

HANGING IN THE BALANCE

Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort's Natural Weight Programme

Writer Stephanie Shiu





PREVIOUS PAGE: Starting your morning with yoga sets you up with a serene start. THIS PAGE: Il Mare boasts the best view in the resort along with delicious Italian fare

If it's wellness you seek, there are few places better than Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort. Located on a remote beach on the southern coast, a four-hour drive from Colombo, your home for the week-long programme is shrouded with coconut palms and the roaring Indian Ocean, a fitting backdrop to reset. All programmes are based on Ayurvedic principles using a holistic

approach to achieving health and balance through identifying body composition, uncovering lifestyle imbalances and focusing on mental clarity to make choices in line with well-being.

DAY 1

In our initial consultation, Dr Jayachandran Thampi, spa director, explains that each

programme is tailored to the individual. The Natural Weight Ayurveda Programme centres around wholesome food specific to your *dosha* combined with detoxifying techniques for a holistic approach without the usual calorie counting and deprivation.

After expressing my interest in elements of the Inner Harmony programme which focuses on stress management, Dr Thampi

adds sessions emphasising mindfulness to combine the two. The flexibility and customisation make it possible to create my own experience.

My morning spa treatment is a Deep Tissue Massage with Ayurvedic *pinda sweda*, a herbal compress soaked with warm medicated oils to banish water retention. They are offered separately on

the spa menu but Dr Thampi recommends them together, and 90 minutes later I emerge unknotted.

More stress busting takes place in the afternoon personal training session with Chathuranga. He has me running to warm up before getting through most of the weight machines, adding dumbbells to leg, arm, and ab movements for a full-body

workout, finishing with a stretch session. I feel more together than my comparatively anxious self this morning.

DAY 2

I spend the morning with the refreshingly non-sense Teresa Richard, the resort's visiting guest artist who teaches yoga, meditation and holds private sessions blending a variety

of techniques, her specialties encapsulating everything from somatic movement and anatomy to tantra-tao massage. Group yin or hatha classes are held most mornings after a 30-minute meditation and her method of teaching is highly specific, hands-on and prioritises form.

After a heavenly Marma Abhyanga, again combined with *pinda sweda*, whereby the marmas – or ayurvedic energy points – are stimulated to achieve balance, I have a private session with Teresa. We discuss what I would like to get out of the session,

easing anxiety being my focus. She teaches me breathing relaxation techniques before leading a guided meditation, which helps heighten my awareness to the places in my body I am holding onto stress.

Feeling less tightly wound, Eddie the resort nature guide and I take to Mulgirigala Raja Maha Vihara, an ancient Buddhist temple built on 205 metres of rock, a half-hour drive from the resort. You'll find lying, sitting and standing figures of Buddha housed across all five compounds, with Kandy-era wall painting

based on Jakata stories adorning the temple walls. Ladies are recommended to wear long skirts or trousers, but a sarong tied over bare legs will do in a pinch. The highlight of clambering to the top is the epic view that stretches along the southern coast which makes the 533 steps completely worth it.

DAY 3

The morning yoga session with Teresa focuses on opening up the chest and shoulders, working towards wheel pose. As



THIS PAGE: Experience the warmth of Sri Lankan hospitality as soon as you set foot on the property. OPPOSITE PAGE: Ayurvedic treatments are a specialty at Anantara Spa



always she offers modifications, and with three generations present in class, ensures each person is personally challenged. We are reminded that our practice is just that – our own – and to avoid making comparisons, the theme of self-compassion the main theme of the class.

If I wasn't relaxed enough after a full body and head massage with the *pinda sweda*, the afternoon reiki session with Diwa ensures there isn't an ounce of tension left in me. She practises a hands-on style which I prefer for its nurturing quality, which she mixes with angelic reiki, calling upon Guanyin or Mother Mary for maternal compassion, which I must be in need of. Afterwards I'm energised yet calm – this must be what balance feels like.

The meal plans help with this and you never feel deprived as protein, usually fish, features heavily. The only no-nos are shellfish and red meat which are difficult to digest, but Italian restaurant Il Mare has plenty of healthy options like minestrone and salmon with mango



salsa. Adjustments to the meal plan can be made to suit your taste, and my preference for local dishes taken into account. The coconut porridge and local spicy salad (usually accompanying the lamb starter) makes for a satisfying dinner, as well as vegetarian or tuna curries. The egg

hoppers at the Journey breakfast buffet are also a must.

DAY 4

Chaturanga put me through my paces in today's personal training session, which is considerably more challenging than the



ever feels easy. Today's example is cat-cow where she instructs us to move from the hips first, and not 'cheating' by leading with the hands and head to improve spinal flexibility. She encourages us to do pigeon in stages, rather than racing to achieve the full pose, to ensure hips are square and we are upright. Followed by a Traditional Thai Massage at the spa, the morning is about being kind to the body.

The part of the programme I am most excited about is my first lesson at the Anantara Surf Centre by Tropicsurf, which caters to complete novices like myself as well as seasoned surfers seeking big swells. Awesome instructor Stephen Taylor plays a video at the resort demonstrating the basics before we drive to a nearby beach – he knows all the beaches, and some secret spots, and chooses depending on your ability.

After giving me a shove to figure out

which leg I lead with, goofy (right) as it turns out, I practise the three stages of standing on the beach – chicken wing (push-up position), lizard leg (one leg bent) before finally popping-up. Stephen holds onto my board as we paddle out, and turns it around shouting instructions. I'm able to stand after the third try which is exhilarating despite the 'waves' being more akin to froth.

We keep at it until it starts to come more naturally, with a couple of wipe-outs in between. I have a newfound respect for how much energy is spent paddling out, especially where the current is strong and you are thrashed before even getting to the good part. It was the highlight of the trip and I laugh so hard I swallow an immense amount of water. If you get the chance to have a lesson with Stephen, absolutely take it as he has such visible passion for the sport and is as enthusiastic teaching beginners and kids as the pros.

initial one. The circuits are more cardio based with intervals on the treadmill, jumping jacks, high knees, mountain climbers and star jumps. Rather than using machines we focus on dumbbell thrusts, weighted squats and walking lunges, before the much anticipated stretch at the end.

In my private session with Teresa, she guides me through breathing exercises that focus on diaphragmatic breathing and counting to ensure a longer exhale for the best chance of achieving calm. One of the most interesting strategies to ease physical tension, in my case the feeling of 'knots' in the stomach, is to give the sensation a physical form. After she prompts me with questions, I describe it to be rubbery, maroon and sponge-like, and the mere act

of naming its shape meant I could mentally shrink it and eventually make it disappear completely.

To mix things up at the spa, today's treatment is a Udwarthanam, more of a scrub though it can be considered a dry massage using herbal powder, which improves circulation and the appearance of cellulite, while exfoliating to leave skin silky smooth. After a steam, I am cocooned in a coconut wrap for half an hour while a head massage is performed. The holiday glow takes place before my very eyes.

DAY 5

Each of Teresa's classes deconstructs a seemingly straightforward pose, as a reminder that when done properly, it hardly

THIS PAGE: Views of the Indian Ocean fringed by coconut palms never gets old. OPPOSITE PAGE: The spectacular vistas atop Mulgirigala Raja Maha Vihara are well worth the climb to the top





Expect to be surrounded by beauty at the resort, whether it's gazing up at a star-filled sky or admiring a beautiful sunset

DAY 6

My last session with Chathuranga follows a similar structure of intervals of brisk walking, running and sprinting on the treadmill. This time he adds a Fitball into the mix into the first set of circuits before an arm-heavy one with push-ups, renegade rows, tricep kick-backs, as well as jump and sumo squats. Before aches have time to set in, it's time for the Anantara Signaure Massage which uses a

blend of oils to promote relaxation while restoring the flow of energy along the meridian lines.

In the afternoon Eddie takes me on the nature walk around the resort, which reminds me of those I used to take with my parents as a child. Familiar with the flora and fauna on the property, he's like a walking encyclopaedia and has an eye for spotting the one leaf which when overturned reveal a family of caterpillars,

or three lizards so stealthily concealed in a tree they would be otherwise undetectable to passers by. We wander through the herb garden where many of the raw ingredients used in the eateries are grown, along the mangroves filled with carp, eel and ducks before he points out the trees in which parrots and peacocks take refuge. Looking for life amidst the greenery makes you feel like a kid again, and just being in nature a walking meditation in itself.

DAY 7

Yoga with Teresa is the humbling experience I have come to expect. Even basic poses I have done a million times need to be relearnt, including a basic extended triangle, in which she points out I am overstretching from the hips. Often in seated positions she corrects by placing her fingers on the back to indicate where the breath needs to be sent, so the posture is naturally aligned. There is a sense of security under her attentive gaze.



The final spa treatment is the Marma Abhyanga Massage followed by the Quench Hydration Facial using shiatsu techniques to relax while boosting hydration.

Although not included, I request to try a watercolour class with the resort's resident artist. A part of the Inner Harmony Ayurveda Programme for stress management, it's easy to see why painting is cathartic, especially

when you are attempting to replicate the tranquil vibe of coconut palms. The creatively challenged needn't worry as he will roughly sketch an outline for you, demonstrate techniques and suggests hues to bring your masterpiece to life. The end result is a surprisingly decent memento of an unforgettable week. www.anantara.com 🌿

