

# Friday

MAY 23-29, 2008

WELL-BEING

## Healing mechanics

**Y**OUR BODY, LIKE YOUR CAR, needs a tune-up. **Kamla Bhatt** takes a break from her hectic schedule to sample the effects of an overhaul at Soukya in Bangalore



**Suja and Dr Isaac Mathai...** Founders of Soukya who work together to restore the mental and physical equilibrium of their clientele through holistic treatment.

After spending the last few months jetsetting across the globe, I was now back in Bangalore and my body was overworked, overfed and sleep-deprived. "Spa-goers seek salvation from a toxic world," said the SpaFinder.com website and I felt those words neatly summed up my current state of affairs. I realised I desperately needed help. And I found just that at Soukya (meaning well-being). "Soukya is a tuning place and regular tune-up of our bodies is necessary. Today our mindset is 'I'll repair my body when it breaks down'. But I believe a living organism needs more service and tune-up because the abuse is greater," says Dr Isaac Mathai, founder of Soukya.

Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of Bangalore, Soukya is a 30-acre

oasis that caters to about 25-30 people at a time. I was headed there to calm and relax my jangled nerves and reconnect with my mind, body and soul. Because I was leaving for San Francisco soon, I could only afford to spend a day.

Driving down the unpaved road to Soukya, I was suddenly unsure if I had made the right decision in taking a day off from my hectic schedule of international travel to spend here, even though it came highly recommended. I am not a big spa fan, although I am partial to naturopathy and ayurvedic treatments. I put a brake on my train of thoughts as I stepped out of the car to be greeted by Colonel Kannan, a trim gentleman who runs the operations at Soukya.

After a quick tour of the place,

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including their herb and medicinal garden and the accommodation, I went over to meet Dr Isaac Mathai and his wife Suja, a trained nutritionist. The couple founded Soukya five years ago. "Is this a spa? It looks like one." I ask. "We are not a spa," the Mathais reply in unison. Billed as the first wellness and treatment centre in India, Dr Mathai waves his hand around the room and explains that Soukya is the culmination of a 20-year dream. Dr Andrew Weil, Dr Deepak Chopra, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other well-known celebrities and entrepreneurs have spent time at Soukya, soaking in the peaceful and serene atmosphere and rejuvenating their mind, body and spirit connections.

Soukya is a holistic medical spa that harnesses the tradition of ancient medical practices and combines it with modern-day medicine. Dr Mathai makes it very clear that they consult physicians and run tests to get a comprehensive medical profile of their patients.

"You have to treat the person as a whole: mind, body, spirit, environmental, ecological and spiritual," says Dr Mathai. About 70 per cent of the visitors come for medical treatment and the other 30 per cent come for weight

management. The guest list also includes about 30 per cent repeat guests, according to Dr Mathai.

## Lunch and assessment

After meeting the Mathais, I had a quick five-course lunch in a quiet and open dining area surrounded by trees and plants. I have Jaya, the chief dietician, for company as I slowly spoon salad into my mouth and soak in the serene atmosphere. Jaya answers all my questions about the food, the calorie content and why a particular ingredient is paired with another.

After lunch, I head towards the medical treatment centre to meet Dr Ajitha, who is a trained ayurvedic doctor. She will prepare my medical chart and help me choose my treatments. According to Ayurveda there are three *doshas* or factors that influence every body. The *doshas* are *vata* (air and space); *pitta* (fire and energy) and *kapha* (water and earth). The *dosha* is determined by looking at the patient's skin, hair, eyes, lips, pulse and the way you answer your questions. Using all of these factors, Dr Ajitha explains, you can then determine the basic constitution of your body. A key reason for determining your body type is to help select what treatment, herbs and oil is

suitable for a patient.

Still curious, I ask her to explain how she is going to fill out my ayurvedic case sheet and she explains Ayurveda's three-step process: *darshana* (observing the patient); *sparshna* (touch and feel the pulse, joints etc) and *prashna* (question and answer).

Because I'm only here for a day, my choices are limited. If I had elected to stay for a longer period then Dr Ajitha's prescription would have been a 15-day treatment. She points out that given my basic body type – *vata/kapha* – I need to avoid foods that are oily, spicy or sour. One of my favourites, yoghurt, is also a no-no. The good news is that I can eat food that is warm and light and easily digestible.

## Treatment time

I was now eager to experience the two treatments Dr Ajitha had recommended. The first was going to be *shirodhara*, where a constant stream of warm medicated oil is slowly poured over your forehead for half an hour. By the end of it, your entire forehead and hair is drenched in warm oil. So what will this do for me? By pouring the warm oil, the frontal lobe cools down and calms your mind, she says. But, more importantly endorphins (the feel-good neurochemicals) are released and they help stimulate the nervous system, she says.

I was ready to experience my first *shirodhara*. "Now remember, do not sleep during the *dhara*. You might be tempted to but give auto-suggestions to your mind and stay awake," I'm told. And here I thought I'd get a nice nap while the two trained masseurs worked

## A TYPICAL DAY AT SOUKYA

The day starts with a yoga session and you have two sets of treatments. One before lunch and the other after. The food served here is vegetarian. Usually in the evenings there is a cooking demonstration on how to create healthy dishes. There is no TV/radio or internet access in your room. There is a common area where you can watch TV and access the internet for a limited period.

- 7 am: Yoga session
- 8 am: Breakfast
- 9 am: Consultation and treatments
- 1 pm: Lunch
- 3 pm: Treatment
- 5 pm: Walk/swim/lectures.
- 7 pm: Dinner
- 9 pm: Sleep



**Facing page (above):** The yoga centre in Soukya that is built amid lush serenity.  
**Left:** Shirodhara treatment being administered to a client.  
**Left, below:** The walk path in Soukya that helps you connect with yourself and your environment.

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### ACCOMMODATION AT SOUKYA

The accommodation  
from deluxe room to

Presidential Suite. This is a sample of the room per day pricing, and is only valid until September 2008:

- Deluxe room for single occupancy \$190

- Deluxe room for double occupancy \$250
- Suite (above) for double occupancy \$620
- Suite for single occupancy \$1,200

on my forehead! I greeted the first trickle of warm oil on my forehead with a frown because it was a strange, new sensation. "Relax," murmured one of the attendants softly, and so I did. I surrendered myself to enjoying this new experience.

At the end of the session, I felt relaxed and experienced a deep sense of calm. Now I was ready for my second treatment, the hot stone treatment. Heated lava stones are placed on different parts of my feet, legs and back and then I get an hour-long massage. With every stroke I can feel my tired muscles relax and by the end of it I'm feeling more connected with my body, mind and soul.

As I washed the oil off my body and hair, I wished I was not a slave to my watch and could take more time off to spend in the verdant environs of Soukya but just as all good things come to an end, I realised that it was time to bid adieu to this spectacular place. ■

- Kamla Bhatt is a freelance writer  
based in India