

Pummel vision

At an Ayurvedic resort in Sri Lanka you will be kneaded, needled, steamed and scrubbed all in the name of relaxation, writes **Mark Andrews**

So much for the new Calvin Kleins. Warm, thick brown oil drips down my body as the hands of masseurs Manjula and Kumara work in unison. I have had my fair share of massages, but none quite like this. Cut the sniggering – this is a serious part of Ayurvedic treatment and the two men working on me are masters, leading me to a near slumber state.

Founded in 1968, Barberyn Reef Resort, located at Moragalla near Beruwala on the west coast of Sri Lanka, in 1984 became the country's first health resort to offer Ayurvedic treatments, and remains one of its top destinations for such treatments.

The family-owned resort takes a holistic approach to treating lifestyle illnesses, such as obesity. As with all treatments, mine begins with a doctor's consultation. Ayurvedic medicine's basic premise is that there are three elemental substances (doshas) in the body – vata, pitta, and kapha – and that illnesses are caused by an imbalance of these. The consultation results in a treatment programme to rebalance the doshas.

For most guests the programme is their reason for staying, so this timetable very much regulates activity. Mine begins at 8.30am with acupuncture. Needles are positioned at key points to help organs and joints according to my ailments. The oil massage follows at 9.15am and this is designed to reduce vata.

I never thought I would actually live to see myself lying in a wooden box but that is exactly what I experience in the steam bath. With

all but my head entombed, I undergo external "oiliation" to reduce vata and draw out toxins through the skin.

Thoroughly steamed, I am led to the herbal garden. In the garden, medicated packs are placed on my back and right leg, which have been causing me problems, and a honey and papaya mixture is spread over my face. I lie for half an hour with cucumber over my eyes listening to gentle music and squirrels chattering.

It is then time to remove all the oil with a special scrub. On days when I don't have the steam bath this is followed by a herbal bath to calm the vata and finish the treatment.

Our well-appointed duplex room overlooks the sea-water swimming pool and the Indian Ocean beyond. The resort is sheltered by the eponymous reef whose lagoon acts as a natural pool, nestled between pristine sandy beaches. The room itself is a blend of minimalist luxury and traditional elements. There is no television in accordance with the resting principles. This also seems to

extend to the paid-for Wi-fi, which is unstable and whose signal is difficult to receive in many rooms.

On nights when there is no live music the rhythmic lapping of the sea serenades us when we dine at the restaurant. Food is another element of the treatment and each table has bottles of concoctions to be taken by the patient. An Ayurveda doctor is on hand to advise on the vegetarian food.

The breakfast buffet is largely Western with some Sri Lankan choices, while lunch – also a buffet – consists more of Sri Lankan curries. Dinner is usually a set menu. The food is some of the best we've had in Sri Lanka, proving that healthy doesn't equate to tasteless.

The resort is a self-contained Sri Lanka microcosm and for many there is little reason to leave. But free tours are provided, as are daily yoga sessions. With so little to worry about and surrounded by such natural beauty with or without Ayurveda treatment it is an ideal place to rest, recuperate and hopefully rejuvenate –



The resort overlooks the Indian Ocean (above); rooms are bright and spacious (far left); oils and herbal decoctions are prepared on the premises (left); a mural adorns the stairwell (below).



Barberyn Reef Ayurveda Resort

Beruwala, Sri Lanka

barbryn.com

★★★★☆

Staying there: rooms range from €70 (HK\$724) for a full-board single standard room to €155 for a double. Ayurvedic treatment costs €70 per person, per day. Rates inclusive of taxes and service charge.

Getting there: fly from Hong Kong to Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport. Free transfers to the resort take about two hours.