



PICTURES BY BARBERYN REEF RESORT

Detox from FESTIVITIES

Joan Koh checks into a week-long ayurvedic retreat in Sri Lanka to discover new meaning to clean living

There's much to be said about celebrating the excesses of the season, and the penalties that must follow in order to keep your body in check. Thankfully, compensating doesn't necessarily have to be painful. With Christmas and New Year behind us, and 15 days of Chinese New Year feasting ahead, it's best to plan ahead to detox your system — and where better to do so than in Sri Lanka, as I found out.

I consider myself as living rather healthily. I've shunned red meat for seven years now and detox with a fruit-and-vegetable diet frequently. I exercise regularly and I know my aging body appreciates it, but a treat at Barberyn Reef Ayurveda Resort is something else.

It's hard not to associate ayurveda with the dripping of oil on the forehead, a ubiquitous image in spa ads. Yet ayurveda goes deeper than that, with a history in India that's more than 5,000 years old. Translated as the "science of life", it believes a person's health is a harmonious interaction of body, mind and en-

viron. The philosophy posits that the body consists of three life energies or *doshas*, namely *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*, which, when imbalanced, cause the body to be susceptible to illness. When ayurvedic therapies heal, they attempt to balance the *doshas*.

In 1968, Barberyn Reef Ayurveda Resort at Beruwala became the first in Sri Lanka to introduce ayurveda treatments to its guests. Barberyn Beach Resort at Weligama down the coast opened last April to cater to increasing demand. The two Barberyn resorts sit on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka, both with the Indian Ocean roaring away at their doorstep. The older 75-room Barberyn Reef Ayurveda Resort, about three hours' drive from Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport, is protected by a long reef (and hence its name), so you can wade about rather safely in the sea.

Slightly over an hour's drive from Barberyn Reef, the stunning Barberyn Beach Ayurveda Resort sits atop a hill overlooking the Indian Ocean. Design-wise, it must be the most pic-

The writer spent a lot of time at the buffet table deciding which vegetables to heap onto her plate

turesque in the area. With a team led by the late Turner Wickramasinghe, a close associate of Sri Lanka's most famous architect Geoffrey Bawa, and with equally acclaimed Laki Senanayake adding finishing touches to the 60-room resort, every effort is made to ensure Barberyn Beach stays tuned to the surrounding tropical splendour while maintaining clean lines and vast space. Nothing is ever over the top. The extra-high ceiling, pavilion-like lobby, balconies opening to the sea and a saltwater pool perched above the ocean are all subtle but ingenious ways to invite nature into the resort.

To the doctor

The health centre is staffed by doctors, qualified pharmacists and experienced therapists. During the hour-long consultation with the ayurvedic doctor, your blood pressure, weight, tongue, eyes and pulse are examined, your urine and stools are scrutinised if necessary and every single health complaint you may have is meticulously recorded. Your speech, bodily movements and general appearance are also observed.

Spirituality is hardly mentioned, if at all, and therapies are kept practical. Each guest is prescribed a series of healing therapies in the form of oil massage and steam bath, oral herbal medication and a restricted diet, if required. In severe cases, enemas, emesis (therapeutic vomiting) and fasting are necessary. An eld-

erly Japanese woman I met had ailments running several pages long, and had been there two weeks when we met. A German man returned for the second time, this time for a month — he swore ayurveda worked for him and isn't a novelty anymore.

I was treated for indigestion and backache, which meant getting massaged daily with an oil that made me smell like chicken marinade. Afterwards, I was sent to a garden where hot maroon-coloured paste was plastered onto my



Doctors at the resort, like Dr Sudhama, keep therapies practical

lower back, and told to lie there for 20 minutes. I joined men and women with all sorts of pastes on their foreheads, shoulders, limbs and even toes, which made the gathering look like a POW hospital. A bath followed, where a therapist scooped herb-infused water onto my back and shoulders continually for 10 minutes. No fancy bubble baths, no aromatic toiletries. This clinical approach to body therapy was repeated daily with clockwork precision.

I was also fed combinations of oral medication eight times daily, from 6am till bedtime. This included herbal tonics, pastes, powdered mixtures — all freshly prepared and waiting daily at the pharmacy for me. On top of a regular diet — I could thankfully eat what I wanted — I was prescribed a diet of green soup (soup with curry leaves) and apple and carrot juice for breakfast, king coconut water for lunch, and nelli juice for dinner.

All this, teamed with daily sunrise yoga sessions held on the rooftop, short hikes and meditation at temples. The combination worked. For the week I was at Barberyn, I reported more regular bowel movements. My insides, I'm happy to report, feel thoroughly cleansed.

You are what you eat

Every mouthful at Barberyn is meant to heal. Food is complementary medicine in the ayurvedic system of healing. Author Sally Morningstar wrote in *Ayurveda for Health and Well-being* that ayurvedic medicine believes "all diseases stem from the digestive system and are caused either by poor digestion of food, which is a major source of nourishment, or by following an improper diet for your dosha. The system therefore concentrates to a large extent on nutrition".

Meals are vegetarian, though, bless the talented chefs, chicken and fish are prepared occasionally. I spent an enormous amount of time at the buffet table, reading everything on the menu card and deciding what best to heap onto my plate. For breakfast, earthen pots

filled with suspicious-looking liquid purport healing qualities. The pot of green soup was labelled, "Curry leaves reduce and control cholesterol and high blood pressure and thrombosis, help the digestive system, improve the liver function and appetite." Next, "horsegram is ideal for reducing weight as it absorbs the fat in the blood". The lunch buffet offered more nutritional healing.

The pot of curried lotus root read: "Lotus root purifies the body cells. Not recommended during Shirodhara [treatment in which warm oil is poured onto the forehead]." I looked forward to dinner daily. I had wonderful dumplings stuffed with potatoes and carrots, tasty hot and sour soup and memorable banana fritters, then there was a sumptuous Sri Lankan buffet spread every Saturday night. Who could fault the delicious vegetarian cuisine?

Every guest had a little "health card" on the table indicating his or her dietary needs. Mealtimes saw diners taking their bottles of herbal cures to the restaurant, ready to ingest them before or after food. A dietitian ensured everybody adhered to the prescribed diet and not eat more than they should.

On my second last night at the resort, I arrived at dinner to see my Swiss dining companion busy cutting her grilled lobster. "It's my last night here and I asked for it. You can do the same tomorrow before you leave," she pronounced gleefully. The next day, though I insisted on my regular Indian vegetarian dinner, the restaurant manager brought me vanilla ice-cream. I had been at my best behaviour the entire week. My tummy was in good shape and it definitely deserved a sweet finish. ■

Rates at Barberyn Reef Ayurveda Resort start from 45 euros a night and at Barberyn Beach Ayurveda Resort, from 75 euros. Ayurveda treatment from 350 euros per person per week. Rates include full board, return airport transfers and scheduled activities. For details, visit www.barberyn.com.



The writer's medication, which she brought to the table at mealtimes

Live long and prosper

SriLankan Airlines' signature greeting marks the start of a great journey. Last year alone, the airline won five awards, including the prestigious Best Overall In-flight Entertainment by the World Airline Entertainment Association (WAEA). You may be forgiven for wondering how such a modest name can outshine larger airline luminaries.

If you flew the airline recently [in October], you'd be entertained by *Terminator 3*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, *The Italian Job*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* — all newly released.

At take-off, you can tune in to a video channel that allows you to watch the aircraft ascending into the skies. With an external camera, the same channel also gives a panoramic view of what's below while you cruise (we all know children and certain engineers love seeing the world through the pilot's eyes).

The Airbus A330s and A340s — all with thoughtfully generous 32-inch legroom in economy class and seats with adjustable headrests and lumbar supports — feature seat-back video with 18 channels, 22 channels of audio entertainment and 16 interactive games in business and economy classes. "Video on demand" with a library of 35 video titles is also available in business class. Honestly, you

would be happy to tuck away your books and magazines.

The final word of endorsement came last September when SriLankan Airlines won the best in-flight entertainment award (for a fleet size of 20 or less) by the WAEA.

In addition, Asia's rising aviation star has been named Best Airline of the Year in Central Asia for the third consecutive year by Skytrax. (Skytrax is the largest independent passenger survey in the international airline industry, spanning 4.4 million passengers from 76 nationalities. The global airline survey covers carriers in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia/Pacific and the Americas.)

It's the staff who hold the real charm, though. The saree-clad stewardesses who warmly welcome you aboard with clasped hands, a wide smile and "Ayubowan" (May you have long life), received the nod from Skytrax, for being the World's Friendliest Cabin Staff. They were also in second position, behind Malaysia Airlines, for the World's Best Cabin Staff.

The writer caught up with all the movies she missed aboard SriLankan Airlines en route to Colombo. The airline flies to Colombo daily. Together with its codeshare partner Emirates, they fly to Colombo 11 times a week.



Earthen pots of herbal soups that offer nutritional healing