

As my taxi pulled into Atmantan, a destination wellness resort about 130 kilometres from Mumbai off the Mumbai-Bengaluru highway, I felt an instant gratification of the non-digital kind sweeping over me. The green expanse of the Sahyadris was broken only by the countless waterfalls (27, I was told at check-in) and the waters of the Mulshi lake that glimmered at the foothills. The mountains seemed to be sulking as monsoon clouds threatened to obscure them with their thick blanket and occasional rain. The setting seemed perfect for a wellness resort.

Located in a lush valley adjoining the Mulshi lake, Atmantan opened in April this year, filling a void of such getaways in the western region (barring the popular ones in the South, the other two such are located in the North—Vana in Dehradun and Ananda in Rishikesh). Wellness retreats signify a new trend in the hospitality landscape, spurred by the increasing interest in organic food and alternative therapies, as well as relaxing and healing getaways that offer a holistic experience for the mind and body. Among the largest of its kind in Asia, Atmantan is spread across 42 acres, its 106 rooms strategically designed to provide an uninterrupted view of the lake. The carefully designed architecture incorporates large vistas and open spaces while the wellness infrastructure includes 23 customised therapy rooms, including a hammam.

The wellness packages at Atmantan combine naturopathy, ayurveda and other alternative healing methodologies (pranic healing and spiritual cleansing) and there are time-tested fitness regimes (yoga, pilates, aerobics). As part of the three-night Atmantan Living package which I had opted for (there are also Spa Life, Master Cleanse, Weight Balance, Journey through Yoga, Fitness Challenge as well as an Ayurveda

Clockwise from bottom left: Atmantan has 106 rooms, including presidential one-bedroom suites like the Mango Tree Villa, offering a stunning view of the surroundings; the wellness resort offers packages that combine alternative healing techniques and tested ones like yoga and meditation; a spa room for couples and an indoor salt water pool at the property



In Pursuit of Wellness

Spread over 42 acres in a valley adjoining the Mulshi lake in Maharashtra, Atmantan takes a holistic approach to well-being

By PRATHAP NAIR



Healing Package to choose from), I went through an initial consultation, during which a wellness practitioner decided on the therapies to administer based on my body's needs. A combination of aromatherapy massages, a Taoist healing treatment called Chi Nei Tsang, the ayurvedic massage therapy abhyanga and foot reflexology were recommended during my stay. While abhyanga was prescribed to treat my dry skin, Chi Nei Tsang was to release toxins from my body. The aromatherapy massages and foot reflexology sessions were for relaxation. This was followed by an appointment with a physiotherapist for postural assessment.

The founders, Nikhil Kapur and Sharmilee Agrawal-Kapur, from the Pune-based Bramha Builders' family, believe wellness is only partly accomplished by therapists and doctors. "One has to feel well from inside and I think this location has the ability to make a person feel good," Sharmilee says as she takes me on a guided tour of the presidential one-bedroom suite villa, called Mango Tree Villa, complete with a personalised gym, sauna, beauty services, and a gazebo and infinity pool overlooking the Mulshi lake and the mountains. Another, a two-bedroom one called Rain Tree Villa, will be ready for guests by January 2017.

I make my way to my own room, one with a lake view where floor-to-ceiling windows bathe it in natural light and offer unhindered views of the surroundings. My day begins with the cleansing rituals of jal neti, eye wash and salt water gargles supervised by a naturo-therapist. As the day progresses, led by wellness consultants, I open doors with handles designed in the shape of frangipani leaves and walk into massage rooms, luxuriating in therapy after therapy. The interiors, by Mint Leaf, Pune, are designed to 'evoke the zen in you'. Besides the alternative therapies, serious fitness goals can also be met at the hi-tech gymnasium, aerobic studio, spinning studio, yoga studio, a multi-functional pilates and dance studio and an indoor salt pool. "While overseeing the construction, I trekked to the mountain tops regularly,



Clockwise from top: Massages form a major part of the therapies offered at Atmantan; the resort's wellness principles apply to food too with small portions being served like the pomfret pollichathu seen here; hot stone massages provide a rejuvenating experience to the guests

at least thrice a week," says Nikhil, a triathlete who recently completed his Ironman in Sweden.

In fact, it was athletics that got Sharmilee and Nikhil interested in pranic healing, a method that uses energy (prana) to cleanse the auras. Sharmilee recalls how Nikhil had a minor sports injury and pranic healing helped him immensely. After that, he even participated in the Ironman last year. Sharmilee is a pranic healing practitioner too.

The resort's wellness principles extend to the food as well. "Eat only three-fourths of your normal diet," says my wellness consultant, as a general rule of the thumb. The restaurant serves really small portions, in line with the philosophy of eating more attentively.

The meals served at the Vistara restaurant, one of the three restaurants at the resort, are delicious. From egg white frittatas to grilled coin-sized pita bread with three types of hummus, and green tea soba noodles, the food did make me desperate for more, but my body soon got into the rhythm of moderate consumption and my cravings stopped.

During the monsoon, I often go trekking and here, the Sahyadris beckoned, but the ergonomically-designed mattress, "providing zone support to the entire spine" were too much to resist after the relaxation therapies. I did take short walks across the property, and sat by the lake or took it all in from my spacious balcony.

My instant gratification turned into

something deeper as my departure date approached—my minor skin conditions vanished, my sleep pattern fell into place and the meditation practice brought a sense of calm. On the third and last day, a complimentary warm herbal bath rounded it all off. As I made my way out of Atmantan, with a bulleted list comprising 'general rules for health and longevity' which was given to me at the departure wellness consultation session, the sun came out, revealing the Sahyadris in all their monsoon-soaked glory. A faint smell of the aromatherapy massage I'd had earlier lingered and as I saw red-whiskered bulbuls flitted among pearly white elderberry flowers, basking in the brief sun, I found myself thinking that no stress or anxiety stood a chance against such natural beauty. **FL**