

A RESET

# Higher Powers

At Ananda in the Himalayas, the ancient science of Ayurveda combines with modern therapies and a potent setting to offer an elevated healing experience.

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**IN THE HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS** of Northern India, not far from where the Ganges River breaks from its mountainous traverse, lies Rishikesh. Here, the forces of nature converge with the human quest for health and spiritual transcendence. Holy waters released from glacial peaks flow through the city's heart, and the river's banks are dotted with ashrams and centuries-old temples where seekers come to find peace and enlightenment at the source. On the city's dusty, narrow streets, colorful saris mix with patterned yoga pants, many of their wearers



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heading to the shore to perform their daily rites. Monkeys scamper, shrieking for edible alms, while sacred cows amble down the middle of the road, undeterred by traffic and honking motorbikes. There's an immense power to the surroundings, and the air buzzes with existential questions. Just north of this devotional hubbub, perched on a hillside overlooking Rishikesh Valley and snow-capped summits, sits Ananda in the Himalayas.

Built on the grounds of a maharaja's lush estate, Ananda offers a dramatic, one-of-a-kind retreat from life's jostled intensity, steeped in age-old wisdom and infused with modern therapies. Before I arrive at the spa, I undergo an intake covering medical history and bowel movements. I set personal goals with the in-house physician and opt for the signature Ayurveda Rejuvenation program to address my symptoms of contemporary existence: poor sleep, extra poundage, situational anxieties, stooped shoulders, and moderate lower back aches. Each program, while tailored to specific objectives, such as pain and stress reduction or a focus on yoga and meditation, is formulated on the foundations of Ayurveda.

This ancient healing science originated in India over 5,000 years ago and is at once simple and infinitely ►





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► complex. Essentially, it posits that the body is a microcosm of the universe and that health is achieved by balancing body, mind, and spirit. This principle seems straightforward, but Ayurvedic practice is anything but. Treatments take into account an individual's unique health and *dosha* — the distinctive ratio of the five elements that Ayurveda separates into three foundational ones: *vata* (air and ether), *pitta* (fire and water), and *kapha* (earth and water). Each person has a combination of a dominant and a supportive dosha, with aspects of the third in play. Notably, doshas are dynamic and easily thrown out of balance. At Ananda, I am determined to return my vata-pitta ratios to equilibrium — and guzzle wisdom from the wellspring that birthed the varied styles and lineages of yoga and Eastern practices I've studied for years, but always in the West.

After an unending journey of delayed flights and winding roads, I pass through Ananda's palatial gates, welcomed by bird song and tangible tranquility. Upon arrival, I receive my seven-day schedule, a physically and emotionally charged regimen of hot oil massages (lots of them), meditation, hatha yoga, and physiotherapy. Once in my room, I unpack — almost unnecessarily. In the closet hang multiple *kurta*, soft, lightweight cotton-linen pajamas to be worn at all times. Rightfully attired, I feel a certain democratization is established, encouraging guests to remain focused on their betterment, undistracted by external adornment. My first treatment is *abhyanga*, a synchronized four-hand massage to liquefy toxins and address disrupted sleep. It reduces me to babbling mush, and I head, entranced, to my evening meal.

In the restaurant, the chef confirms dietary parameters and preferences for every guest. A variety of culinary

choices are available: Colorful and aromatic dishes local to the state of Uttarakhand, vegetarian and not, grace other dinner tables, but I'm committed to a prescribed regime of broths, congees, and stewed vegetables. These muted-tone meals contain remarkably earthy and savory flavors (for my flighty vata-ness) and keep me satiated and content. The decadent dark chocolate, bake-free brownies from the breakfast buffet (that the chef kindly packs into a care box for my journey home) are my only indulgence.

Every day I enjoy massages for pain and inflammation, and medicated ghee is poured into my eyes. This is as stressful as it sounds, yet it clarifies my vision. My nostrils and sinuses are flushed repeatedly with herbal oil to dislodge migraines (now, six months post-treatment, I'm still pain-free). I rinse my mouth with a sesame-based oil every morning before my daily postural exercises with the physical therapist, again after a soothing guided yoga nidra practice that loosens my mental tension, then finally once more in the evening before I drop into a deep, fulfilling sleep. At sunrise I wake for an awareness practice, and at sunset I sit for Vedanta lectures, absorbing practical philosophy from a visiting scholar from Mumbai.

After a weeklong stay focused on shifting habits and adopting new ones, I cross back through the splendid gates, returning to the loud and scattered outside world, better equipped to keep my inner peace.●

