

Health Spa Reviews - Nalanda Ayurvedic Centre, Greyton



Review by Leigh van den Berg

A balm for the soul

Looking for a restorative break from the hustle and bustle of town? In hope of a little healing? Perhaps you should take a drive out to the postcard pretty town of Greyton. There, less than two hours out of Cape Town, you'll find the Nalanda Ayurvedic Centre, a blissful retreat for the body, mind and soul.

Having been booked in for just two days, the first person I met upon arrival was the owner, the warm and welcoming Margit Gillot. A veritable encyclopaedia of Ayurvedic knowledge, she trained in Europe under Kiran Vyas, a man who grew up in an ashram with none other than Ghandi. Guests can stay with her in her home which has been converted into a guesthouse that can comfortably accommodate up to six people at a time. Surrounded by misty mountains and a tranquil green garden, it has a warm, rustic charm. Every room is full of fresh flowers and the spacious lounge contains comfy couches and a cosy-looking fire place. The treatment centre is a mere five minute stroll away and both are located on the main road.



According to Margit, the retreat's clients come from all over the place - Cape Town, the rest of South Africa and even overseas. Many come for a Pancha Karma, a 'powerful body and mind detox' that's no less than seven days. However, if you feel you're in need of a shorter break, that's perfectly fine too. She's only too happy to customise your stay to suit your needs. 'The retreats purpose is to support people in their health and wellbeing, be it to heal or simply relax', she says.

Once settled in my en suite, Margit gave me a bit more insight into the ancient system of traditional medicine that is Ayurveda. (In Sanskrit, 'ayus' means 'life' and 'veda' means 'science'). In Ayurvedic philosophy, the five elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether) combine in pairs to form three dynamic interactions referred to as doshas, namely Pitta, Kapha and Vata. After asking me a few questions about my not-so-fabulous health and taking my physical appearance into account (skinny, pale, manic-looking), it's decided that I'm a combination of Vata (air and ether) and Pitta (fire and water). Both are playing up and the end result is generalised anxiety and insomnia. Fortunately, Margit knows exactly which treatments



will help in bringing my body and soul back into balance. In fact, she even knows which types of foods are best for my doshas and, if I change my diet to include them, this will assist in helping me to de-stress!

Now, on the subject of food, you should know that when I found out that all my meals would be vegetarian and assist in the 'detox process', I immediately assumed they'd be bland. Luckily, I was dead wrong. Over the next two days, Gaynor, the resident chef treated me to a veritable smorgasbord of varied, nutritious, delicious-tasting fare. In fact, every meal, be it breakfast or supper, included at least five different dishes! Of all the good things I got to eat, the dishes that really stand out are a crispy potato and cauliflower bake, a mean lentil curry and a miso soup that would put any of Cape Town's sushi hot spots to shame.

In regards to the treatments, know that all the services that Nalanda offers are authentically ayurvedic. Here it's all about heavenly dosha-balancing head massages,

not waxing and tinting. Margit herself gives massages, but also has three tireless, strong-armed therapists that work for her. Of the five or so extremely enjoyable treatments I received, two really stood out. The first was a full body massage in which small metal bowls called kansu were used to rub my feet. I can't explain it rationally, but the moment those bowls met my soles, I felt the tight cord of tension that had been running through my body immediately slacken, as if it had been severed. Just like that, I relaxed! (Later, I learned from Margit that the kansu are made from five different metals that help balance the fire elements in the body. If you have too much of it, like me, it'll help calm it down. They can also assist with any 'digestive disorders'.) The other treatment du jour was a paga champi, a dry leg pressure massage that's used to help 'bring vata back into its place'. It can also help alleviate PMS symptoms and aid digestion.



Aside from getting to enjoy an array of Ayurvedic massages, I also got to do yoga in the mornings and was encouraged to do several 'self-care' rituals to aid the detoxification process, the most notable being performing a sesame seed oil self-massage known as abhyanga. I soon found out that sesame seed oil is used extensively in Ayurveda and spent much of my time covered in it from head to toe. Still, I learned that it's fantastically beneficial in that it's a great anti-oxidant with anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties. 'It's the only oil that can penetrate all seven layers of your skin easily', says Margit. 'It nourishes, detoxifies and is great for reducing stress and tension; relieving fatigue and insomnia and promoting strength and vitality'.

So, after two days of living la vida Ayurveda, what can I tell you? For one, I left the retreat feeling a lot more relaxed than when I arrived. My body was also 'happier' because of all the good food I'd consumed. That and the fact that I'd not been in contact with any nasties like pesticides, preservatives and caffeine. In fact, I think all this contributed to my somehow managing to completely avoid the menstrual migraine I tend to get like clockwork. As for my spirit... Well... Let's just say that the place's real asset is its owner. One late night chat with Margit is like a year's worth of therapy and ice cream for your soul.



Thus, if you're looking for a pedi and pina colada by the pool, this place is not for you. However, if you want to improve your health, (both mentally and physically), in a peaceful environment surrounded by a team of genuinely caring Ayurvedic experts, give Nalanda a ring. Here you'll find people fully committed to helping you live your best possible life - one that's the most healthful, mindful and balanced. And maybe (just maybe) you'll even find yourself.