

# Travel tips from yoga-loving, wine-drinking holiday guru Stella Photi

By [Polly Humphris](#) Monday 18 Nov 2013 6:00 am



Stella Photi at the Ananda in India (Picture: Stella Photi)

**Stella Photi is the founder of Wellbeing Escapes, which provides healthy holiday experiences.**

**Where did you go on your last holiday?** Last month, I combined a business conference in Delhi with seven nights at the Ananda ([www.anandaspa.com](http://www.anandaspa.com), doubles from £356 per night), a well-being retreat in the Himalayas. It specialises in Ayurveda, the ancient form of Indian medicine, as well as yoga. It also offers active pursuits, so my husband spent five

hours a day trekking with a guide while I woke early for two-hour yoga classes.

I was blown away by its Ayurveda programme, which is adapted to your individual needs. I felt a completely new woman: entirely de-stressed. I find it hard to switch off while on holiday because I'm constantly stimulated, so I found my time at Ananda really soothing. One afternoon, my husband and I did a 14km white-water rafting trip in the Ganges. Once we got through the rapids, we jumped into the waves and let them carry us down. It was freezing but so invigorating.

We ended up in Rishikesh, which is a holy city about an hour from Ananda. We had to change out of our wetsuits in a tent in one of the town squares. It was bizarre and very funny, too. The locals were walking around the tent wondering what on Earth we were doing. We also attended a sacred Hindu ceremony, called Aarti, on the banks of the Ganges. It was such a perfect end to the whole experience, watching people being blessed with candles and we were able to do it, too. It was beautiful.

After our stay at the Ananda, we drove to Agra to see the Taj Mahal. It was exhausting because Agra is a madness of traffic and noise. We went on a sunrise tour and every view was breathtaking.

**Do you have a pre-flight ritual?** I certainly have an anti-ritual. I grew up in a household where my mother insisted the house was spotless before she left and it would cause so much stress I vowed I would never do that. The night before I travel, I eat by 7pm. People are stressed before they go away, so eating late will overload your digestive system and hinder a good night's sleep.

I stretch for ten minutes in the morning – a simple calf, shoulder and neck stretch – and drink at least half a litre of water an hour before I get on the plane. This means I'm running to the loo the minute the seatbelt sign is switched off but that's better than being dehydrated.







The Uffizi Gallery in Florence is on Stella Photi's bucket list (Picture: Alamy)

**What's on your travel bucket list?** As I get older I'm really connecting with nature, so the Galápagos Islands are my ultimate destination – the epitome of a place that's bursting with life. It is a group of tiny volcanic islands that form a national park and biological marine reserve, and it just buzzes with natural life.

I would fill my days exploring, walking and diving, marvelling at the rays and sharks, and the various species of turtles. For culture, I'd like to go to Florence for the beautiful renaissance art. It is one of the best-preserved centres of art and architecture in the world.

I'd visit the Uffizi Gallery and the Galleria dell'Accademia, where Michelangelo's David is exhibited. I'm beginning to get more into my wines too; I would like to know more about vintage wines, so I'd love to spend some time in the Loire Valley.

**What has been your most memorable travel moment?** I love Africa. My last trip was over three weeks and every part was incredible. We started off in Cape Town and went on a four-night steamboat cruise on the Zambezi, where we saw elephants and buffalo. After the cruise, we went to Victoria Falls, which was very special, but my favourite country was Mozambique. We went to a place called Ponta Mamoli, on the border with South Africa and not particularly well-

known.

We flew in on a four-seater plane and landed in a field before driving along a sand road to White Pearl resort ([www.whitepearlresorts.com](http://www.whitepearlresorts.com), doubles from £276 per night), which has just 20 rooms. I have never seen a coastline so beautiful. You could walk for miles and not see a soul. It was so wonderfully underdeveloped and it's quite rare to find places like that.

**Top travel tip?** I take a vitamin B complex supplement for about a month before I go anywhere because I have read it might keep mosquitoes at bay. I also avoid potassium-rich foods such as bananas, which are said to attract them. If I do get bitten, I apply essential lavender oil to stop the itching and irritation.

If you're a nervous traveller, get some Bach Rescue Remedy. It really helps calm you down. To avoid jet lag, when you arrive, get some sun on the back of your knees – a traditional Chinese doctor gave that tip to me and it seems to work.

