

Shreyas review | Luxury health retreat, India

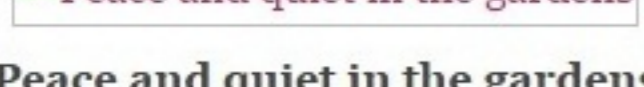
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ASHRAM MEETS LUXURY HOTEL IN BANGALORE INDIA

The Quick Read: Shreyas is a graceful health retreat hidden inside a coconut plantation, where yoga and detox nutrition are delivered with integrity and care. It offers the infinity pool and grand buildings of a luxe hotel, yet all the staff practice yoga and meditation alongside guests every day, bringing a lived experience of oneness, and a gentle vibe of respect. Organic gardens supply the kitchen for wonderfully cleansing food and juices. Doctors of naturopathy, ayurveda and yoga design recovery programmes for those who have major ills. Yoga teaching is strong. A rare oasis of leafy tranquility in the colour and clamour of India.

Budget: ££££



Peace and quiet in the gardens

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Who it's best for: Shreyas is ideal if you feel a need for quiet, soothing retreat time to cleanse and reset your health habits, and if you're recovering from cancer, another illness or over-exertion. It also suits those who want to access intensive, high-quality yoga and meditation teaching without sacrificing the comfort and service levels of a top-notch hotel. Fellow travellers are international and Indian professionals. It is superb for those who want space to look inwards and immerse themselves in nature.



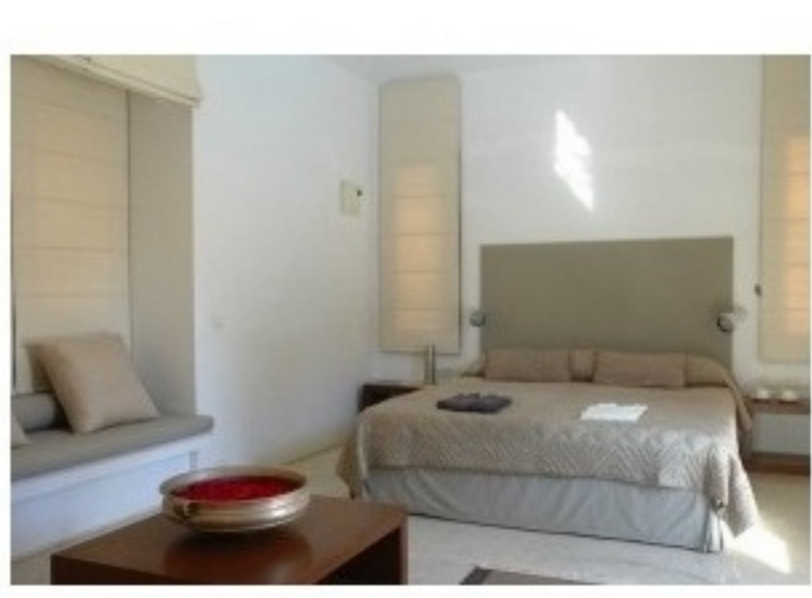
Yoga (with a spot of incense) is at the heart of Shreyas

What you can do: Shreyas is first and foremost about yoga and nutrition. Morning and afternoon, there are simultaneous Hatha and Ashanga classes led by a rotating faculty of excellent Indian teachers. Across a few days, you experience their markedly different styles – a revolution for yogis who are locked into a familiar teacher's routines at home. The Hatha is steady yet deceptively challenging because deep poses are held for long periods and careful adjustments mean you move beyond any lazy habits. Ashtanga is really vigorous here. Yoga packages include individual classes where beginners learn enough to become confident in one week, while experienced practitioners are pushed into therapeutic poses, especially useful if you bring injuries.

Shreyas is also famous for cleansing and detoxing. Whether you are having juices or special therapeutic food, everything is freshly picked and served while full of vitality. The meals are super abundant, colourful, and served with such panache that they are an activity in their own right. Juices come eight times a day – wherever you happen to be in the grounds – and are so plentiful and vibrant that it is actually a pleasure to detox.

The days pass very easily with many Ayurvedic/naturopathic massages to choose from, varied meditation offerings, steam rooms, alluring gardens to wander and an irresistible pool.

Where you stay: Shreyas sits calmly in the midst of a mature 25 acre coconut plantation. The focal point is a courtyard where dining room, steam-rooms and library spill out onto an infinity pool shaded with exotic flowering trees. Everything else happens out amongst the palms, reached by footpaths which weave past lotus pools and fragrant fig groves.



Inside a poolside cottage

The grandest building is the lofty open-sided yoga shala. It has a vaulted white ceiling, cool terracotta floors and columns framing views in all directions. It hums with energy like a modern day cathedral. Accommodation varies. Poolside rooms are large, with all the comforts of high-end hotels – sofas, huge dressing room, wonderful bed – but open straight onto the courtyard and pool loungers. Garden cottages, meanwhile, are out amongst the coconuts. They have low-ish tenting for the roof, yet are otherwise fully-equipped rooms boasting huge bathrooms which open to the elements. The furnished verandahs and the delight of padding to and fro along footpaths make these indoor-outdoor spaces, though cheaper, a better option.

Everything is lovely to the touch – think silk bedspreads, clean swept footpaths, white cotton-wrapped daybeds. Brown fabrics and dark stained woods are maybe more Indian than European in aesthetic. The treatment spa is a breezy bamboo building which feels close to nature, yet the massage tables are solid – warmed by electric blankets when need be.



You'll find flowers everywhere

Flowers are lavishly used. You see pools of golden petals, giant urns of rosebuds, tables clothed with flat leaves.

Otherwise, the interiors are restfully modern with the occasional deity in stone or brass.

In the vegetable gardens you watch timeless scenes of saree-clad women tilling red earth and carrying baskets on their heads. Herons wander by. Rainwater is captured, waste is treated onsite, and there's a clear ecological awareness which mitigates the power showers, mountains of clean towels, and pools.

Passing trains, cheering children at a nearby playcentre, and music from a village sometimes make their way over the walls – otherwise you're inside a huge bubble, secluded completely from the clamour of India.

How was it for us: At first I was a little confused by the informality of Shreyas, unusual for high-end retreats. We were greeted in a sitting room not at reception. Our first yoga class was taught by the same smiling man who managed our check in. But soon I got it – the retreat operates more like a large-scale home than a hotel, guests are really guests not clients, and every staff-member is equally invested in delivering a unified yogic experience. The result is a feeling of deep care. I enjoyed countless little touches – each time I stepped out of my shoes they were turned round, ready for me to walk away; each time I left my cottage, an unseen elf would refresh my room. In the absence of a reception I learned to stop any passing staff member, and whatever my request – it would be gracefully met. In this huge plantation, there are never more than twenty guests, so I expanded, blissfully, into the sense of ample space and individual care.



Rosie settled in quickly

I found the yoga physically stretching, both in group and individual classes, so I felt I was earning my massages and feasting. I liked being stretched into deeper postures, developing a firmness and greater dynamism in my personal practice.



The pool begins to sparkle at night

Magic crept in at dusk. Each night the whole property was lit by candles and supper would be served – all seven or eight dishes of it – in a new area of the gardens. By sparkling pool or roaring fire, I loved the sociability and laughter of sharing small tables with different people each night – especially after ample quiet all day.

Most special of all though, I enjoyed an unusual gentleness at Shreyas, owing, I believe, to the fact that all staff practice an hour's mandatory yoga and another hour's chanting meditation every day. Whilst it is luxurious to practice yoga in a cathedral-like space with brilliant teachers twice daily, and to be circled by a man wafting cleansing, insect-repelling incense throughout, it was grounding to share that luxury with the men who would later serve me my food. If yoga is about a healthy oneness, Shreyas creates a 3D experience of this, with integrity.

What we took home: I left feeling toned, clean inside and graced with great calm. I'd got a new surprising habit – cleansing my airways with saltwater up the nostrils and a pot to continue at home. I'd read about yoga, diet and spirituality and received a lovely hand-bound yoga textbook to take home.



Looking after the huge grounds

Would we go back: Yes, if I ever need to clear my system of toxins or rehabilitate. Also I'd go back if I were exhausted by the grimy clamour of ordinary India and wanting a peaceful haven.

People watch: Many staff have been at Shreyas for 15 years and all take pride and ownership in their work. Mani is a stellar yoga teacher – a yoga MSc – particularly brilliant if you bring an injury. Sombha gave precise pampering massage. Santosh was always beaming and in total control of the dining room. The creator, Pavan, a London investment banker/ashtanga teacher, teaches some classes when he visits – it would be fascinating to meet him.

Shreyas has three doctors – Ayurvedic, naturopath and yogic – working as a team. In the initial consultation their combined interview seems too broad to be useful. Other retreatants said the doctors are helpful if you engage individually with specific requests.



Meals vary, but are always splendid

Food watch: Shreyas has huge organic gardens providing 65 percent of the fresh 'satvic' (light/health and soul-inspiring) vegetarian food. Breakfasts are splendid – hot waffles, porridge or masala dosa come alongside a table laden with tropical and dried fruit, nuts, honey and a dairy juice. Lunch and dinner start with remarkable soups – cumin spinach, or beetroot cucumber for example. The salads are rough cut, well spiced and dressed. Some days the main dishes are Asian – colourful, texture-rich, and interesting. But other days the main courses are western – for example pasta with steamed veg – less exciting to the western palate. You can always ask (in advance) for something different on these days. If you're detoxing the juice regime is brilliantly varied, tasty, and satisfying. Eight juices a day mean you never feel hungry or deprived. The kitchen develops individual diets for those tackling cancer or particular ailments; clients I met on these longer therapeutic retreats claimed noticeable results.

What's queenly: Being served home grown food outdoors at night, on a table scattered with tuberose, between a tree full of lanterns and a blazing firepit.

What's lowly: A weak initial consultation. You are asked questions about your bowels in front of your travelling companion, the questions feel too general to be diagnostic, and you're given bland lifestyle tips.

Insider tip: Although the food is good, do try a couple of days' juice detox – it's delicious, and leaves you feeling great.



Everybody – staff included – participate in the yoga sessions

Price with a companion: From \$500 (£325) for two per night in an en-suite tented garden cottages including tax, including two yoga sessions, consultation, use of spa and all meals.

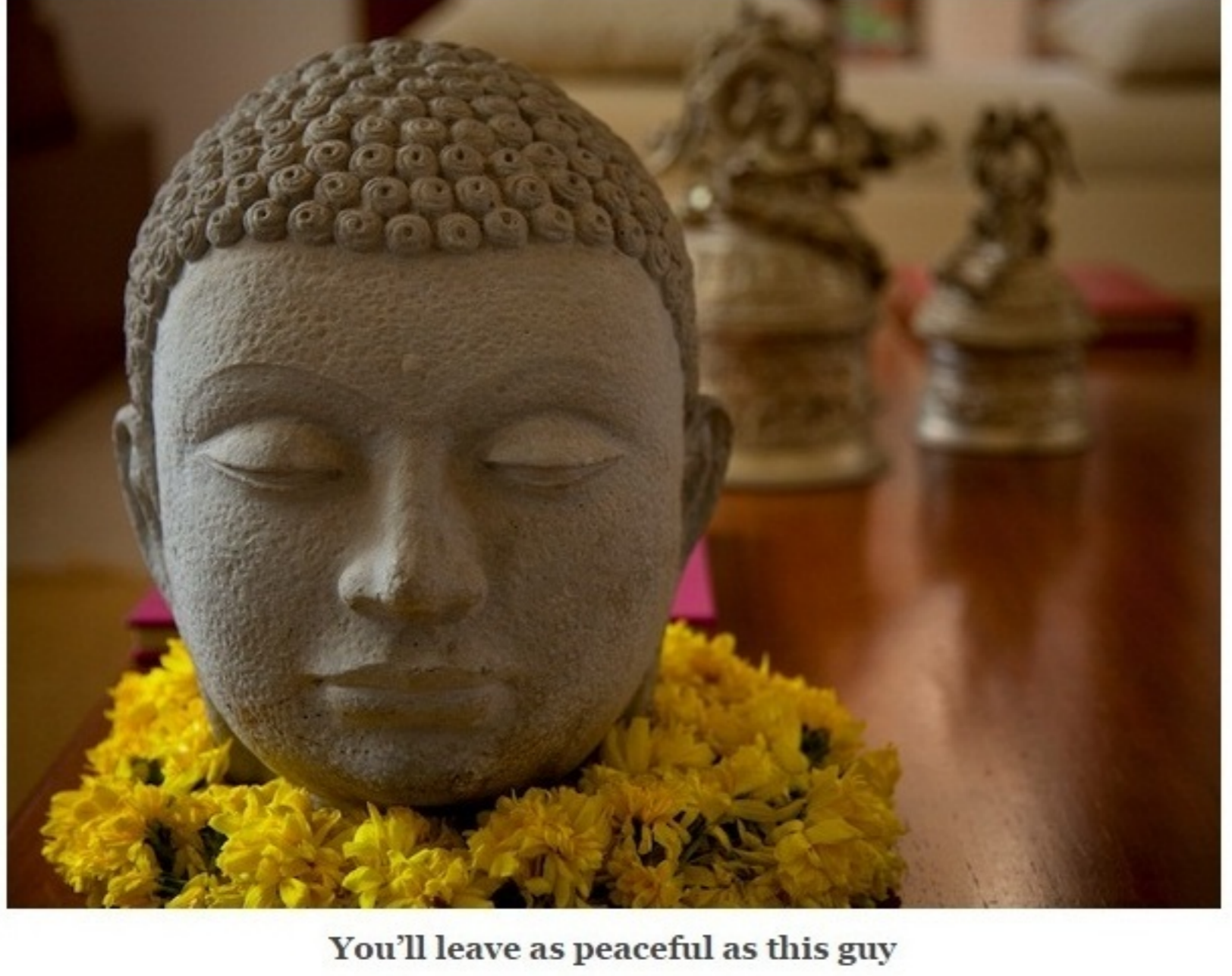
Price going solo: From \$370 (£240) in an en-suite tented garden cottages per night (as above)

Value for money: It's not cheap, but you get an unusual amount of space around you combined with attentive service for the price.

Reviewed by **Rosie Walford**

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Retreat calendar shreyasretreat.com Other yoga retreats

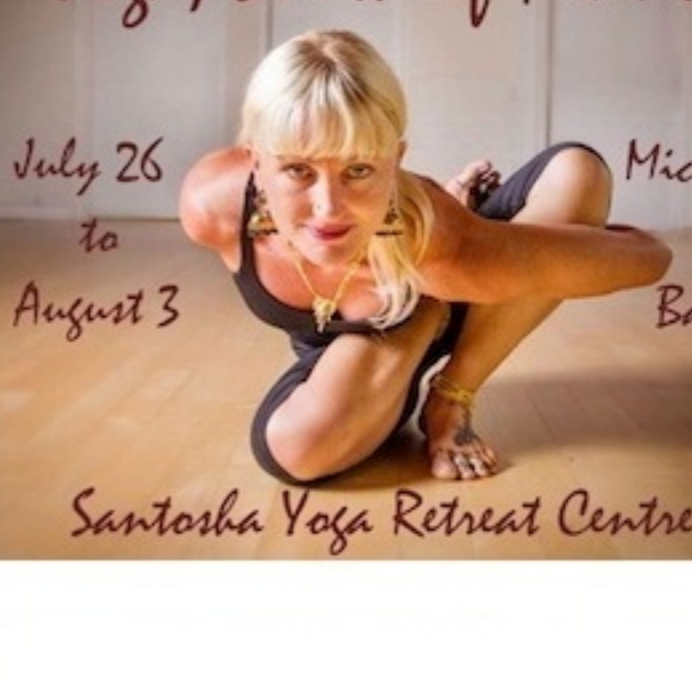


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