



SPA SPECIAL



Vana's paths encourage mindful walking

MENDING MY HEART IN THE HIMALAYAS



Can massage and mindfulness fix a broken heart? Fong Chau went to Vana Malsi Estate in India to escape the now, but ended up returning to herself

I didn't know it when I touched down in Delhi, but I'd come to India to find myself. It wasn't long ago that I'd known who I was – someone about to spend the rest of her life

with the right man. On New Year's Eve we'd drunk champagne and watched fireworks pop over London. "Let's get married," I said. Three days later, he left me.

Over the previous months we'd lost our way, caught in a fog of sadness and apathy through which we no longer had the strength to seek each other out. My proposal was born out of love, but also out of desperation to save an eight-year relationship. So, when given the chance to fly out to Vana Malsi, a wellness retreat in the foothills of the Himalayas, I was

unsure. Could a week of spiritual healing help me win back the love of my life? It was worth a try.

Vana attracts a global and well-heeled clientele. From property developers to a smattering of celebrities, they come to find peace, clarity, and yes, themselves. The approach is holistic, with a treatment menu more than 10 pages long, incorporating Ayurvedic and Tibetan healing, fitness programmes, yoga, meditation and acupuncture.

The clean architecture and lashings of pale oak create an airy Scandinavian feel. It's a thoughtful paradise through

which carefully cultivated pathways encourage mindful walking. Guests worry about nothing. My state-of-the-art bed moulded itself to my body shape, the air conditioning in my room was set to the requirements of my dosha (Ayurvedic mind-body type), even my clothes were picked out (all guests wear pyjamas of organic cotton). I ate richly hued and deliciously spiced thalis, also prepared to suit my Ayurvedic composition. Such detail made staying here a complete rest for my weary mind, though I still saw the world through his eyes. Would he like it here, too?

A friendly but no-nonsense doctor helped determine my retreat objectives. I want to fix us, I told her. "All well and good," she said, looking me square in the eye, "but right now you're not together. You have to heal yourself." Her words hit me like a sucker punch. I enrolled on a bespoke de-stress plan to address

my emotional blockages. After taking my pulse, my doctor rightly determined that I was suffering from joint pains, and explained that my Vata (the Ayurvedic energy of movement) was imbalanced, as was my Tibetan wind energy,



The retreat is nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas

What to pack

Chain, £95; pendant, £39, both Daisy London

Slippers, £75, Holistic Silk

Uma Pure Bliss Wellness Oil, £39



Home remedies

THREE STEPS TO GET STARTED

- Drink warm water as soon as you wake, to aid digestion and detoxify the body.
- Get to know your stomach, giving it regular and gentle massages to release emotional baggage.
- Learn to be in the moment by drinking a cup of herbal tea in a mindful way. Notice the warmth radiating towards your face, how the cup feels in your hand, how the first sip tastes.



One of the bright, spiced lunch dishes at Vana

And little by little, that's what I'm trying to do. When my thoughts turn in the wrong direction, focusing on my body, even if it's

just drinking my tea in a mindful way, gives me the strength to return to myself. Sad times come and go, but living life means accepting them and moving on. Vana helped me take the first steps, more will surely follow. ■

TRIP NOTES

Healing Holidays offers a seven-night stay at Vana Malsi from £2,869 per person sharing, including economy flights from London Heathrow, return transfers, full board and bespoke retreat programme; Healingholidays.co.uk

suggesting over-thinking. For the rest of the week I was to practise being in the moment by connecting with my body, freeing me from my whirling thoughts. It would be a start.

I joined yoga classes and trekked to a nearby nature reserve, trying to focus on physical sensations rather than letting my mind wander. In Shirodhara treatments I imagined new pathways mapping themselves out in my mind as warm oil trickled over my scalp. In the massage that followed, I went for 90 minutes without thinking of him, and left feeling calm and revitalised. Later in the week a Taoist abdominal massage

intended to release emotional baggage yielded powerful results. Pushing down, my therapist commented on how firm I was.

When I said I'd been doing crunches, she countered that it was because I was holding on to the past. Going to the bathroom after felt like a life-changing moment – years of emotional baggage literally flushed away.

When I returned home, I found he had a new girlfriend. It'll implode and he'll come back, I thought. Then I recalled that initial meeting with my doctor: "You have to deal with the situation as it is now."

"Sad times come and go, but LIVING life means accepting them and MOVING on"