

IMMERSE YOURSELF

ALL HAIL THE RISE OF THE WELLNESS RETREAT,
CHANTS **LEO BEAR**



In a world plagued by stress, weight issues, anxiety and depression, there are no quick fixes. That's why more and more travellers are seeking holidays to rewire their internal hard-drives and reset their lives. →

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Picture the scene. It’s mid-afternoon and you are lying on your back on a soft carpet in a zen-like room surrounded on three sides by dense forest. You are wearing a pair of loose-fitting linen pyjamas and feel deeply relaxed. There is a musician sitting cross-legged in the corner of the room playing a bamboo flute, and as gentle notes float through the air, you are lulled into a sweet restorative sleep.

Daily flute sessions – or raag therapy as it’s referred to – are part of the timetable at Vana Retreat, a new ultra-luxurious hideaway in northern India, designed for stressed-out soul-searchers to get in touch with their inner karma.

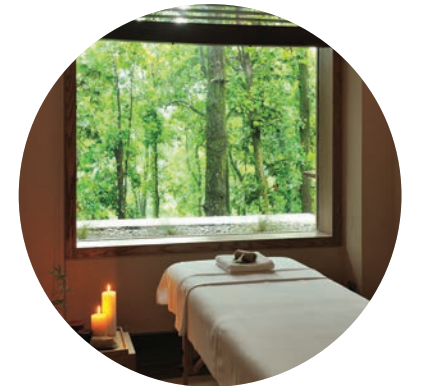
Although still in its infancy, wellness travel is growing at nearly twice the rate of other types of tourism. According to findings shared at the Global Wellness Tourism Congress last autumn, some industry insiders liken the growth of wellness travel to that of eco-tourism and predict that within the next decade, wellness will go mainstream.

Anne Biging, founder and chief executive of Healing Hotels of the World, confirms the trend, saying: “Spending time at a holistic retreat to achieve a higher level of health with long-lasting

effects has become a major driving force in tourism. Everywhere in the world, luxury holistic resorts and retreats are being built and Healing Hotels of the World now has 100 partner resorts.”

As growing medical evidence emerges to suggest that healthy lifestyle choices can affect longevity, looks and even your DNA, hotel brands are cashing in on the desire to live better and longer. Tapping into ancient Eastern philosophies, resorts from Phuket to Panama have been adding wellness centres, yoga pavilions and mindfulness workshops to their day-to-day offering, and now with full-scale immersive retreats promising wellness way beyond the benefits of mere spas, the landscape is really changing.

These contemporary ashrams are springing up faster than you can say ‘namaste’. The Alila hotel group has just announced it is working with mindful leadership coach Christian Kurmann on two ‘mindful stillness retreats’ to be held at its resorts in Oman and Bali, while construction is underway at SHA Wellness in Spain to build the SHA Academy, a centre for learning designed to arm guests with the know-how they need to maintain their good habits once they are back →



TOP: Sound bath therapy
MIDDLE: Meditation room
BOTTOM: Hand massage
FACING PAGE: Living area of a suite at Vana Retreat



AGENT'S VIEW



KAREN NYONI
SENIOR SALES ADVISOR
HEALING HOLIDAYS

A trip to a holistic spa or wellness retreat in India is a unique experience.

Using the ancient healing art of Ayurveda, every wellness programme is tailored to each person's dosha (body) type. Everything is personalised from your meal plans and exercise schedule to the 'very good for you but somewhat less palatable' herbal tonics and medication prescribed by an Ayurvedic doctor. Meals are vegetarian and onion and garlic is never used. It may take a while to readjust your tastebuds, but once you do, the food is very wholesome and tasty. Detoxification is a key part of most Ayurvedic programmes and will have you feeling lighter, re-energised and better than you have ever felt. It's not all trials and tribulations – four-hand massages soothe away aches and pains. Be warned, Ayurvedic massages require a lot of oil – there's no room for being bashful, you are covered from head to toe in oil and the results speak for themselves: amazing skin and lustrous hair.



Vana, in Dehradun, India, offers the next level of wellness and is a trailblazer in the spa world

in the real world. Of course Thailand continues its reign as the place to balance body, soul and mind, while closer to home, 'holidays for health' are proliferating in Austrian resorts such as Hotel Adler Balance and Ayurveda Resort Sonnhof, both of which are centres of wellness excellence.

For the ultimate wellness retreat experience though, you'll need to send your clients to India. It's here, in the foothills of the Himalayas, that I was initiated.

Located on the outskirts of Dehradun, Vana opened in January. Set up by Indian entrepreneur and ex-Harrovian Veer Singh, his plan was to create the most iconic wellness retreat in the world. And what he has achieved is remarkable. Vana is a trailblazer – the next level in wellness – offering guests a deeply personalised immersive experience with a potentially life-changing outcome. Of course, results require commitment, and

time, as well a healthy bank balance.

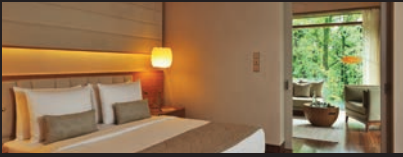
My goal was to destress, relax and take a breath before a big birthday I had coming up, but visitors can choose anything from weight loss and detoxification to improved fitness and spiritual enlightenment. Then it's over to the experts, who plan guests' itineraries.

Three nights is the minimum stay and I was there for five, but Vana is already getting bookings for its ayurvedic panchakarma programme (colonics and all) which lasts anything from 14 to 21 days.

Once checked in, I was handed regulation Vana attire and asked to dispense with any handheld devices (these are banned in all communal areas). Guests are encouraged to give themselves over completely to the experience to reap the most reward – this meant no popping out for a beer in the local town as I later discovered.

Treatments vary according to the retreat and its location. Vana draws from the ancient healing therapies of Ayurveda, traditional Chinese medicine and Tibetan healing combined with yoga and →

SAMPLE PACKAGES



AMPERSAND TRAVEL

Seven nights' full-board at Vana Retreat from £3,100 in a Garden Room, return domestic flights from Delhi, use of all resort facilities, specialist consultations and spa treatment of choice.

ampersandtravel.com

020 7819 9770



HEALING HOLIDAYS

Seven nights at Ayurveda Resort Sonnhof for £1,288 including a consultation, pulse and nutritional diagnosis, 11 treatments and full Panchakarma board. Accommodation is not included: double rooms cost from £115 per person per night, singles from £135.

healingholidays.co.uk

020 7843 3597



SCOTT DUNN

Seven nights at Chiva-Som from £3,620, based on two people sharing an ocean view room on a full-board basis including flights and private transfers.

scottdunn.com

020 8682 5060



An ancient Taoist healing technique that massages the internal organs via the abdomen

meditation. Of course, an army of doctors, consultants, specialist practitioners, naturopaths and nutritionists provide the foundation for any successful wellness organisation and during my stay, I met with four doctors. They checked everything from my blood pressure to the bendiness of my fingernails and I was prescribed a series of daily treatments and a strict menu plan including twice-daily doses of buttermilk for my digestion.

I quickly discovered I was on a diet. Portions are small – about a third of the size I'm used to – but each dish is so creatively displayed and delicious, I didn't miss the refined sugars, grains or oils that they were devoid of. There's nothing bland about vermicelli-crust potato cakes or beetroot cake with poached apple and papaya basil compote – all grown on site.

Beyond my busy rota of consultations, yoga classes, flute therapy and spa treatments, there were the usual comforts to indulge in; an infinity pool overlooking the forest canopy, jogging trails, tennis courts, lychee orchards to stroll through.

Accommodation is no different from a five-star hotel. Vana's 69 rooms and 17 suites have a calm yet cutting-edge aesthetic combining clean lines, a neutral

palette and lots of ash and bamboo. Every piece of furniture, artwork, upholstery and lighting is bespoke, and all of the bedlinen and towels are organic. Even the Macs in the reception have bamboo-panelled veneers so as not to disrupt the calm.

Having thoroughly enjoyed my stay, I was delighted to learn I'd lost 6.6lbs in the process. I'd also managed to shrug off a nagging back pain I'd been putting up with for more than 10 years. I won't lie, the zen-like halo wore off quickly but I have been sticking to the smaller portion sizes and now enjoy a much lighter alcohol intake. Most valuable of all, I got to put life on pause, to contemplate the future, and I returned home ready to take on the world all guns blazing. Your clients will thank you for encouraging them to do the same, I assure you. ●

FACT BOX: VIRGIN ATLANTIC/JET AIRWAYS

fly daily to Delhi from Heathrow. Prices start from £627. Flights from New Delhi to Dehradun with Jet Airways start from £100 return.

VIRGIN-ATLANTIC.COM 0844 209 7777

JETAIRWAYS.COM 0808 101 1199