

INDIA

ghee massage from the roots of my hair to the tips of my toes.

The next day, after breakfast with fellow inmates — an Italian fashion designer, a French actress and a group of Russian media moguls — I have my first *njavarakizhi*, a key ayurvedic treatment, used to treat muscle stiffness. Two therapists armed with fist-sized bags containing a hot herb-and-rice mix pummel my body mercilessly. By the end of the hour-long treatment, I feel like I've done several rounds with Muhammad Ali.

Gradually, I get into a routine. At breakfast, I have slices of papaya, followed by a treatment. For lunch and dinner, when my stomach is rumbling like a drain, I'm given a mound of fibre-rich red rice, wholewheat chapatti, lentil dishes and various raw vegetables. There's no late-night partying, no TV dinners. In the evening, we have lectures about *dosha*, we do yoga and meditation, we watch Kathakali performances (one of Indian classical dances), then tumble into bed, exhausted, at around 10pm.

Then, one hot afternoon, my shoes are handed back, the gates are opened and I step blinking into the streets of Kollengode. I've shed a few kilos, I feel supple and healthy, and my skins glows, but when Shijo drives me — via rutted roads crowded with rickshaws; trucks adorned with fabulous psychedelic paintings; and browsing cows — to SwaSwara, I realise how much I've missed the outside world.

Beach bliss

A rickshaw drives away from the temple-town of Gokarna, SwaSwara is another CGH Earth property, but the difference is striking.

Unlike the solemn mahogany magnificence of Kalari Kovilakom, SwaSwara's 24 spacious villas are full of light, and glassed-walled bedrooms look out onto herb-planted private courtyards; there are delightful open-air showers, and lounging spaces where you can read a book, sip tea and listen to the Arabian Sea booming on Om Beach close by.

At dinner, there are real portions of food and I even get to have a glass of wine. With yoga every day, art classes in the afternoon, boat trips and nature-related activities, the week flies by.

As I head out for the town of Varkala, where I'm booked for a two-week yoga retreat, I realise how much I value both experiences. Kalari's strict regime might have worked wonders for my body, but Swaswara's laid-back magic has been a balm for my soul. ■



Massage at ayurveda centre
Below: Frugal breakfast of papaya

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SAMPLE

● **GREAVES INDIA** offers a seven-night SwaSwara/Mumbai stay including flights, five nights in a SwaSwara villa on a full-board basis, yoga, ayurveda consultations and treatments, plus internal flights and transfers and a deluxe room in Mumbai on a B&B basis, from £1,899 per person. T: 020 7487 9111. www.greavesindia.co.uk

