

# THE DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

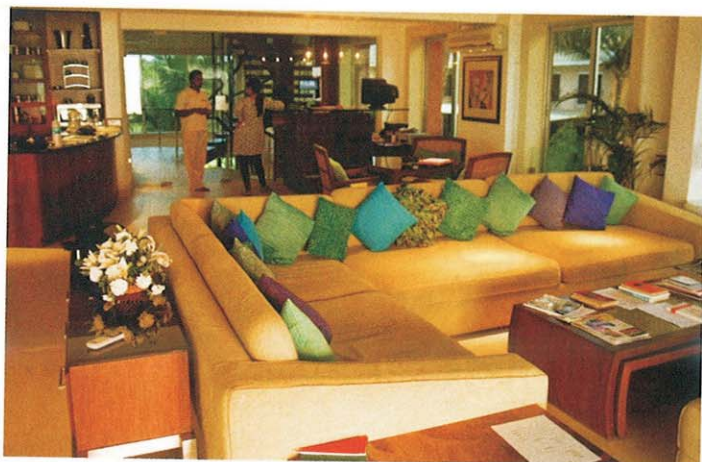
The promise of sunshine, pampering and daily yoga enticed a burnt-out *Victoria Gill* to south Goa in search of serenity only for her to find that sometimes enlightenment comes in unlikely packages



IT'S no exaggeration to say that prior to my arrival in south Goa I was approaching burnout. For weeks I had been surviving on a diet of junk food and takeaways, my only exercise running between hospitals to visit sick family members, the stressful toll of which was starting to show. I needed a week in the sun to rejuvenate and be pampered, to undertake a voyage of self-discovery. In no way had I anticipated this.

The setting is perfect (south Goa is less spoilt and more elegant than the white apartment complexes and acid casualties of the north). My accommodation, the Beach House, looms over pristine white sands leading to warm, cobalt ocean. But in my excitement over impossibly chic beachfront villas, yoga in its native land, a never-ending massage menu, super-healthy detox cuisine and testimonies from satisfied spa-goers, I had omitted to read the small print. I am here for something far more extreme than mere relaxation, as I soon find out.

After a welcome supper on the terrace, the pink full moon setting over the lapping sea, Ayurvedic guru Dr Arajita informs me that the focus of the retreat is a juice fast, complemented – dear God – by twice-daily enemas. The words “life coaching”, “beauty treatments”, “meditation” and “body brushing” wash



over me as I fixate on the funnels and tubes in the plastic bag in front of me. This is not just a wellness retreat, but one of those extreme detoxes I have always tended to associate with a certain kind of reality TV. Not even a roll call of past and future celebrity endorsements can reassure me – I am no longer sure that this is the break for me.

My disappointment is dissipated, however, as I sink into the teak four-poster in my glass-fronted ocean-view duplex, fondly remembering the two-therapist welcome massage I had enjoyed on arrival. The following morning, I embark on a rousing session of sun salutations and warrior poses on the terrace as beach life gently awakes.

Fasting (or ‘vrat’) is an integral part of Indian culture – one legendary sect even abstains from food for weeks on end. The Beach House’s five-day regime verges on the tyrannical: water with lemon and honey followed by dry body brushing before 8am. Juices – which range from delicious pomegranate, papaya and lime to sterner cabbage and carrot concoctions (all mixed with benzonite clay to aid ‘cleansing’) – and clear vegetable broths are carefully balanced six times daily alongside wheatgrass and aloe vera shots, liver and parasite cleansing juices (which, thankfully, taste like nothing else on earth) and a complex array of 40 vitamins to boost digestion and replace lost nutrients. Miss or even miss-time a dose and the side effects are giddy, as I haplessly discover.

The schedule of heavenly massages are another story. From lymphatic drainage to Balinese and hot stone, they are undertaken in private open-air bungalows and never fail to send me off to sleep. Daydreams of pizza, chips, burgers and ice cream pepper



reflexology and detox facials, foot baths and body wraps. Beach meanderings and seashell collecting are interspersed with fantasies involving chocolate, while Black Forest gateaux and steak cravings permeate stress management seminars and nutrition assessments.

And then there are the infamous self-administered coffee enemas, in which twilight zones are spent curled into a foetal position, trying to conquer tummy

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ache and the urge to go to the loo. The toxins don’t just come out of the body. My dreams – or rather nightmares – are intimidatingly vivid. We are warned that the third day, ‘liver day’, is when the cracks begin to show. Participants often become angry, ill and emotional. I pass it with little care beyond craving my next juice.

The following morning I wake in floods of tears. I am sunburnt, pink as a flamingo, too upset to leave my villa, my distress matched only by furious guilt at hiding away as the sun beams and my fellow retreaters frolic over yoga and attack the beach. I administer my garlic enema at 1pm and then the tears are replaced by waves of nausea and sweating as the lingering headache clangs into full effect. I am convinced that I have malaria. Dr Arajita reads my faintly elevated temperature, explaining it away as a common effect of the detox.

Yeah, right. I have contracted malaria and I will now be quarantined in India

for another three weeks. I go back to bed and insistently google ‘detox’ only to discover that my symptoms are indeed side-effects of the pudge.

Emotionally raw the next and final morning, I conquer my embarrassment to do yoga. Another girl speaks of being similarly stricken the previous day. Two others are now emotional and sick. After weigh-in, we are led to a sleek, bijou, dark-wood restaurant overlooking the hotel’s fertile gardens to enjoy what is both our first and final feast – a selection of exquisite exotic fruits.

So was it worth it? All I can say is that since returning to the maelstrom – 10 pounds lighter and palpably energised – I feel better able to handle stress, digest and abstain from food, and my eyes shine more brightly than in the first throes of love. I guess, after all that anguish, I finally conquered the enema within. *Total Body Rebalance retreat, The Beach House, Goa. £1,050 for seven nights, excluding flights (thebeachhousegoa.com).*

Photography by Thomas Knights Photography (thomasknights.co.uk)

