



OUR MAN ON THE GROUND TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE

GLOBAL TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

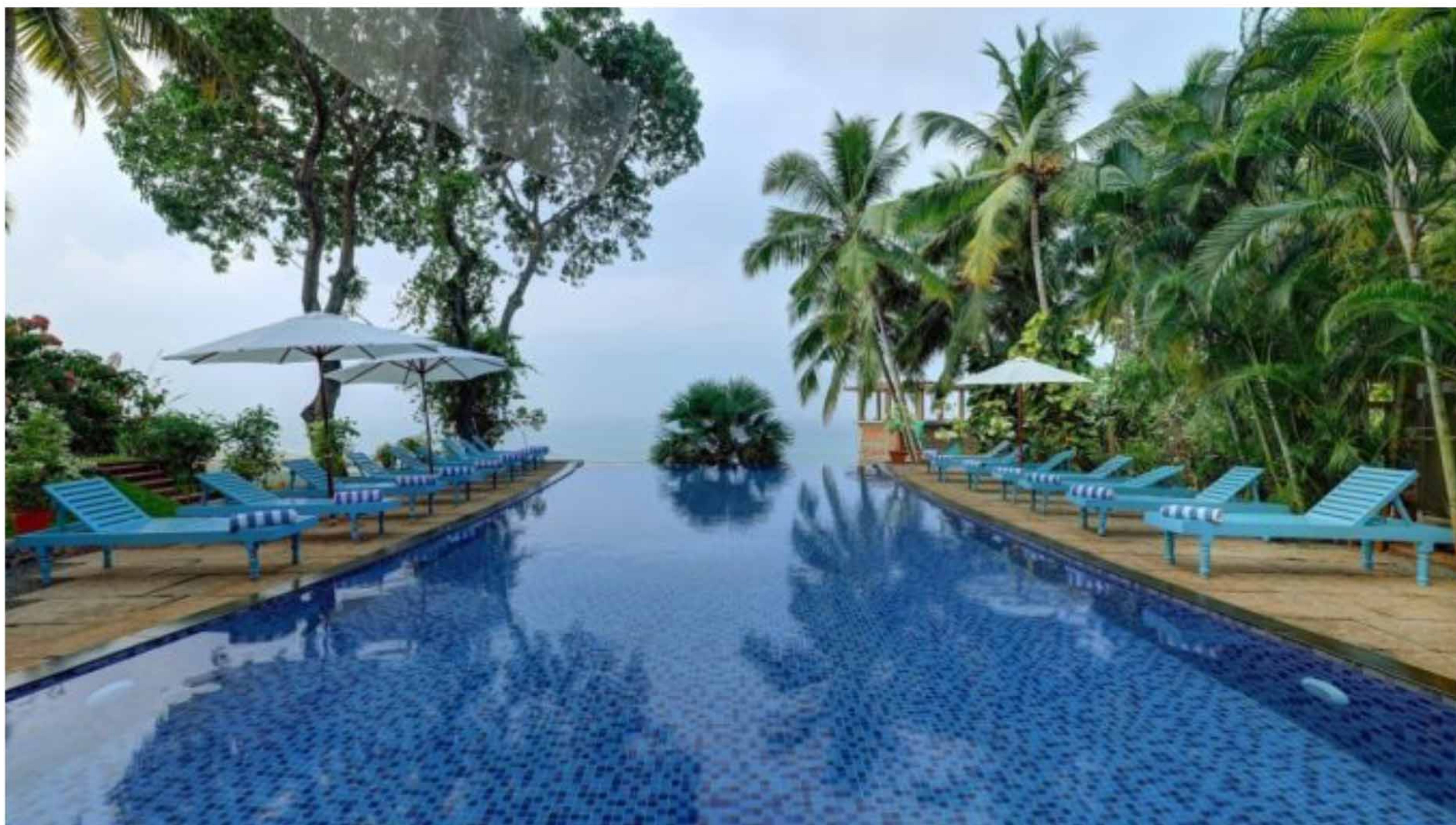
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SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

SEARCH ...

Somatheeram Ayurveda Village

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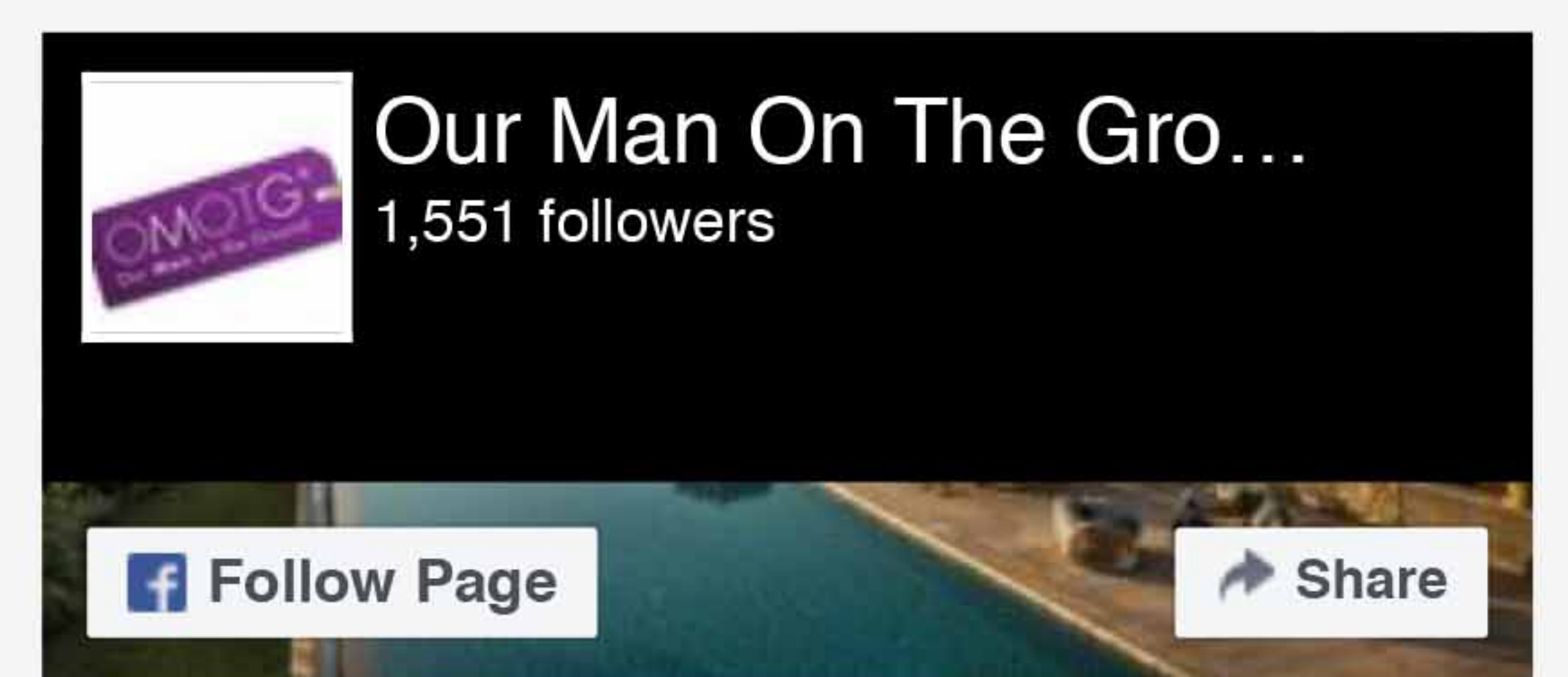


Sometimes festivals are held at Somatheeram Ayurveda Village. These boast henna painting, palm reading, and guests' futures also being revealed by a toothless, old soothsayer with a parrot that selects cards with his beak for his master to interpret. The bird picks a lucky card for me, emblazoned with the elephant god, Ganesha. "You shall be very happy lady when you go home," the parrot tells me, via his master and an interpreter. "Ganesha helps if you are starting a new job or new projects."


I'm in a hospital with a difference: India's first Ayurvedic hospital in a resort setting. Somatheeram is located in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, above the golden Chowara Beach that extends forever. The retreat is perched on a hill with 15 acres of garden with medicinal herbs and dotted with coconut palms and with paths meandering through jackfruit and mango trees to the hospital and therapy rooms. Opened 35 years ago, Somatheeram boasts multiple awards.




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The luxury at Somatheeram isn't found in zillion-star accommodation: the rooms are simple although there are must-have Indian antiques and granite sculptures (such as Buddha heads) around the resort. Its real selling point is its first-rate Ayurvedic hospital, 15 Ayurvedic doctors (mine, Dr K Chandrasekharan Nair is excellent) and 71 experienced therapists *in a resort setting*.

It's a place for those who prefer their Ayurveda, yoga and meditation with a bit of a buzz. For people who don't just want traditional Ayurveda (which discourages exercise and taking sun during the course of treatments) but like a little entertainment too. This means Somatheeram lures devotees wishing only to focus on treatments but also attracts families and those looking to chillax.



Yes, there's a yoga shala with its sides open to the ocean and another yoga hall atop the hill. (It's here that I join daily group meditation and yoga, and also have excellent private lessons with the super-flexible, super-patient, Jinu JR). But there's also a lap pool overlooking the Arabian Sea and an al fresco stage for Kathakali dance performances and sitar recitals during dinner. Plus, there are three little shops selling pashminas, baubles and silver. And a naturopathic pharmacy flogging everything you could ever need and more: think 'hair drop-out cream' to Masala tea.

Time now to go up to the Ayurvedic hospital. It's a steep walk in the heat from the bottom of the hill (and my Kerala cottage) to the hospital's 30 therapy rooms. (There's a wheelchair ramp or rooms close to the hospital for those with mobility issues). Dr Reshma Venu 'medical officer', a lady in a white overall and with a plait to her waist, leads me to a consultation room. She gives me a 17-page booklet to fill in – encompassing questions on my sex life, eating habits and how long I've practised yoga.



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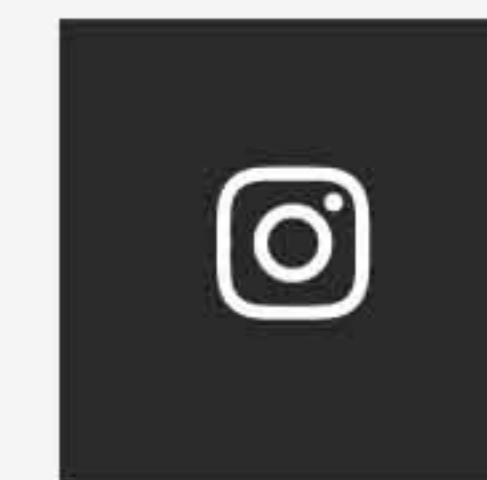
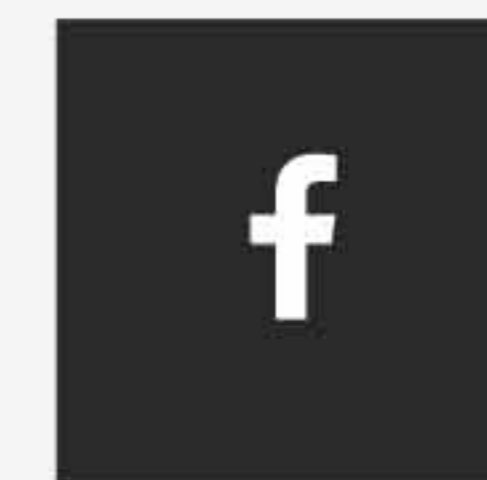
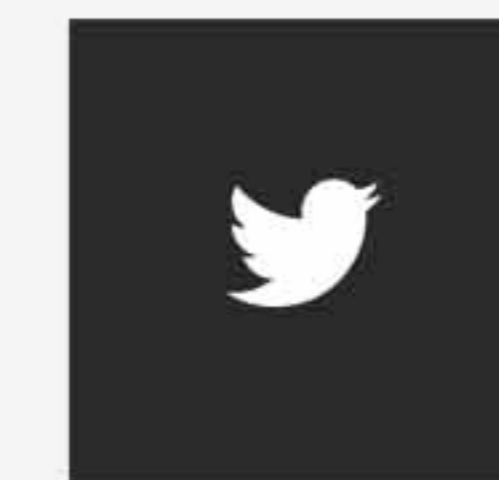
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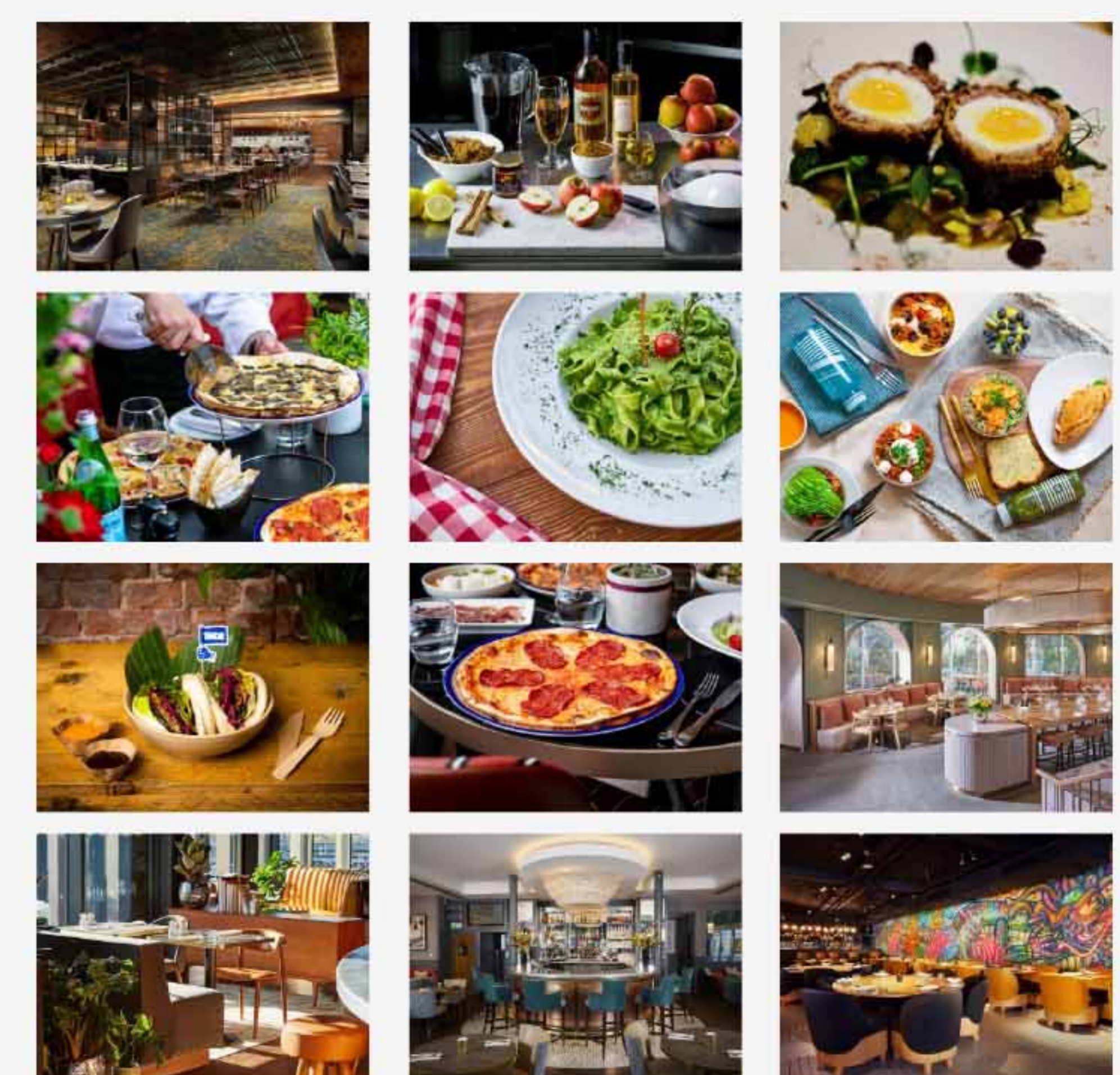


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The chief medical doctor, Dr K Chandrasekharan Nair soon joins us. He has more than a little experience: he's 71 and has been an Ayurvedic doctor for half a century. We talk about the need for regular sleep, diet and routine; the importance of eating freshly prepared food; and avoiding situations that cause anger and upset. And what to do during the treatment period, such as not drinking anything cold and avoiding non-vegetarian food.

He explains Ayurveda to me and identifies my dosha, or body type. Pitha Vatha, since you ask. It's diagnosed by observing everything from hair colour to pulse. The theory is that the living and non-living are made of air, space, water, fire and earth – present in the body and mind in Vata, Pitha and Kapha. Dr Naidu offers a very detailed and attentive consultation and then decides on my individualised treatment plan to get my doshas into balance.

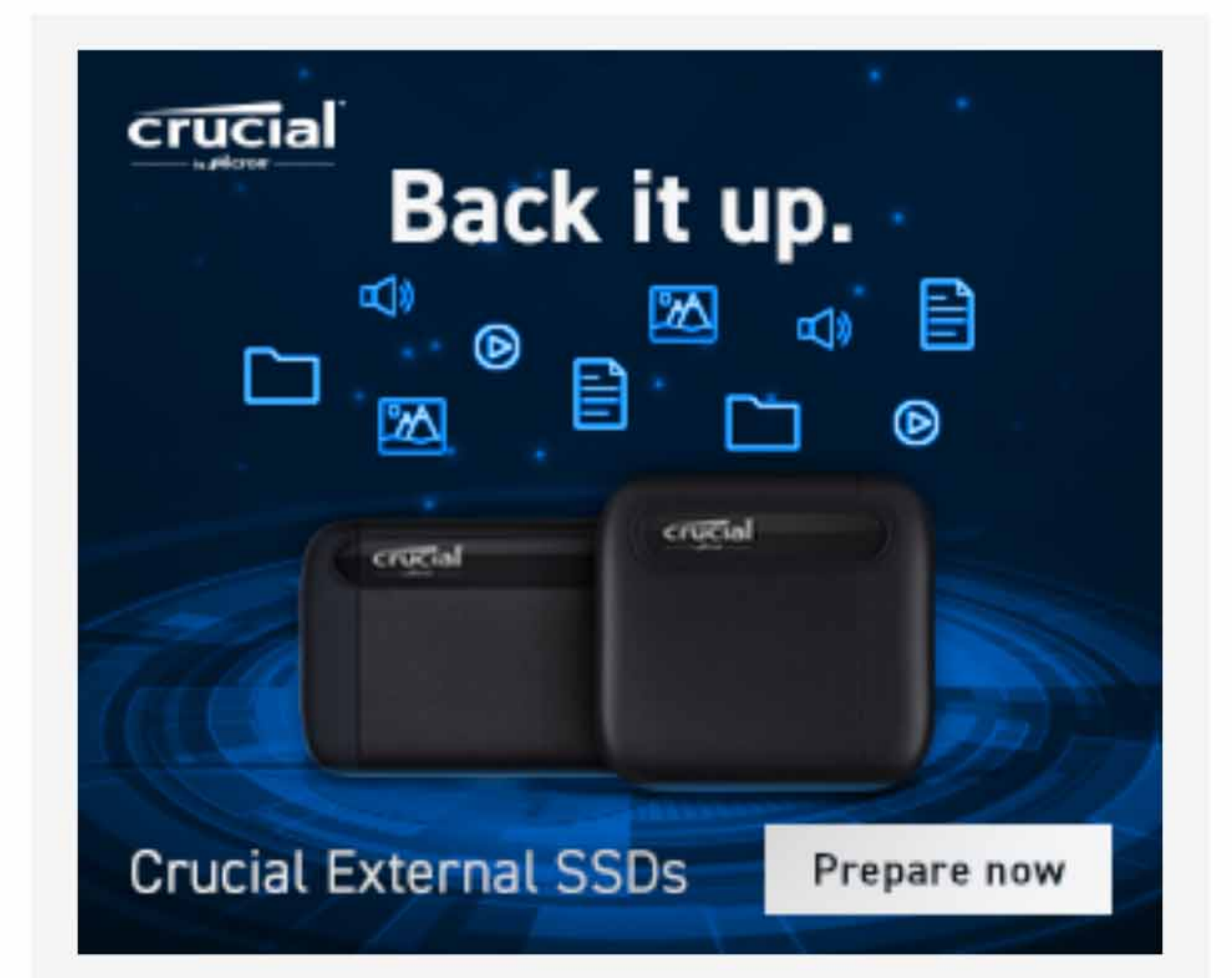


I love the massage in which I lie on the floor while my therapist, Prasanna, hangs on a rope over me, massaging me with a foot so adept it could be doing a painting. And my daily Shirodhara, in which warm oil in a pot above my head is moved mesmerisingly across my forehead. Oh, and let's not forget the dry powder massage, in which I'm scrubbed and massaged with handfuls of hot herbs. Heaven.

Then there's Kizhi pouch massage with medicinal herbs, rice and milk. (Good for joint stiffness and blissing out.) And Kativasthi, in which warm oil is poured onto the crown in a ring made of black gram powder paste. (Good for spinal and neck pain.) Plus, Sirovasthy in which oil is poured onto the crown through a leather funnel to relax the mind. And oh, bliss, bliss, bliss....there's Abhyangam, which is a synchronised medicated oil massage with my two therapists, Prasanna and Swathy D (who are so good that I want to take them home).



When I'm not having treatments, I'm eating. People don't dress up for lunch. There's a Chinese lady slathered in a red face pack. And lots of Italians wearing Somatheeram's green hospital overalls. There's a big buffet for every meal with dishes marked according to the dosha for which it's good, (and a dietician on hand to help). Or there's an à la carte menu, which can involve too much of a hungry wait.



The food is 90% organic, vegetarian and there's no alcohol or tobacco. Breakfast includes continental options and fresh pineapple, mounds of papaya to iddli (fluffy steamed rice cakes), appam (rice hoppers leavened with fermented palm sap and served with vegetable stew) washed down with Ayurvedic teas or fresh ginger, lime and honey.



Lunch might be a thali (a range of south Indian vegetarian curries in little metal dishes), herbal leaves soup, onion thoran (onion fried with grated coconut), lots of interesting vegetable curries such as pavacka thoran (bitter gourd), okra (ladies fingers) or drumstick leaves and perhaps a glass of Vazhappindy juice (an extract of plantain stem) with herbs. And dinner? Maybe beetroot soup, black dal, grilled vegetables or unusual local vegetables in sauces of coconut, with chapatis, fluffy rice cooked with herbs, then grilled pineapple.

Soon it's time to retire to my cottage. There are 80 thatched cottages and bedrooms of mud and bricks, with reed ceilings, fans or air-conditioning (air conditioning is not recommended during Ayurveda). I'm tired and it's time to fall to sleep to the sound of the ocean. Yes, it's a hard life being massaged, pummelled and looked after by two lovely therapists. But someone's got to do it.



After a week, it's time to leave Somatheeram. My aim was to lose a wee bit of blubber and to relax after a stressful time. I achieve my mission. I walk out with good resolutions, a little weight loss, luminescent skin and enough Ayurvedic tablets to open a pharmacy.

The Details

Somatheeram Ayurveda Village, Kovalam, Thiruvananthapuram – 695501, Kerala, India.

Website: <https://somatheeram.in/>

Email: mail@somatheeram.in

Tel: +91-471-2268101 / 2266111

*Fly to Thiruvananthapuram and the hotel will arrange to come and collect you in a courtesy car.
Somatheeram Ayurveda Village is located just south of Kovalam.*

Type of Hotel: 4-Star Hotel and Health Resort

Number of Rooms: 80 rooms, including complimentary Wi-Fi.

Price Band: Medium

Insider Tip: Book a sea-view cottage. Bag therapists Prasanna and Swathy D, and book yoga with Jinu JR: she's super flexible, beautiful and very inspiring.

Reviewer's Rating: 8/10

Author Bio:

London-based Anya Braimer Jones writes about travel, interned at MailOnline and has been published in publications from The Telegraph and Family Traveller to the Luxury Channel. She's a whizz at social media and has also dabbled in Public Relations.

Photographs courtesy of Somatheeram Ayurveda Village