

THE YAK

The lighter and darker sides of Bali,
Asia's fashionable playground.

Vol. 15 JUN/JUL/AUG 07

- **Global Soul - Pico Iyer**
- **Fish Called Wonder**
- **Single Minded**
- **Shabby Chic**
- **Electro-couture**

ISSN 1907-929X



9 771907 929008

IDR Rp 48,000. \$59





PRANA
HOT STONE



A PASSAGE TO INDIA

Sophie Digby samples the divinely humorous world of Ayurveda, the Indian art and science of healthy and happy living.



AYURVEDA. We may have heard the word often enough. We might even have an inkling that it's something old (5,500 years, at the last count). Most of us could probably hazard a vague guess at its Indian origins - but, truthfully, what else could we impart to a casual inquisitor about this ancient, curative art? Not much, I venture. Probably because it's simply not that easy to explain.

Illness and disease - modern science understands the matter as a case of patho-

gens, infectious agents and genetic disorders; Ayurveda's take on the same is an imbalance in your *doshas*. I prefer to lean toward the latter explanation and head up to Como Shambhala Estate, just north of Ubud, for a complete Ayurvedic overhaul by Dr Deepak Denginal - and to find out exactly what a *dosha* really is.

In the elegant consultation room, I sit face-to-face with Dr Deepak Denginal, a very attractive Bangalore knowledgeabe, who studied holistic healthcare in Kerala.

Osteopathy, natural medicine and yoga are also part and parcel of this Ayurvedic master's repertoire - so I decide to dive straight in. "What is a *dosha*?" I ask, as pictures of pappadums, naans and chapatis make their inevitable appearance in my cliché-scrambled imagination.

"*Doshas* are, in Ayurvedic terms, the three 'humours' that govern the body," he clarifies. "Similar to the Greco-Roman four 'humours' - sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic - or the five elements of

Chinese medicine that define character and constitution."

One's *dosha* is determined by body type - body frame, weight, facial features, mood, sleep patterns ... even the shape of your belly button. The good doctor then proceeds to quiz me about my past, my present, my eating preferences, my sporting abilities (or lack of them), and finally, about the condition of my stools. It takes me a second to realise he's not enquiring about the ones I usually sit on in bars.



Far Left: Shower - Como Shambhala.
Left: Oil massage - Prana Villas & Spa.
Below: Shirodhara - Prana Villas & Spa.



Essentially, the three types of *dosha* are made up of Vata - space and air; Pitta - fire and water - and Kapha, water and earth. In the world of Ayurveda, our bodies and their processes are comprised of unequal amounts of these and are ultimately governed by them. So, after an amiable 30-minute consultation, Dr Deepak classes me as Pitta Vata. I believe that means that I need to balance the dominant *dosha*, and the good doctor prescribes an appropriate treatment using specially crafted oils, aromas and teas to stabilise this runaway humour.

Como Shambhala offers three to seven days of 100 per cent professional, elegant, semi-classical Ayurvedic treatments and, depending on the need or the inclination, one can totally cleanse the body, both inside and out, or just dabble in a couple of Ayurvedic treatments and enjoy the outward pleasures of Abhyanga, Pizhychil, Shirodhara massages - in which oils soothe and calm the mind and body, or the Swedana, where herbal steam is used to do the trick.

I am definitely a dabbler, so I start with an Abhyanga massage using oils that contain a lot of my missing humour - Kapha - as this will calm my excessive Pitta and Vatta. The healing massage, with its multidirectional movements and focus of pressure, will improve the energy channels of my 107 smaller chakras; all in all I feel

fabulous. I follow the excellent massage with a herbal body scrub; I am now anointed in the ways of the Vedas.

The most popular treatment, and probably the most well-known - by us Westerners at least - is Shirodhara, in which, after a full body massage with oils, a steady stream of warm sesame oil is poured onto your Third Eye. Some people are mad about it; some people are mad to get away from it, likening it to some Iron Curtain torture method. Personally, I found it one of the best ways to relax and turn off the incessant inner chatter. Como Shambhala's deeply relaxing massage is followed by motionlessness, with just a steady trickle of warm oil pouring consistently on my forehead; having reached bliss, I return to an organic uncton that is a body scrub, a hot shower and a delicious cleansing tea. I would just like to mention that, in their particular field, Como Shambhala massage specialists are equal to none on Bali, and that's not just my opinion, however humble. Meticulously trained to attain the Como standard, they just never seemed to put a hand wrong.

Having come gently back down to earth with my *dosha* barely on the ground, I return for a further consultation with the charming Dr Deepak in order to get my head around the way Ayurveda aims to treat the body and banish illness. After an hour of what I might class as an Ayurveda

biology lesson, I have learnt that this method of treatment not only targets the physical body but also the ethereal body - the prana, the life force, the subtle energy. I learn that each *dosha* is responsible for different physical and subtle energies and that there are a total of 10 *dosha* or 'constitutions'. I nod intelligently; my knowledge of Ayurveda now twins with my understanding of electricity and fax machines. So after mentioning that I am in fairly good health, Dr Deepak knowledgeably rounds off the lesson with, "Ayurveda is the science and the art of healthy and happy living". I can totally relate to that.

Since Como Shambhala is not for everyone's budget, and Ubud may in fact not be on everyone's must-do-map of Bali (may I suggest they change their map immediately), I decide to investigate what is on offer down south. Two venues came up trumps - a relatively new holistic and New Age space, L'Ayurveda on the Sunset Bypass, and the Mughal-inspired Prana Spa on Jl. Kunti. 'Ayurvedic-inspired' is the descriptive that comes to mind, as Maya Safira Muchtar from L'Ayurveda explained: "Here we adapt the treatments to the local climate and customs." She then divines my *doshas* and I am off to try the Padabhyanga - a massage that concentrates on *narma* points - close relatives to the reflexological variety.

Pad means foot and *abhya* without fear

- it's designed to prepare the body to face the challenges of everyday life, as I understand it. So this is a foot, full leg and buttock massage that improves circulation and sleep patterns, is good for diabetics and eliminates fatigue. After a pummeling, an oil slathering and a *namsa*-point massage, my legs are good to go. Hailing from Jakarta, this axis of healing not only imparts four Ayurvedic methods of massage but also offers a three or five-day Ayurveda Retreat in Bali. Mind and sight culturing, Reiki and colour therapy, yoga, and a variety of psychic and spiritually-inspired treatments are also on offer.

My next Shirodhara moment is within the confines of the luxurious Prana Spa. Thick Persian carpets, carved brass oil pourers, candles and tinkling music. Prana has tailor-made its Ayurveda treatments to suit the Seminyak spa-seeker. Whilst I did not get the full body massage, I did get that lusciously languid oil-on-forehead experience for a full 45 minutes or more, with no interruptions ... I do admit I can feel why the Seminyak spa-seeker wants to do as little as possible when lying in such lavish surroundings, putting mind to matter is, generally, something I can't even bear thinking about. ❧

www.cse.comoshambhala.bz
www.layurveda.com
www.thevillas.net