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PG 53: SOUKYA

GUIDELINES GETAWAYS

SOUKYA INTERNATIONAL
HOLISTIC HEALTH CENTER*By Maxine Albert*

I had been hearing about the marvels of Soukya Holistic Health and Ayurveda Center in Bangalore, India for quite a while. Being the curious traveler that I am, I decided to combine a visit there with a cultural excursion to see the palaces, temples and ruins of Southern India protected as World Heritage Sites. I boarded The Golden Chariot Train which took me to these ancient treasures of royal kingdoms. Little did I know that the richest journey would be my stay at Soukya.

Located in the countryside on an organic farm with thirty acres of beautifully cultivated land, Soukya is a 45 minute drive from Bangalore in Southern India. This

world renowned healing center looks like a luxury resort in the middle of a pastoral paradise. The entire facility is surrounded by lush greenery, lotus ponds and fragrant gardens. You'll see all types of trees, plants, herbs, flowers, fruits and vegetables here, which are used for the treatments as well as for the delicious vegetarian cuisine—fresh from the garden. You're bound to have your senses stimulated with the multitude and variety of colors and aromatic scents. The decor is très chic with handcrafted tiles, thatched roofs and Gujarati mirrors. Accommodations include deluxe cottages with dining rooms, over sized sitting rooms and private gardens both in front and in back. Outdoor decks with table and

chairs make relaxing, reading, sunning or spending quiet time in your own garden an unforgettable pleasure. It's the ideal place to loll and de-stress. The well-appointed rooms are spacious and have ceiling fans, indoor/outdoor showers and air conditioning. You'll find every modern amenity you could possibly want in this serene setting. A swimming pool is used for both recreational and therapeutic purposes. There's a walking and jogging trail that will transport you to the Garden of Eden. Prince Charles, Camilla, Sarah Fergusson, Ravi Shankar, The Dali Lama, Tina Turner, Sting and Deepak Chopra have been guests here. I set out to discover what this so called health oasis truly offered.

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Soukya means "wellness" in Sanskrit and "that is our aim," says Dr. Mathia, the founder, chairman and medical director. It is the first healing center of its kind where different systems of medicine including ayurveda, naturopathy, homeopathy, allopathy and over 30 complementary therapies like yoga, acupuncture, mud therapy, hydrotherapy, reflexology, counseling, and nutrition are combined, not only to treat medical conditions but also to promote general health and well being.

"Health is not just the absence of disease," Mathia states. "The holistic approach views the person as a whole—mind, body and spirit. Anything health related must deal with all three of these. If you don't, it's like putting on a band aid and not dealing with the root cause," he says. "The psychological, nutritional, lifestyle, environmental and spiritual aspects of each person are taken into consideration in holistic medicine. A disturbance in one of these affects the others as they are all interconnected. An imbalance can result in ill health and disease. The individual treatments here are designed to restore the body's natural balance and create a harmonious state of wellness," explains the doctor. All of the

medicinal herbs used in the treatments are grown in the organic garden. Then they are processed and blended at Soukya under the supervision of the doctors.



Dr. Issac Mathai had a dream from early on to create a holistic center that offered the best integrative services. In addition to being a medically qualified homeopathic physician, Mathai studied Chinese pulse diagnosis and acupuncture in China. He trained at the mind-body medicine program at Harvard and started his practice in London where he also taught yoga and meditation.

With his vision and diverse background, it seems that he manifested his dream at Soukya, with his wife Suja who is the nutritional consultant. As a visiting consultant to London, New York, Washington DC, Europe and The Middle East, the doctor has a patient network of thousands of people from over 60 countries.

Upon arrival each guest is adorned with a garland of flowers and given a cool towel, a fruit drink and a blessing. This was my first glimpse of the nurturing environment here. Whether you come for medical treatment or a wellness program for stress management, relaxation, rejuvenation, diet and nutrition or anti-aging, everyone is monitored by doctors. The philosophy is that the body has an innate ability to heal itself, which works when everything is in balance. I learned that Soukya is a mindset—an approach to healing where the person becomes an active participant. This means being aware and making conscious positive choices. Life management programs to improve quality of life, weight loss, addiction and depression guide people to enhance their total well being. There's a focus to educate and train people to take responsibility for their health.

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Dr. Mathai states, "Often, I find that emotional upheaval is the root cause for medical conditions. This is why a complex physiological and psychological interview is conducted with a patient that could take even eight hours. Every case has an emotional connection."

I tried to remember the last time a medical doctor attempted to link my illness with my emotional state. Nothing came to mind.

Physician, healer, sage—the Good Doctor has a warm smile and a twinkle in his kind, piercing eyes. Talking to him is both illuminating and a bit unnerving. You feel like he is able to scan your body and your thoughts—and see everything. But isn't this what you want your doctor to do—have that highly developed sixth sense and know exactly what is right for you? The Doctor is eminently likeable, innately wise and he sure knows his stuff. He tells me that they also treat rare, chronic diseases, which have not responded to other medical approaches.

I set out to put Soukya to the test. I'm a regular yoga practitioner. To the best of my knowledge, I had nothing more than a bad case of New York City stress which manifests in my stomach and digestion. I think this is pretty typical, living this fast-paced life.

The regimen at Soukya is as follows: Each visitor first fills out a long questionnaire detailing their complaints, previous history, food and weather preferences, dreams, personality, emotional issues, skin and hair condition, etc. Then you are seen separately by different doctors who take your pulse, ask you questions and do whatever exams they deem necessary.

The doctors get together and design a reg-

imen of treatments uniquely for you, based on their mutual assessment and diagnosis of your individual needs. Your program is reassessed each day, and adjusted if necessary. Protocols using ayurveda, the 5,000 year old Indian science of life, are key. Once your dosha, which is your ayurvedic mind and body type, is determined, specific herbs are selected for treatments and to prepare the medicated oils used on you. Your dosha tells everything about you—your emotional make up, preferences, sleep patterns, skin, joints, hair. It governs which foods, activities and climates are right for your specific body and temperament. What was really fascinating was that by looking at the different descriptions, I was able to accurately pick my dosha. The characteristics and preferences were spot on.

The day started with an early morning yoga class. I stepped on circular stones across a pond of water lilies and entered the open air hall with its black oxide floor and grass circular roof. The instructor was the naturopathic doctor who had done my initial consultation the previous day. I learned that naturopathic physicians have degrees in yoga and study it for its cleansing and curative powers. Before the session begins, the doctor explains that this is not traditional yoga as we know it. Rather, it is therapeutic. She started with an invocation. I must say, I really felt it work on my breathing and lungs. She also led the daily afternoon yoga and meditation sessions.

I had acupressure and reflexology massages which were excellently executed by skilled therapists. I was feeling pretty pampered. Then I had a hot lava stone massage with

medicinal oils picked specifically for me. The heated stones were placed all over my body and between my toes. I felt my body relax and open up in places I never realized that I had held on before. In addition to the beneficial effects of massage for stress, sore muscles and circulation, Dr. Mathai explained that the herbal properties open up micro channels and release impurities. The ayurvedic oils have a rejuvenating effect. With the Shiro Dhara treatment, a continuous stream of heated oil is dripped on your forehead and oozes into your hair and scalp. This infusion relaxes the nervous system and calms the mind. At the same time, two therapists perform a synchronized Abhyanga massage on your body. As I felt both sets of healing hands and the warm drops on my third eye, I drifted off. My body reached a deep state of relaxation where true healing takes place.

Meals were sublime with fruits, vegetables, spices and herbs deliciously prepared, from the organic garden. I still dream about the red pumpkin soup, sweetest fruit salad and other exalted concoctions. Freshly squeezed pomegranate, watermelon, papaya, pineapple, and sweet lime juices were delectable. Dining was in an open air area in view of nature. I learned that the vegetarian food here is sathwic. This means that it creates positive vibrations in the body and contributes to a calm mind. A different tasty herbal water was served at each seating. A highlight was the demonstration showing how many herbs were used in the water. A long term dietary plan is given based on your ayurvedic body type so you can sustain the health benefits gained at the center. *Continued on Page 59*



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One sees bougainvillea, coconuts, mangos, lychee, chestnuts, sandalwood, cumin, gooseberry, custard apple and passion fruit along the Nada Paaha walking trail. Purple lantana, cumin, coriander, jasmine, cinnamon and ginger will stir your senses. Beets, basil, carrots, rosemary, garlic and tomatoes grow in the garden. You'll see the anti arthritis karuva leaf and anti inflammatory castor oil leaf. Guests are encouraged to take time for themselves and commune with nature.

My final visit with my doctor was nothing short of fascinating. I had noticed that my stomach and digestion had actually eased and relaxed. The consultation was more like a reading by a medical intuitive who knew me better than anyone on the planet. She went through my entire personality and told me how to handle all the difficult situations that arose in life. This was without me asking or telling her anything, this time. She told me what agitated me, what made me happy, how to calm myself, which physical activities and foods were good or bad for me. It was uncanny and everything she said has worked like magic so far. I was given my special diet, specific yoga postures and creative outlets to pursue. She literally gave me a prescription for life.

A male friend who was at Soukya saw significant improvement from symptoms of enlarged prostate in less than a week. Another friend I traveled with felt relief from chronic health issues in a relatively short time. I met two youthful fit Swiss ladies while I was visiting Soukya, who told me that they go there often, as do their friends. Sometimes they come to balance their systems. Other times they may need medical attention. Europeans have a different attitude about health and wellness. I saw a woman at a cocktail event in New York who had recently been to Soukya. I could not stop staring—she looked so much younger. One patient who comes for an annual tune up told me that traditional Western medicine had failed to help her. She is pleased with her results at Soukya where the focus is always on the best regimen of treatments for each guest.

Soukya has also had fantastic results with anti-aging. With the Panchakarma treatment, Dr. Mathia explains that ayurvedic and naturopathic protocols detox the body and create metabolic changes. In combination with other therapies, herbal oils are also used to rejuvenate the cells. He says that people (over 40) have dropped over 20 years in their bodily functions and appearance and have greatly improved their sex lives.

The medical treatments at Soukya are geared to give the optimal results without the toxic effects of potent drugs. Arthritis, cardiac hypertension, diabetes, asthma and chronic diseases are treated with excellent results. The center has also had success in the treatment of addictions. Dr. Mathai explains that the brain/body chemistry of the addict has been altered. Thus it's vital to restore the brain to a balanced healthy state.

"Prevention is better than cure and the best time to take stock is when you are alright," says Dr. Mathia. "Listen to your body and indulge and pamper this most precious gift." This is the splendor of Soukya where you can change a life imbalance to a life in balance.

How To Go:

For information on travel to Soukya, The Golden Chariot Train and other places in India, as well as other destinations around the world, contact the superb travel specialists at OPG, Our Personal Guest. They take the guesswork out of even the most demanding itinerary. These dedicated professionals take a hands-on approach to all details with attention to your personal taste and needs.

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