



namaste

Teacher's Newsletter

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TEACHER'S CORNER

Ayurvedic Nirvana

by Jaymie Meyer

In January 2006 I traveled to South India, the birthplace of the ancient Indian science known as Ayurveda. I stayed at two resorts: the Marari Beach in Kerala, and Backwater Ripples on Vembanad Lake. The weather is picture perfect in January: not a cloud in the sky, daily temperatures in the high 70's, and cool, starry nights. Before our trip, tour guide Tao-Porchon Lynch told me that hour-long massage treatments cost \$20 for two massage therapists working simultaneously. I said, "Hallelujah! Leave me at the Spa and fetch me in time to fly home."

The treatments take place in huts with thatched roofs, tile floors and white concrete walls. The walls rise to a height of approximately 10 feet, leaving several feet of open space before the roof begins. The simple design is evocative, allowing in tropical sounds of birdsong and palm fronds swaying in the breeze.

Spa etiquette is strict: women are massaged by women and men by men, no exceptions. This created a problem as our group was comprised of 16 women and one man and time slots for women were limited. Not getting the time slot she wanted, one female tourist begged to let a man do the job. The physician looked at her as if the request were the most ridiculous thing he'd ever heard. Fortunately, the female staff stayed overtime to accommodate all.

The massage room is spare, with a 7-foot long wooden table standing four feet off the floor. I had to rise on tiptoe to lift my 5'9" frame onto it. The table is constructed with a wooden lip around the perimeter that is several inches high. I had never seen a massage table made of wood. As I stood there wondering how comfortable it could be, the masseuse entered the room and told me to take off my clothes. "Underwear, too?"

"Everything. I will come for your clothes in a minute."

Once naked, I felt like Eve in the garden, using both hands to cover my private parts. When the masseuse returned, she took away my clothes and returned with a triangular piece of beige gauze with long strings attached at each point. At lightening speed, she placed the teeny triangle in front, bikini-style, and instructed me to thread the bottom string through my legs, whereupon she drew it up and tied it to the other strings behind my back.

Next she invited me to sit on the table for the head massage, which begins most Ayurvedic treatments. Warm oil is poured onto the head and the scalp is gently massaged, helping release tension and improve circulation. Laced with herbs and

spices, the oil smells exotic, and feels soothing and sensuous. Based on your health profile, the doctor helps you choose the most appropriate treatment. The one I received was for general well-being.

After a few minutes, she asked me to lie on my belly. The second masseuse entered the room. Again, warm oil was poured generously over my body; it wasn't long before I was completely greased. Having four hands simultaneously massage you at once feels utterly decadent. Had I not felt so blissed I'm sure I would have heard myself purring. The strokes used in Ayurvedic bodywork are long and light, unlike Shiatsu or Swedish massage. Nevertheless, the movements promote circulation and lymphatic drainage, all positive factors for good health.

When it came time for me to turn over, I quickly realized the necessity of the lip on the table. Even with that edge, turning over required six hands – mine and those of both women – to keep me onboard. Had that edge not been there, I would have gone flying off the table like a fish out of water, wildly flopping about. I giggled at the awkward scene. My g-string was barely intact, and soaked through with oil. Finally, I managed to turn over.

While it never felt improper, both women devoted much time to making a figure eight pattern around the circumference of my breasts with their palms. They took turns alternating and reversing the direction several times. The movements were brisk. As there is more lymphatic fluid in the body than blood, I felt this part of the massage must be especially beneficial for breast health.

The treatment over, I was escorted (so as not to slip on my oily feet) to a private shower, where an herbal scrub and shampoo were provided to wash away the oil.

I sampled six Ayurvedic treatments in as many days. The one described here, for general health, was my favorite, but I also enjoyed the head and face massage, the oil drip (sidohara) where a stream of medicated oil pours steadily onto the forehead, and finally, the herbal facial. When people ask me about the highlights of my trip to India, I tell them that Ayurvedic massage ranks right up there with the Taj Mahal.

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