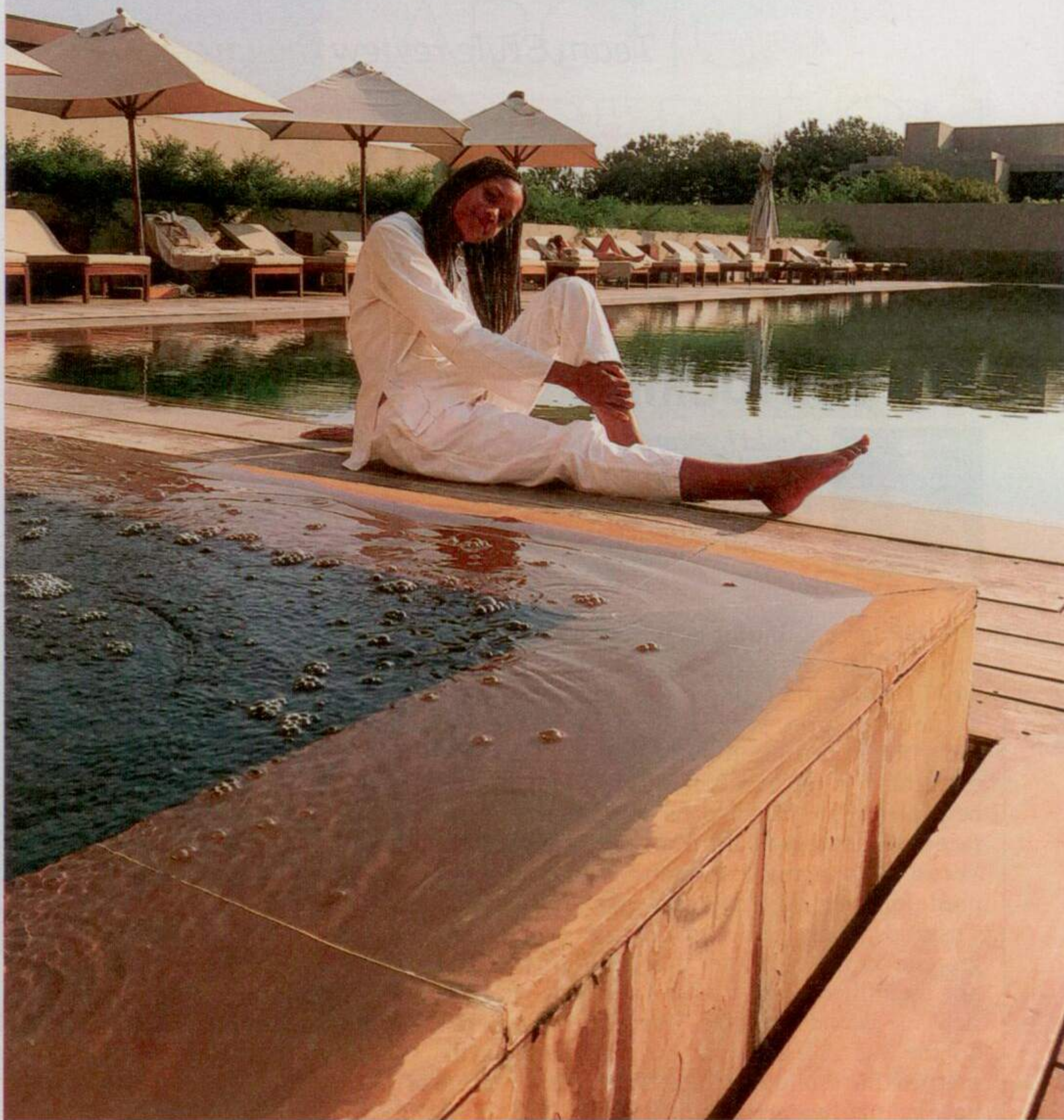


Right Actress Naomie Harris by the pool at Vana.
Below The Forest room bathrooms overlook lush vegetation.
Bottom A Forest room — your private retreat



NAOMIE HARRIS WHY VANA IS MY HEAVEN ON EARTH

The Oscar-nominated actress explains why this magical Indian retreat is the place to go to restore mind, body and soul

I was the ideal candidate to go on a retreat. Before I went to India, I'd been working crazy hours. I felt stressed and depleted, and so a friend recommended Vana. I took it on blind faith and booked. I like to be surprised on holiday, and I certainly was. I'd imagined Vana to be in the middle of nowhere, but it's set in 21 acres of forest in the centre of the city of Dehradun. Stepping into Vana's reception was like walking into heaven. The architecture is incredible — with high curving white walls, floor-to-ceiling windows and an installation of doves suspended over a reflecting pool. I felt instantly cocooned.

I called my family to say I'd arrived safely and then I switched off my phone. Vana is so conducive to relaxation that a self-imposed digital detox was easy. I quickly got into a rhythm. I would wake up at 5.30am, watch the sun rise from my balcony and meditate. Other people raved about the yoga, but I skipped it as I prefer Pilates. The doctors tried to get me to go walking in the local hills or down to Rishikesh for the Aarti ceremony on the Ganges, but I was happy to sit by the pool, meander around the grounds and chat with other guests.

My favourite treatment was the combination of Abhyanga, where two therapists massaged me at the same time, directly followed by Shirodhara, where warm oil was dripped onto my forehead. It was so powerful that after one session, I felt as though I had cleansed my body of deeply held emotional baggage. The food, too, was a revelation: fresh, organic and so varied.

I felt good when I left, but I didn't fully appreciate the profound impact Vana had actually had on me until I was back to my gruelling schedule. I've stayed in some fabulous hotels and spas, but I've never wanted to return anywhere — until now. I can't wait to go back. This is my go-to place. ■



This picture One of the soothing spa rooms at Vana. Below The food is organic and fresh. Bottom The swimming pool is the perfect place to unwind



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1 BA flights from Heathrow via Delhi to Dehradun. 2 Seven nights in a Forest room. 3 Full board — three meals per day. 4 Personalised programme of treatments. 5 Local airport transfers. 6 Entry to the airport VIP lounge in Delhi on outward journey. 7 Daily group activities. 8 Opportunity to upgrade to World Traveller Plus for just £150 on return Delhi-London flight.

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