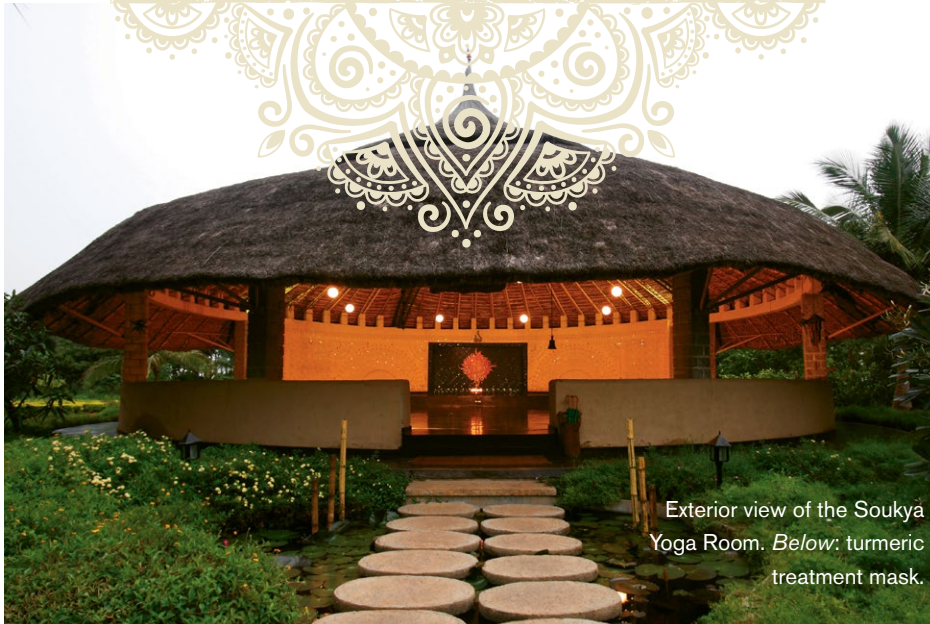


THE SOUTHERN SOUL



Exterior view of the Soukya Yoga Room. *Below:* turmeric treatment mask.

Bangalore

Soukya International Holistic Health Centre

Set amid 30 acres of organic gardens replete with herbs for treatments and vegetables for meals, Soukya—from the Sanskrit *soukhyam*, meaning “wellness”—is an oasis just an hour’s drive from bustling Bangalore.

Soukya has hosted A-listers seeking stress reduction and anti-aging treatments, as well as individuals suffering from acute medical conditions such as cirrhosis of the liver and diabetes. Dr. Isaac Mathai, Soukya’s founder, is quick to assert that his center is “not a spa” but an “integrative medical treatment facility” based on Ayurveda, the 5,000-year-old Indian “science of life.” Other holistic philosophies such as Naturopathy, Homeopathy, and Allopathy are incorporated, setting Soukya apart from purely Ayurvedic-based centers. All programs begin with a thorough medical consultation, and treatments are customized for each individual.

I’m led to a treatment room for *Dhara*, a famous Ayurvedic treatment during which a continuous stream of medicated oil is applied to the forehead and “third eye.” *Dhanwantharam*, an Ayurvedic oil blend that expels toxins and promotes



rejuvenation, is comprised of dozens of organic herbs and takes at least a week to produce. Next is *Abhyanga*, a vigorous four-handed Ayurvedic massage. Finally, I’m ushered to a steam box, and positioned on a stool with my head sticking out. I am then led to a hot shower where I’m instructed to exfoliate with a mud-like sandalwood-based scrub.

My Soukya experience culminates with an Indian reflexology session, beginning with a *tulsi* (holy basil) footbath. I feel a peculiar sensation on my toes: a wire “reflex ring,” resembling a steel pot scrubber, is put on each digit and rolled up and down, meant to promote circulation. Floating to the car on new feet, I’m off to face the chaos that is IT-infused Bangalore city life. soukya.com

—Kristin Vukovic

Kerala

Spread out on India’s southernmost tip, the lush, tropical state of Kerala is considered the seat of Ayurveda, and boasts the country’s highest concentration of holistic spas and eco-retreats. The region’s healing history is due mainly to its wealth of natural resources, and many of the natural ingredients used in Ayurvedic treatments—including camphor, neem, turmeric and mustard oil—are grown here.

The Park Kochi

Overseen by a dynamic female CEO, the hip Park chain is one of the most design-conscious and greenest brands in the country; their stunning Hyderabad property is LEED Gold certified, and all the hotels feature organic foods and herbal-based services in their Aura spas. Kerala options include The Park on Vembanad Lake, an easy-chic boutique spot with a traditional Ayurvedic spa; the Apsara Cruiser, a luxury boat that glides around scenic backwaters; and The Park Kochi (to open later this year), a modern city tower overlooking the Malabar Coast, with a dedicated spa floor, wellness programs, and panoramic yoga terrace. theparkhotels.com

Vivanta Bekal

Set on 26 seaside acres bordered by Kappil beach, this northern Kerala hideaway features 71 villas built to evoke traditional Kettuvallam backwater house boats. Enjoy kayaking, exploring historic forts, and picnicking on spice plantations before retiring to the spa for signature treatments like Chandana (a cooling sandalwood and aloe vera wrap using organic linens), Abhisheka (a cleansing/massage ritual using holy Ganges water), and Samattva (a yoga/breathing/chakra balancing combo.) vivantabytaj.com

Spice Village

From the outdoor check-in, where you customize your welcome tea with local herbs, to the mountain village-inspired cottages (topped with thatched elephant grass roofs), organic gardens and fruit orchards, and extensive sustainability programs, this award-winning eco-resort is the real deal. Spice Village has a small Ayurvedic spa on site, but for a more dedicated wellness experience, head to its sister property, Kalari Kovilakom; the 18-suite spa retreat features 10 treatment rooms, medicinal herb gardens and yoga/meditation/chanting halls. cghearth.com

—Sandra Ramani