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Spa-searching for the soul: Siddharth Shanghvi visits the best spas in India

A 50-something goes spa-hopping in search of the fountain of youth. He comes back with a glow that sets his Tinder profile afire!

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The gorgeous Amanthan Resort in Pune(Amanthan Resort)

A friend travels for adventure-themed breaks, in the hope that a paragliding accident might relieve her marriage of the husband. Another buddy, who crosses continents for wine-tasting holidays, confessed a perfect trip meant being sloshed 'by or around breakfast'. Specialist travel – including to massage parlours in Pattaya – changed the way we look at travel: in lieu of aimless drifting, there had to be a focus, a peg, a point-to-point series of attractions. Internationally, spa circuits are popular.

Recently, as I met my middle age with a mood disorder, I decided to check into a few spas to see if they might save me from devolving into an 'Uncle' – which is what the neighbourhood kids call me lovinely (I cannot tell you what they call me otherwise).



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Wholesome vibrant food is part of the experience at every good wellness facility (Atmantan Resort)

What distinguishes this spa from others – which are privileged by swankier rooms – is that it's a fundamentally serious place for sorting yourself out. Yes, their treatments for body renewal – such as the gentle eye rejuvenator – are sterling, but I'd go back for their authentic interpretations of Choornasweda or their Pizhichil (and I'd definitely angle for one of their gorgeous private villas over the rooms).

Pre-wedding pampering

As I was about to get my first acupuncture treatment at Atmantan, a sparkling new spa near Pune, I was reminded of my mother's first needle treatment. The therapist, she said, had put her out of her joint pain and, comforted, she had exclaimed: "Every prick was worth it!" I've lived by her sage words ever since, and I gladly volunteered to the astonishingly sensitive treatment by the hands of my doctor at this spa, which I predict will be the go-to wellness destination in India.

Carved into the mountains, overlooking Mulshi dam, the centre is evidence of charismatic owners Nikhil and Sharmilee Kapur's vision, adventure, expertise and passion. The resort appears in the middle of nowhere, immured by hills. To have crafted beautiful rooms overlooking the water with top-notch treatment rooms testifies this is a labour of love. Not only was the acupuncture exceptional, the Chinese massage panned out as a revelation of pain (strong, blunt pressure) that led up to relief (two days later, my muscles eased up from the treatment as I felt energy around my navel rerouted through its natural channels).

At Atmantan, renowned British medium and healer Jacqueline Bourbon – a visiting therapist, ex-Chiva Som – gave a reading into my past. As she channelled into visions of all the people I'd dated, she might have been horrified; I know I am. During the guided meditation, Bourbon alerted me that someone in my life – a tryst of recent vintage perhaps – had had to leave. I rose from the meditation thinking this matter was over. This person, for their brio and talent, dissolved into a kind of memory ash. I'd never believed a spa would grant me such a shift on a deep, psychological level; truly a gift.



Activities at Atmantan Spa

At the resort's excellent testing centre, I checked for allergies. While I'd assumed this would have been limited to my former mother-in-law, it expanded out to tur dal and other dals (as a result, I've resolved to consume only mutton biryani). I asked the spa manager if I might avail rejuvenating treatments before returning to Goa. She suggested a body wrap and their glorious signature massage (in equal parts guided meditation and relaxation workout). I came back from my stay looking at least 10 years younger than my age. "But," my sister reminded me when I reached home, "you went in looking, maybe, twenty years older than your age."

In any event, I said to her, this has been a good start.

*The writer is the author of the best-selling book, *The Last Song Of Dusk*, and has also*