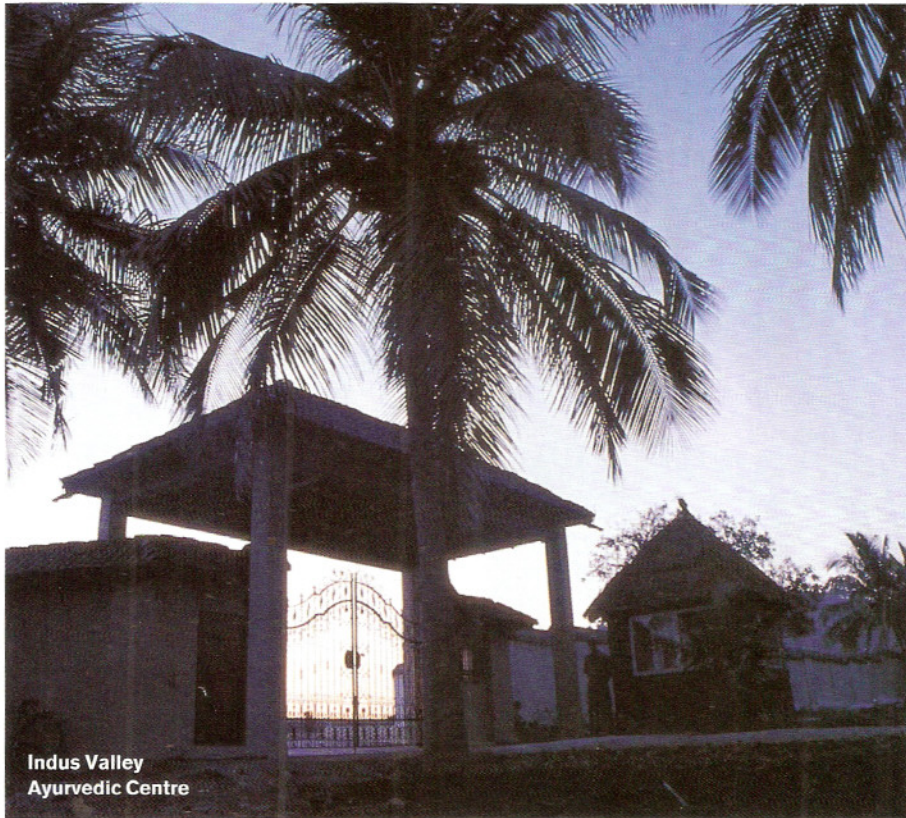


# ALTERNATIVE RETREATS



Indus Valley  
Ayurvedic Centre

**WHAT TO BRING** Hair conditioner, mosquito repellent, and extra cash, because the ayurvedic products used are excellent and you'll want to take some home.

**X-FACTOR** State-of-the-art ayurveda.

**DOWNSIDE** The beauty-salon stylists need to practise their blow-dry skills.

**DESIRABLE DISTRACTIONS** Sightseeing can be arranged. There are also astrology, ayurvedic-cookery and yoga classes.

**FACTS** From £60 per room per night. Treatment package, from about £1,100 per week (based on two people sharing), including meals, treatments and consultations. Ring +91 821 473437; or visit [www.ayurindus.com](http://www.ayurindus.com).

## Wellness Centre, Ananda Uttar Pradesh, India

The Ananda hotel, in the foothills of the Himalayas, is home to the Wellness Centre, the newest spa in India, with the widest range of treatments. Situated in the grounds of the Maharajah of Tehri-Garwal's palace in Uttar Pradesh, the centre looks down on the holy town of Rishikesh and the fast-flowing Ganges.

The centre consists of a state-of-the-art gym, sauna, steam rooms, 13 treatment rooms, pebbled pools (which massage your feet as you walk through them) and a large relaxation area. It also houses two doctors – one traditional medic and one ayurvedic physician – both of whom see each guest before treatments begin.

Treatments on offer include aromatherapy, shiatsu, hydrotherapy and reflexology, as well as beauty treatments using products

from the centre's own range or Aveda, along with meditation, breathing techniques and yoga. These classes take place in the palace's Music Pavilion, an exquisite, pillared and painted structure in the gardens. The gardens themselves are unmissable, especially in the early morning, when the sun rises over the valley.

**SIGNATURE TREATMENT** Shirodhara, in which a stream of warm oil is poured onto the forehead for complete relaxation. If your stay is shorter than three days, you may only be allowed its wimpy cousin, the thakradhara, which uses buttermilk rather than oil. Smelly, but effective.

**DINING** The chef uses the principles of ayurveda, with the freshest herbs and spices, to prepare his delicious dishes.



Spices used in  
ayurvedic cooking at  
the Taj Residency

**WHO TO BRING** Your fevered brain and your best friend. Only your nearest and dearest could cope with seeing you as an oil slick.

**WHAT TO BRING** Extra shampoo to deal with the oil, and good walking shoes.

**X-FACTOR** A spa is only as good as its therapists, and some of the best on earth have been trained in these gardens.

**DOWNSIDE** The architecture of the new buildings is stark and unsympathetic; however, it will mellow and fade after a few monsoons.

**DESIRABLE DISTRACTION** Visit Rishikesh in time for evening prayers, when thousands of votive candles and oil lamps float down the river. The town is known as the birthplace of yoga, and rose to dizzy fame when the Beatles visited with the Maharishi in the Sixties. The foothills are good for hiking.

**FACTS** From £1,599 per person for a nine-day package (based on two people sharing), including flights, transfers, accommodation in Delhi and five nights in the Mandarin Oriental Ananda, two spa treatments and full use of all facilities, with Greaves Travel (020 7487 9111; [www.greavesindia.com](http://www.greavesindia.com)). **JO FOLEY**

## Hoar Cross Hall Staffordshire, UK

You don't have to travel to India to find ayurvedic treatments. Hoar Cross Hall is a spa in the middle of the Staffordshire countryside, and it has an excellent range of ayurvedic treatments.

**SIGNATURE TREATMENTS** Shirodhara, the oil treatment. Traditionally, this helps insomnia, and pain and stress in the shoulders and neck. It also releases the chemical serotonin in the brain, which produces deep sensations of pleasure and relaxation.

**DINING** Breakfast and lunch are served as a buffet; dinner is à la carte, with the focus on low-fat, healthy food. Not a chocolate bar or biscuit in sight.

**WHO TO TAKE** Great for a gossipy, girls-only weekend of total pampering and relaxation.

**WHAT TO TAKE** Swimwear, an exciting book and training clothes. During the day, guests wander around in bathrobes, but you'll want to dress up for dinner.

**X-FACTOR** The minimum guest age of 16 ensures a peaceful stay.

**DOWNSIDE** The institutional style of the interiors and the gothic architecture. The underground dining and treatments rooms are slightly claustrophobic.

**DESIRABLE DISTRACTIONS** A swimming and spa pool with water grotto and aromatherapy steam room offers a variety of aqua-aerobics classes. Yoga, tai chi, archery, cycling and beginner's golf.

**FACTS** From £284 per person for two nights. Massage, from £29; shirodhara, £29. Ring 01283 575671; or visit [www.hoarcross.co.uk](http://www.hoarcross.co.uk). **HENRIETTA DUPS** □

[www.harpersandqueen.co.uk](http://www.harpersandqueen.co.uk)



Clockwise from top left: lotus blossoms at Kumarakom Lake Resort. A fountain tree in the gardens at the Indus Valley Ayurvedic Centre. Therapists at the Taj Residency. Coconut oil at the Taj Residency. A bath at the Taj Residency

their treatment, its results, and a guide to how to follow it up when they leave. It's no wonder the centre has already attracted a dedicated following. Yet, in spite of the demand, there are no plans to expand. Dr Vinod says: 'We would lose the individual care each patient receives.' That says it all.

**SIGNATURE TREATMENT** Elakkizi, a soothing treatment for back pain, using specially medicated plants that are wrapped in linen, then heated and applied to the afflicted area.

**DINING** Delicious and creative ayurvedic menus: low-fat, no refined flour, no yeast, and tailored to your dosha. Chinese, Indian or Continental cuisine.

**WHO TO BRING** Come alone, to concentrate on curing specific ailments.

**WHAT TO BRING** A good book, a personal stereo and creature comforts like a down pillow. The hotel provides super Biotique ayurvedic products.

**X-FACTOR** Dr Vinod, the ultimate health guru. The rest of the staff and their peerless, devoted service.

**DOWNSIDE** Calicut itself is rather dull, and the centre is a little clinical. No sex!

**DESIRABLE DISTRACTION** Shop for local bargains in silks and jewellery – the hotel will arrange tours.

**FACTS** From £905 per person per week, room only, including flights and transfers, with Western & Oriental (020 7313 6600). Treatment programme, from about £70 per person per day. Ring +91 495 765 354; or visit [www.tajhotels.com](http://www.tajhotels.com).

**Indus Valley Ayurvedic Centre**  
Mysore, India

Located in a beautiful setting among the golden Chamundi Hills, outside the historic city of Mysore, this is fast becoming known as one of India's most innovative ayurveda centres. The vision of IVAC's charismatic founder, Dr Talavane Krishna, is to create an oasis where everything – architecture, gardens, accommodation, amenities, food, treatments and staff – is in harmony with ayurvedic principles.

Guests can stay in the main house, with its high-ceilinged, spacious rooms or, better yet, in the traditional Karnatakian thatched cottages dotted about the grounds.

They are lovingly decorated with local textiles and art, and many have a beautifully appointed treatment room attached. When you arrive, you are given a very detailed questionnaire to complete, as well as a consultation to help the highly qualified team of doctors determine your dosha and state of health. Pink-uniformed therapists then whisk you off for a heavenly round of treatments.

Every detail has been thought out; even the massage tables are specially designed for maximum comfort. The hand-picked staff are intelligent, upbeat and caring, with a genuine desire to please. At IVAC, the fountains, gardens and tree-lined walkways create an idyllic setting. Dr Krishna presides over it all like a benevolent Prospero on his magical island, where burnt-out Calibans soon become blissed-out Ariels.

**SIGNATURE TREATMENT** Panchakarma, the ayurvedic detox programme.

**DINING** Fresh, organic, vegetarian, mildly spiced Indian ayurvedic cuisine. Other options on request.

**WHO TO BRING** Ideal for that special someone.