



## SHREYAS STILL

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Learning to soothe the mind and comprehend contradiction.

At Relais & Châteaux's Shreyas Retreat I collected a series of oppositions. "Be active but still. Be calm but engaged. Look inwards but don't be narcissistic." Contradictions are everywhere in India. They're found in the streets, which shouldn't work but somehow do, and the landscape that mixes mountain and beaches. I suspected yoga might be another of India's contradictions. After a week enveloped by Mumbai's mayhem it seemed strange that a practice centred around serenity could form a key component of the country's three main religions. But as my companion and I drove through rural Bangalore we started to see a more peaceful side of India.

Arriving at Shreyas, we went straight to our tented cottage (designed to make guests feel closer to nature, a central tenet of yoga) where we met 'The Doctor' for our initial consultation. Softly spoken and knowledgeable, she explained that there were two yoga classes every day, one before breakfast and one in the evening, with meditation and a plethora of activities on offer in between. All this fit perfectly with Relais & Châteaux's desire to promote "the good and the beautiful" in both food and hospitality.

I could hardly be described as a yoga expert. My experience consists of sporadically attended classes where I giggle when an instructor tells me to "touch the earth" as we sit five storeys above a bustling city street. Nevertheless, I was excited to practice in India. I explained this to 'The Doctor', who added a few notes to the schedule of yoga, meditation and massages she'd created for our stay. As she left, she promised to send over coconut water, which she correctly predicted would ease my companion's dizzy spells. We spent the evening cradling coconuts, reading books and watching the rain, which was unseasonably early.

Yoga the next morning was held in an open shelter surrounded by frangipani trees. All staff members practise yoga and when guest attendance is low, some join in. There's something about being around people for whom yoga is part of the fabric of their lives and not an exercise in vanity that made the experience all the more enriching. Meditation was more challenging though. "How can you think about yourself and not feel selfish, or sit in silence and not have a thousand thoughts running through your mind?" I asked my teacher. "You just let them go," he replied. "Think about them dispassionately, as if they belong to someone else".

Suspecting that a distraction would help with such an endeavour I ventured to Shreyas' spa, a modernist gem with cool cement walls and floor to ceiling windows. 'The Doctor' recommended a series of soothing massages and one facial, and as the days progressed these treatments were accompanied by a growing sense of calm. Indeed, after my final massage I realised I'd been thinking about nothing at all. At yoga that evening my wavering limbs were still while the thoughts that usually ricocheted around my head remained strangely silent.

I have often said that multiple things can be true at the same time, but until I travelled to India I don't think I really understood what that meant. Life can be chaotic and untroubled, heartbreakingly unfair and curiously wonderful. As we set off at the end of our stay I saw the streets in a different light. Children laughed and waved from the back of trucks while women sat upright in their saris as their motorbikes flitted in and out of traffic - calm and frenetic all at once.

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