

SWASWARA

KARNATAKA, INDIA

IN BRIEF An inward focus fuelled by hardcore Ayurveda

THE LOWDOWN It's a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Goa airport dodging wandering cows and motorbikes piled high with families, but the journey melts away as soon as the dramatic coastline of sandy Om Beach (so called because its two curves are shaped like the Sanskrit letter for 'om') appears. Mini Chandran and her team pour delicious herbal tea as they tie a handmade friendship bracelet with a tiny shell from the beach to your wrist. It's the signal to start switching off (mind and phone). *Swa* means self and *Swara* sound, and the ethos here is about listening to the inner voice. Everything is set up for re-connecting and recalibrating. For a start, each of the cottages is built in traditional rustic style, with bathrooms partially open to the sky (look out for a simian audience in the shower). Being able to see the stars, smell the sea and hear the waves is therapeutic in itself. The pool, beach and local sights make it tempting to turn this into a holiday, but to do that is to miss the point. A full programme of Hatha yoga and meditation begins at 6.30am every day. Posture and meditation techniques are taught in authentic Indian style, which may seem slow for those used to the full-power yogis of the West, but trust the process and your practice will really develop in a mindful way. Learn *Tratak*, the art of looking at a candle flame to cleanse the eyes, or *Yoga Nidra*, to fall into a deeper consciousness. Then, let go and chant: the meditation space has the acoustics to make the shakiest 'om' sound pure. Ayurveda is at the heart of *SwaSvara*. There's a fully dedicated clinic and a stay begins with a consultation. Many returning guests opt for full *Panchakarma* detox (a series of five Ayurvedic treatments), but the 'Swa' Wellbeing programme is a perfect intro, and includes the yogic-cleansing *Kriya*, and *Jal Neti* (a saltwater nasal wash that helps relieve rhinitis and improve breathing) with the option to add in a juice cleanse. The signature *Abhayanga*, a full body massage with warm herbal oils that smell full of goodness, is also part of the treatment and total bliss. The open kitchen and adjoining restaurant form the central hub, so it takes dedication to be on a strict food regime. Join the chef and his team as they make the tasty signature fish curry. It's hard to believe the food is healthy, but it is – and a great lesson in how to consume more than the five a day we rarely get. Even the drinking water is infused with a different herb at every meal.

INSIDER TIP Even if you're not a yoga devotee, try the *Pranayama* (breath-control) sessions. The simple techniques will have a calming effect, and you can use them at home to manage stress.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; www.healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers the seven-night *Swa* Holiday programme from £1,369 per person full board, including flights and transfers.

