

Spa of Sanskritic Lore

Perched atop a cliff, amidst lush greenery and tall coconut palms, the Leela Kovalam Kempinski Beach Resort in the quiet beach town of Kovalam offers a sublimely divine ayurvedic spa experience at the recently opened Divya.

by **DISHA RATHORE**



Only a fool would look for European spa therapy in God's own Country, Kerala, which is synonymous with ayurveda, the holistic herbal science of the Vedic ages. And its new resident, The Leela Kovalam Kempinski Beach Resort in Kovalam, offers a divine ayurveda spa experience befitting the gods, hence the name Divya for its holistic health spa.

Nestled amidst lush greenery, and colourful flowers overlooking the Arabian Sea, the in-house spa at the Leela Kovalam Kempinski Resort is located at the starting point of the uphill road which leads to the main complex. Done in the traditional Kerala architectural style, the yellow bungalow with a red terracotta roof promises to pamper every whim with a rejuvenating and re-energising treatment

in sublime luxury.

At Divya – it's not only the essence of ayurveda but the essence of India that is on offer. As I climbed up the stairs leading to the spa, a beaming smile and folded hands, in true Indian fashion, welcomed me. Before I could take in my surroundings of a warm reception area done in teakwood, huge brass vessels decorated with flower petals and a bronze Vishnu statue, I was offered a refreshing drink. The choice was varied – fresh coconut water, iced tea, fresh juices, and bottled water, being in coconut country though, I settled for coconut water.

While I sipped my drink, an attendant walked my way with a tray. I was about to put back the empty coconut, when I noticed a pair of rubber soled-green plastic slippers on the tray. For what I asked? Shoes were to be discarded into safekeeping, so that dirt stayed outside

and the clean and pure environs of the Spa remained unscathed.

It's not just the massages, but the philosophy of *Shareeram Adyam Khalu Dharma Sadhanam* (Health is Wealth) that defines ayurveda. So after a thorough consultation with the Ayurveda Specialist, I was told to take my pick. If you wish, a special ayurvedic diet chart is prepared for you while you stay at the hotel to enhance your ayurvedic experience.

There is a whole array of authentic ayurvedic massages and preventive packages to choose from, ranging from a forty five minute ayurvedic massage (*Abhyangam, Dhara, Udvarthanam, Elakkizhi*) to 14-or 21-day rejuvenation, relaxation treatments (*Panchkarma, Rasayana, Vajeekarana*). The ingredients used are traditional medicated herbal oils, powders and milk depending on



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whether the massage is for detoxification, relaxation or for stress relief.

One therapy which the courageous among you can try out is the *Chavittithirummu*, a traditional treatment for *Kairali* martial arts dancers. It's a rigorous massage done by one or two therapists hanging on a rope and kneading your back with their toes to increase your flexibility.

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experience. An elevated wooden platform overlooking the Arabian Sea makes for a soothing backdrop for yoga or meditation. So, as you meditate or practice the *asanas* you can feast your eyes on the vast expanse of calm, azure seawater, listen to the lilting sound of waves crashing on to the rocks and surrender to the tranquility that pervades the air.

You get to choose from among eight massage rooms done in ebony teak wood, dim lights with splendid views of landscaped gardens or the Arabian Sea

and a hydro-pressure shower cubicle installed in each one. If you are au pair, then you have the option of a spa treatment *deux*. The massage room for couples is an interesting concept, with a screen separates the two massage tables and a larger shower cubicle for two. If you want some fresh air then you can get your massage outdoors, with the sound of the sea as a backdrop, under open canopied tents.

Sadly I had to give the canopied tents a miss. Blame it on the rains. I stayed clear of *Chavittithirummu* and played safe and opted for a forty five minute long *Dhara* massage. Once in the massage room I was told by my masseuse that I could use the white cloth for cover if I was uncomfortable. Well, as if. Lying on the *Thoni*, the high wooden massage table, I was lightly kneaded all over with warm medicated herbal oil kept in traditional brass vessels. This was

followed by a 15 minute head oil massage, which entailed pouring a stream of herbal oil on my forehead from the brass bowl hanging overhead.

The experience was relaxing. I had lilting instrumental music for company and a view of the landscaped garden. After the massage I was left alone with my thoughts for another 15-minutes for my body to absorb the oil. With the massage over, I washed off the medicated oil in the adjoining shower cubicle feeling thoroughly relaxed. The final touch is the smearing of herbal powder – *Rasnadi* on the scalp to avoid any reaction like sneezing. So, it's not just relaxation but holistic wellness which is on offer.

As I walked back uphill towards the main complex, I was already planning to take time-out to try one of the longer wellness packages – the *Rasayana*, *Vajeekarna* or the *Panchkarma* to truly refresh my body and luxuriate once again in an experience that is simply divine. ♦

Divya, Leela Kovalam Kempinski Beach Resort, Kovalam Beach, Trivandrum-695527

Timings: 8am to 8pm, daily.

Moneywise: From Rs 750 for basic massages to Rs 70,000 for treatments.



factfile

Getting there

Trivandrum is the nearest airport located at a distance of 14 kilometres from Kovalam. **Jet Airways** flies daily from Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai to Trivandrum. **Air Deccan** and **Indian** operate daily flights from Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai and Mumbai. Air Deccan also flies daily from Kochi to Trivandrum. From Delhi, the flight takes approximately four-and-a-half-hours. From Mumbai and Chennai, the flight duration is approximately one hour and from Kochi it's a 30 minute flight.