



SPIRIT CLEANSE

TIRUVANNAMALAI, INDIA

www.ashoktree.com

THESE DAYS, THERE ARE MANY PLACES OFFERING THE PRACTICE OF PANCHAKARMA CLEANSING, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, STRONG RECOMMENDATIONS ARE NEEDED WHEN CHOOSING THE RIGHT ONE FOR YOU. THE PERSON LEADING YOU THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE SHOULD BE A PROPER AYURVEDIC PRACTITIONER WITH A FAIR AMOUNT OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE.

“Pancha-what?” I hear you say? I can tell you one thing: It is not for the faint-hearted.

I'd like to share with you the best of the best Ayurvedic doctors that I have ever come across, in a far away land called India. If there was a luxury place that had Ayurvedic doctors who were as amazing as Dr Radhika, it would be highly recommended, considering how comfort is so welcomed during a cleanse like Panchakarma, but this amazing woman does all her incredible work in a humble little village in a south-east Indian ashram called Ashok Tree.

Ashok Tree offers very simple accommodation and they do everything they can to make your stay as comfortable as possible, but a luxury ashram it ain't! That is, if such a thing were to exist anyway. Our health and the desire to feel better are far more important than five-star comfort and if you are ready to sign up for a ticket to feeling incredible from the inside out, then this ashram in India is the place to go.

When it comes to detoxing and cleansing, if one hasn't done Panchakarma, one cannot say that they have done it all. Panchakarma is for those in reasonably good health and with a certain level of strength, as it can be too intense for those who are frail or sick.

In case you haven't heard about Panchakarma before, it is a full body detoxification using Ayurveda's most potent healing tools – a powerful cleanse using a powerful combination of natural herbs. Dr Radhika spent five years of her medical studies being in a garden so naturally, the healing powers of herbs and her extensive knowledge of them is astounding. You can put yourself in her hands with total trust, even though her herbs will torture you like nothing ever before! But for all a good reason...

It is hard to put the Panchakarma experience into words that would be considered acceptable as table conversation and also words that don't put you off trying it for yourself. Panchakarma is hard, it is not pleasant and while you are in the middle of it you may say that you will never, ever do it again. You walk out after ten days feeling absolutely incredible, convinced you will never get yourself into such a bad state that you would have to go through that ordeal again.





But then you slip a bit and even though you are not feeling as bad as the first time you went there, Panchakarma starts calling you. That feeling of your insides being like those of a newborn baby, that clear skin, the flat stomach, all that good energy, a clear mind, your habits having been reset, the glow... all the things that we can easily lose in these crazy busy, stressful times we are living in. And really, who doesn't want to feel that great as often as possible?

In the case of Panchakarma, this feeling comes with a lot of hard work – most of it on your behalf – and you may feel pity upon your doctor and her helpers for having to observe the 'process'. But for them, this is everyday normality – seeing people puking and walking around looking half dead!

There are pleasant moments too, like daily massages, shirodhara treatments (warm oil poured on your forehead sending you into a state of absolute bliss) and gentle walks around the village saying hi to cows and smiling farmers. There is a lot of yoga involved to help you move and not become too static, as the easiest thing to do (and what one only feels like doing) is to stay curled up in bed all day feeling sorry for yourself. You are also encouraged to do a digital detox and internet access is very limited. You will likely need to go and beg for a WiFi connection so you can get a shot of your social media crack. But if you can completely avoid being online, the whole experience digs in much deeper and you may be surprised at what else comes up.

Panchakarma is a highly spiritual experience if one commits to doing it 'by the book'. The hard work includes a thing called vomina, which as you might guess is actual vomiting after you have been asked to drink between five and eight glasses of milk, or for non-milk drinkers, sugar cane juice. Then you are passed a tablespoon of the most incredibly unpleasant mix of herbs anyone could put into their mouth, which instantly raises your stomach muscles and off you go like a scene from *The Exorcist*, starring you. After that, it is not all over! Next up is between five and eight glasses of salty water, my dears. And then the whole process of those demons coming out of you starts up all over again.



The next day, your front is given a rest, but your backside is next, with virechana, aka extreme bowel evacuation. For your mid-morning ‘snack’ you are given a tablespoon of a mashed green paste which has the power to make you go into a state of elimination up to 40 times. Yes, you read it right. 40 times. FORTY. In the space of a few hours, while you are ordered to walk around with no lying down. It is a rather agonising experience, but again, the final result makes it all worthwhile at the end!

The experience of all these toxins coming out and a total colon detoxification is not a walk in the park. The bad news is that these processes are repeated during your stay for a complete detoxification, followed by green enemas too. Those are a real highlight.

Needless to say, they don’t feed you a lot during Panchakarma. Not that you really have much of an appetite anyway, but even if you do, apart from the small bowl of kitchari you are given to eat daily, a plate of papaya is all you get.

If Panchakarma has an official food then it must be kitchari, the fragrant blend of yellow dal and basmati rice. It is a Panchakarma staple with its easy to digest complete protein. It is cooked and served with added ghee, which loosens impurities, called ama – basically undigested food particles caused by eating the wrong foods or simply from weak digestion. Body-based Panchakarma treatments are designed to flush them out.

After Panchakarma is finished, the most important part is actually your diet afterwards – during the comedown period when you have to eat the right foods. It is important to include those days in your schedule, as your system is so super clean, especially your intestines. If any further healing is to take place, you are starting with a fresh, new canvas and you only want to put the best and most non-abrasive ingredients into your system. Your Ayurvedic doctor should give you clear instructions on the drinks and food that are suitable for this very important part of the cleanse.

Spiritually, Panchakarma puts you in a better place and regardless of what an unpleasant experience it can be at times, if you have what it takes to get through it, it couldn’t be recommend more. Puking and all...

