

INDIA

The Times Spa Guide: Atmantan Wellness Centre, Pune, India

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Atmantan Wellness Centre is set in the Sahyadri mountain range

In a nutshell

The location is a reason to be here — and considering it's a four-hour drive from Mumbai airport, that's saying something. Just outside Pune, the Atmantan resort is set in the Sahyadri mountain range (older than the Himalayas) overlooking the spectacular lake at Mulshi. The restaurant, gym and most of the rooms have stunning mountain views on the other side of the lake.

So imagine an updated version of a health farm, set in a dreamy location with some of the best trainers, doctors and therapists, with delicious (portion-controlled) food made by award-winning chefs. The energy of the place has a noticeable positive charge — a combination of good vibes from the quartz crystal said to be in the rocks on which it was built and the enthusiasm of the young couple who opened the lush 40-acre site in 2016.



A five-night Wellbeing Booster package includes a private yoga session

What's it like?

Although it's pretty luxurious, it's definitely a wellness centre and not an uber-fancy spa. The treatments and classes are serious, with top-of-the-range therapists and teachers, but there's no outdoor pool to lounge around (at the moment there's just an indoor one and plans for one in the gardens) nor luxy post-treatment herbal-tea and whale-music chill-out zones.

Who goes?

The majority of guests now are discerning Indians, many from Mumbai, but the word is spreading to the West and there has been a sprinkling of European guests and some people from the Middle East.

The treatments

The choice is vast. Every style is ticked, from acupuncture to reflexology and the full range (more than 20) of Ayurvedic treatments. Doctors and therapists from across the country have been drafted in by the husband-and-wife founders, Sharmilee Agarwal Kapur and Nikhil Kapur, who wanted to create somewhere that people could come for fitness, yoga, weight loss, stress relief and just to feel healthier and happier. To this end there are packages from five days and upwards. One guest loved the place so much they stayed for nearly two months.

Many of the treatments are prescribed by the in-house Ayurvedic doctors, whom you'll see at the start of your stay for an assessment of your health and lifestyle. Guests also see a physiotherapist before any treatment programme begins, for a postural analysis and suggestions of the type of exercise they should do during their stay.



Group activities such as yoga, meditation and pranayama breathing are available

I started out with familiar treatments such as acupuncture and a rejuvenating massage (both excellent), but when I dipped my toe into the Ayurvedic world, I was hooked. I booked a karna purana, where warm medicated oil is dripped into your ears — an experience that left me with a feeling of calmness and clarity. Then I tried the circulation-boosting dvarthanam, in which my body was first rubbed down with herbal powders by two therapists. Skin has never felt softer. Soon I was joining in with the Indian guests for morning kriya, where we all stood over sinks pouring warm salted water up our nostrils, gargling at length and bathing our eyes with herb-infused water.

These are traditional start-the-day cleansing practices that even the locals are rediscovering. They worked better for me than caffeine (which is not on the menu here; nor is booze).

What are the rooms like?

They are simply designed, all with a little garden terrace or a lake-view balcony. I'd file them under functional luxury: not crazily fancy, but they do have the most comfortable mattresses I have slept on, wonderful, natural, locally made toiletries and — praise be — a kettle. (Am I the only person who thinks that room-service tea is insanity?). If you want more privacy or have serious money to spend, there's a villa for two on site with its own small gym and swimming pool.



The restaurant and most of the rooms offer stunning views

What about the food?

The food here is really something to shout about. How the chefs manage to create such flavourful meals that are low-fat, low-salt, low-sugar, low-dairy and low-calorie is some kind of alchemy. Breakfast parantha stuffed with spiced sweet potato, raw chocolate brownies, tiramisu (a healthy version) and the Atmantan's peerless Bircher muesli will stick in my mind for some time. The portions were small, which meant you could manage three or four courses at every meal, without feeling overwhelmed. A relief to me — I wanted to taste everything. Bring on the cookbook.

The lowdown

Lesley Thomas was a guest of Atmantan Wellness Resort (atmantan.com). A five-night Wellbeing Booster package, booked through Wellbeing Escapes, costs from £1,560pp for single occupancy and from £1,405pp when sharing a room. The price includes full board accommodation, five treatments, one private yoga, Pilates or a personal training session and daily access to group activities such as yoga, meditation and pranayama breathing (020 3735 7555, wellbeingescapes.com)