

THREE SEASONS AYURVEDA



Kerala, India

The first time I visited Kerala (the most southern state of India and the home of Ayurveda) was to visit a Panchakarma (Ayurvedic detoxification and rejuvenation) center to have this ancient practice done in India. This process has been practiced for thousands of years and is a foundation of the Ayurvedic lifestyle.

I first experienced Panchakarma in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at The Ayurvedic Institute in 2007, when in my late 40s I started experiencing chronic psoriasis. I had spent five years trying to manage my condition with Western medicine, and every year the Western medicine solution always resorted back to very strong steroids to bring my symptoms under control. I had met Dr. Vacant Lad (founder of the Ayurvedic institute) at conferences about Ayurveda and felt a deep connection with him, so I decided to check into his clinic for treatment. Ayurveda differs from Western medicine by looking to the root cause of disease instead of just treating symptoms and then makes lifestyle changes based around the five sense therapies to bring balance and health. My life changed since that first stay in New Mexico, and I have learned how to keep my condition under control based on the fundamentals of Ayurveda and Yoga practices.



Ayurveda originates from the Vedas (original documents of India) over 5,000 years ago and is the holistic system of healing, divided into eight parts called the Ashtavaidyas. These eight limbs of Ayurveda loosely correspond to the Western medical system's eight branches of medicine and include: general medicine; pediatrics; treatment of evil spirits; ear, nose and throat; surgery; toxicology; rejuvenative therapies; and aphrodisiacs. The original doctors (Vaidyas) of Ayurveda passed their knowledge on through time.

Ayurveda originated and flourished in Kerala because of the patronage from the royal families who nurtured and promoted its research there, and because of its favorable climate with abundant sunshine, fertile soil, and rainfall, making it a natural source of a wide variety of plants and herbs with medicinal value.



Fort at Kanyakumari

I have been to Kerala on three occasions, each time visiting a different Panchakarma center, but my favorite is Manaltheeram, about one hour south of Thiruvananthapuram (the last major airport in this state) and about an hour north of the southern tip of India. This area is called Kanyakumari because this is where the three major bodies of water meet at the tip of India: Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean. Kerala has a tropical climate with three seasons: the summer, February to May; the monsoon, May through September; and the winter, October to February. Kerala experiences a lot of rain, making it very lush.

When you go through the Panchakarma process, it is important to stay rested and allow the body to not only cleanse but also rejuvenate. Too much running around can be taxing on the system, especially in India where all travel can be stressful. But I have made time to explore Kerala, taking a boat trip in the backwaters, and visiting the Fort at Kanyakumari. On my last trip, I visited the state-sponsored elephant recovery center and met my new friend Raja, a 2-year old elephant born at the center. I was there during her bath time and then feed her breakfast.



Raja & Jeff



View From Manaltheeram Resort

Of all the places I have been in India, Kerala is one of my two favorites because of the slower pace, lush surroundings, and amazing oceans. National Geographic has named it one of the “Ten Paradises of the World” because of its lush jungles, beaches and coastline, resorts, and tropical weather.

Besides tourism its major trades are spices and herbs, coconuts, tea, coffee, nuts, fish, and rubber production.

Although Hinduism is the largest religion in this state, you will find a diverse mix of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism with many mosques, temples, churches, and synagogues.