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- The Best Spas
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▶ Planning a Trip

- In Depth
- **▶ Suggested Itineraries**
- **▶ India Events**
- **▶ India Forum**
- ▶ India Photos
- View More Places in India
- **Index**

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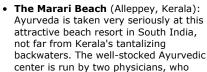
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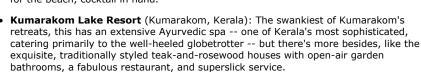
The Best Spas

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For the ultimate Ayurvedic treatment -- not so much pampering as a full-on rejuvenation experience that emulates the philosophy of health as a way of life espoused in ancient Indian texts -- there's nothing that comes close to **Kalari Kovilakom.** The health programs offered there are so special, in fact, that we've included them amongst India's best spiritual experiences, earlier in this chapter.



dispense sound medical advice as well as treatments, and your program is backed up with special Ayurvedic meals at the resort's restaurant. Or forgo the rules and just head for the beach, cocktail in hand.



- Somatheeram (Southern Kerala): This shabby-chic center, carved out of red sandy soil and perched on a terraced cliff overlooking a beach, is more hospital than hotel, but it has been inundated with awards for "Best Ayurvedic Center" (mostly from Kerala's Tourism Department). Ayurvedic therapy is the primary reason to book here, joining the many European "patients" who shuffle around in pastel dressing gowns, serene expressions on their tanned faces.
- Shalimar Spice Garden Resort (Kerala): Not far from Periyar Tiger Reserve, this lovely inland resort occupies a 2.4-hectare (6-acre) plantation scented by exotic spices. Over and above the enchanting Euro-chic accommodations designed by Italian architect Maria Angela Fernhof is an intimate Ayurvedic center drawing a regular European clientele. Built according to traditional specifications, with a stone floor, handmade brick walls, and an open fire for heating the medicated oils, the small space is always filled with the aroma of coconut oil.
- SwaSwara (Om Beach, Gokarna, Karnataka): With meditation sessions in a gorgeous blue-domed building alongside the pool, and regular yoga classes that encompass a wide range of techniques presented by a skilled master, guests at this top-notch retreat are offered every imaginable type of Ayurvedic treatment, combined with a specialized, individually designed diet, with lectures and art classes to aid in your discovery of self. Set in a superb location just a few minutes' walk from the much-venerated Om Beach, this inspiring resort features wonderful indoor-outdoor suites, designed a bit like traditional Karnataka homes, with open-to-the-elements bathrooms and air-conditioned sleeping quarters.
- Wildflower Hall, Mashobra (near Shimla, Himachal Pradesh): The pièce de résistance at what once was the mountain retreat of Lord Kitchener and is today the most beautiful resort in the Himalayas is the spa -- not only because the highly trained therapists offer the ultimate rubdown (Balinese, Thai, Swedish, Ayurvedic -- and that's just for starters), but because it takes place while you stare out blissfully at snowcapped peaks and a magnificent deodar valley, swirling with mists.
- Ananda-in-the-Himalayas (near Rishikesh, Uttarakhand): The 1,951-sq.-m (21,000-sq.-ft.) Wellness Center at this destination spa resort, located high above the Ganges, is rated one of the best in the world. This reputation is well earned -- thanks not only to its ultraefficient team of therapists, masseuses, and yoga instructors, but also because



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you are totally pampered from the moment you wake (to a steaming cup of honey, lemon, and ginger) until you retire to a bath (where a candle heats fragrant essential oils) and a bed (warmed by a hot-water bottle).

• Shreyas (Bengaluru, Karnataka): Simplicity is the catchword, but attention to detail is never compromised. Relaxed, minus any ostentatious predictability attached to most spas, Shreyas believes in detoxifying the spirit as much as the body. This is as perfect as it can get.

Back to Top

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