full body canvas to work on. Having cared for more than 12,000 clients since 1989, you will quickly feel at ease in the experienced hands of your same sex therapist.

The accommodation is clean and simple, with the Siddhartha cottage offering deluxe accommodation at the resort.

Treatment packages range from seven to 28 days and focus on rejuvenation and wellness and include consultations, treatments, medications and food. The buffet style dining identifies the predominant *dosha* that it supports: *vata*, *pitta*, *kapha* or *tridosha*.

[www.somatheeram.org](http://www.somatheeram.org)