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How Ananda In The Himalayas Is Bringing Its Ayurvedic Wisdom To Your Living Room

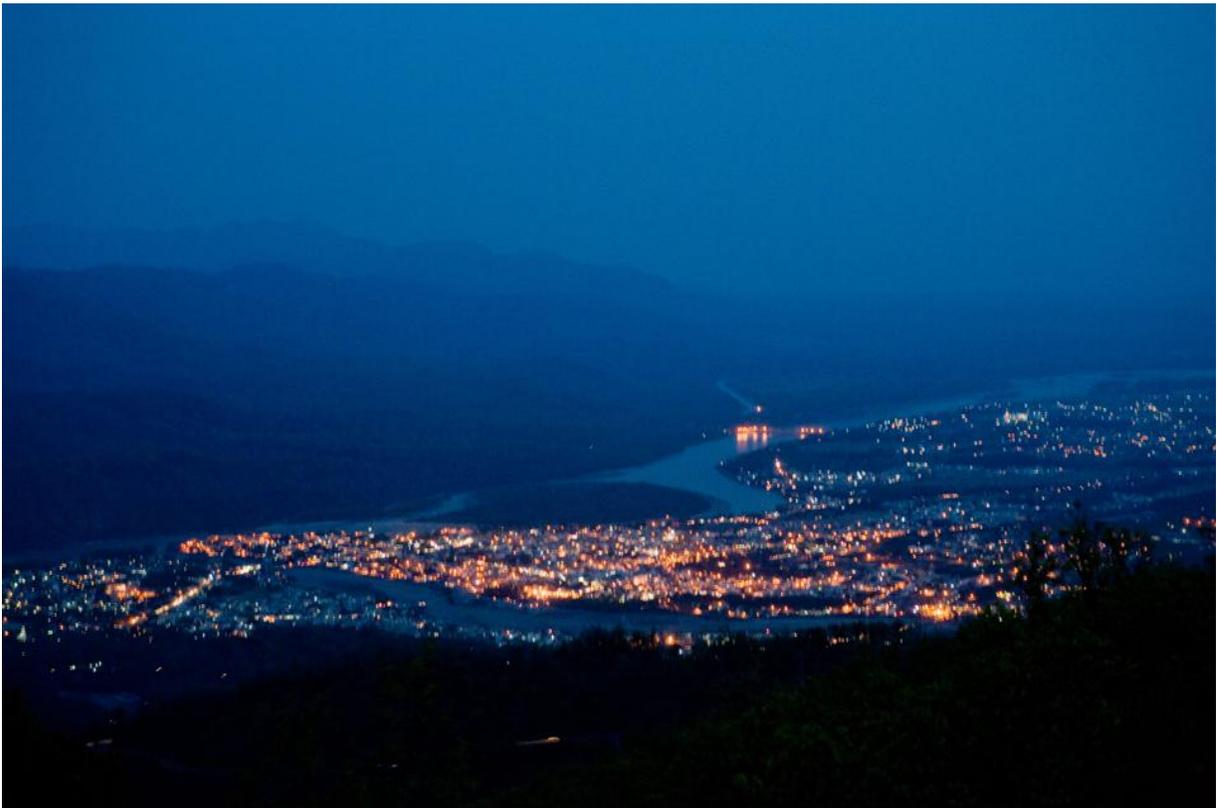


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Travel

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Global lockdown and the grounding of all travel has prompted unique innovations across the travel sector. We've seen them all: virtual tours of museums; recipes from leading restaurants' chefs to cook at home; zoom interviews with wellness experts straight from the spa... these are just some of the ways travel brands have tried to keep in touch with would-be guests and travellers while they are stuck indoors.



Cookies on Forbes

Ananda has an inspiring setting at the foothills of the Himalayas. (CREDIT: ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS)

Celebrating its 20th year in 2020, **Ananda in the Himalayas**, a world-renowned wellness retreat in India, would have ordinarily been celebrating with exciting new programmes and a celebratory smoothie or two. Instead, while local travellers *are* starting to return, international visitors are still unable to, and so the retreat has been thinking on its feet.



Ananda is renowned for its wellness expertise. (CREDIT: SACHIN SONI)

It has gathered together its experts to offer a curated **Ananda Wellness Bliss** programme, which its many devotees around the world can tap into remotely (as well as being just the thing for inviting in newbies and wannabe guests alike). The 360 degree programme takes the ‘experience at home’ notion to a new – deeper – level. Participants can directly tap into the brand’s wealth of expertise, with consultations leading to bespoke meal plans and yoga sessions, so that what you experience is one step-short of a real-life stay at the retreat. The Wellness Bliss also sees a collaboration with premium Ayurveda skincare range, **Mauli Rituals**, meaning that participants can be matched with a personalised range of products – depending on the results from their Ayurvedic consultation.



Find a new outlook at Ananda. (CREDIT: ©CHRIS CALDICOTT)

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Located at the foot of the Himalayas in India, Ananda is regarded as one of the world leaders in wellness, particularly in Ayurvedic practices. Set among 100 acres of virgin forest, it is a soulful place, overlooking the mountains, the valley of the holy town of Rishikesh and the river Ganges. In 'normal' times, just being here soothes the soul and switches off the brain.



The retreat is a leader in yogic practices. (CREDIT: SACHIN SONI)

Based around four key pillars - yoga, meditation, Ayurveda and the philosophy of Vedanta (the search for God within) – the spa concept means people come here for a variety of reasons – including detox, stress management, weight loss or perhaps to ‘find’ themselves again. The focused programmes are overseen by a line-up of professionals, in the form of Ayurvedic consultants, nutritionists and experienced therapists, who create a personalised therapy and activity programme. Ananda is especially renowned for its yoga offering, with yogi enthusiasts able to enhance their practice with personalised yoga sessions, yoga nidra (a form of meditation) and pranayama (breathing exercises).



You can boost your at-home programme with complementary products from Maui Rituals. (CREDIT: AVC)

The collaboration with English brand **Maui Rituals** is a fitting partnership. Founded by husband and wife team Anita and Bittu Kaushal, they took off on a pilgrimage to their motherland, following a life-changing

event. Here, they re-discovered the healing power of India's natural herbs and holistic traditions. So fascinated were the couple by the Vedic scriptures that Anita went onto study Ayurvedic health and nutrition and Bittu furthered his knowledge under the guidance of his father; an Ayurvedic doctor. The result was Mauli Rituals, a one-stop shop for eco-luxe body and skincare blends, led by Ayurvedic principles but rooted in science.



The essence of the Aurvedic practices that you can enjoy at Ananda are bought to your home. (CREDIT: SACHIN SONI)

In Ananda's new customised Wellness Bliss programme, this is all bought together for followers to delve into at home. During two in-depth Ayurvedic consultations, an Ayurvedic physician reviews mental, physical, and emotional health to assess your body type (dosha) and current imbalances. This results in a bespoke programme of diet and activities to restore energy, balance and peace. It kick-starts with an in-depth wellness assessment questionnaire, followed by a video consultation by one of the in-house doctors, such as Dr Shijoe Matthew, who has practiced in the discipline of Ayurveda for over 12 years.



The idea behind Wellness Bliss is that you embark on your own journey of wellbeing. (CREDIT: ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS)

Following this, your *swasthya* score is worked out. In Ayurveda, the word *swasthya* is the Sanskrit term for health. Put simplistically, for perfect health, all the doshas (the three energies that every person has in their makeup) – namely, vata (representing air and space elements), pitta (fire and water) and kapha (earth and water) – need to be aligned.

“Imagine it as a tripod,” explains Dr Matthew. “It can only properly work if all the legs are level. If one leg is weaker, it will fall.”



The bespoke programme is based around Ayurvedic principles. (CREDIT: ANANDA)

The consultation discovers an individual’s dominant dosha, and also advises on what this actually means in reality, with suggestions for lifestyle changes and diet. Daily routines are drawn up with wellbeing advice – such as the best self-massage techniques to destress; specific physical exercises for your dosha type, and when best to do them; as well as breathing exercises. Instructions are detailed and multi-layered. Pitta dominant results, for instance, are told that this often means that their digestive system and hormones can be out of balance. So suggestions are given for what ingredients to use to aid this, and a choice of recipes to cook. Pitta dominant people usually can’t tolerate excessive acidic, salty or spicy foods. So dishes, such as barley tofu and spinach *khichadi*, coconut and lentil soup or eggplant moussaka, can soothe and balance. “Ayurveda is a way to live life in entirety,” says Dr Matthew. “For it to work effectively, you apply the principles to everything – diet, mind, body, soul.”



Mauli Rituals is also based around Ayurveda with body oils to match the three doshas. (CREDIT: AVC)

To enhance your experience further, the results you receive can be matched to the products you can purchase from Mauli Rituals. If you have been guided to carry out a daily abhyanga (self-massage) to combat anxiety, for instance, then seek out one of the body oils (which come in different blends

to suit your main dosha type). If ashwagandha powder has been suggested to help with insomnia, then Mauli's Organic Ashwagandha Booster can be added to cereals, in porridge or to smoothies.



The yoga teaching by Fareena is the same, but the destination at home is probably not as scenic.

(CREDIT: SACHIN SONI)

The multi-faceted programme also includes a yoga consultation followed by personal yoga and meditation classes. You can choose between hatha yoga, meditation or pranayama (breathing) sessions – or a combination of all. Each is tailored to individual level, goals and specific conditions, and the instructor provides guidance and adjustments as you practice – a long way from the typical online zoom classes.

Fareena Farid is one of the yogic instructors, and is based at Ananda.

Beginners start with the Pawanmuktasana I series (the first sequence of yoga poses in the Satyananda tradition), which focus on joint exercises to stimulate flexibility and the natural healing process. Pawanmuktasana II follows – eight different poses focusing on the abdominal muscles and back,

said to aid digestion. Another session may delve into standing poses – such as the Tadasana (or Palm Tree) and Natarajasana (or Lord of the Dance).



Be transported with the meditation sessions. (CREDIT: ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS)

She also leads meditation sessions include Vedantic meditation – a form of self-realisation – and yoga nidra – or yogic sleep. This is a guided practice in which you lie in in the Savasana pose (or corpse), while Fareena’s lilting voice transfixes you, as it carries on the air all the way from the Himalayas to your living room. The idea is that you enter a state between sleep and consciousness, focusing on breathing, the sixth chakra (or third eye) and ‘witnessing’ images. Fareena calls to mind thick forests, starry skies and blue oceans – the very things we are missing right now when most of us do not have the ability to travel. We may not be able to go far, but – it turns out – this home experience is the closest thing you’ll find to transporting you to a better place.

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