

Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort



Somatheeram is like a little world unto itself. Perched dramatically above the coconut palm-fringed arc of Chowara beach, just south of the Keralan capital, Trivandrum, the scene is already set for total relaxation. Here thatched cottages, nuzzling among luxuriant gardens of orchids, banana palms, bougainvillea and jasmine, stagger down to the crashing Indian ocean, which provides a backbeat to your stay.



Beyond the obvious natural beauty of the place, there's ample comfort, too, in stone-built bungalows adhering to the traditional South Indian style, more luxurious teak-furnished Kerala houses, and the rather fabulous Sidhartha villa, with panoramic views and a bathroom open to the sky.



I arrive hot and a little frazzled from my journey and am immediately put at ease – a sweet-scented chain of jasmine and marigolds is draped around my neck, a bindi of sandalwood paste is placed on my forehead and I am given a tender young coconut to sip. Already I can sense Somatheeram working its subtle magic – and this is only the beginning.



I am shown to my charming cottage, designed in rustic simplicity yet with luxurious touches in the teak furnishings, bedding, towel art (every day a different animal) and wet room bathroom complete with treatment robe and Ayurvedic herbal toiletries. The terrace was the clincher, though, with its wraparound view of tropical gardens dipping to the ocean below.



With its second-to-none team of highly skilled doctors, practitioners, chefs, therapists, lecturers, yoga and meditation instructors, it's easy to see why this Ayurveda resort has scooped multiple awards as one of the very best in the world. The gardeners buzzing around to keep the grounds immaculate are quick with their smiles. The charismatic F&B manager Prasad talks you through the minutiae of the vegetarian dishes on the buffet – all extremely healthy, well spiced and uniformly delicious – and recounts fascinating stories of his life in Kerala to those who show interest. In short, everyone seems to care. Every detail matters. It is this that makes the difference and gives Somatheeram its edge.



After an initial consultation and pulse diagnosis to determine my *dosha* (constitution), the doctors put together an individual programme for me. In a treatment room lit by a single candle and with a view out to sea, I am left in capable hands for therapies like head-to-toe *abhyangam* warm oil massage, which leaves me in a soporific state, *podikizhi* herbal poultice application to encourage sweating, detoxification and loosen the muscles, and *shirodhara*, where oil is gently poured in a constant stream over my forehead from a pendulous copper vessel. I'm in heaven.



Switching off from technology is positively encouraged in the spirit of calm. And that's precisely what I do. Between treatments, my days unfold with gentle yoga and meditation, walks on the beach, swims in the pool and evenings spent on my terrace, watching the Keralan fishing boats drift across the inky ocean like fireflies.



I'm told that I would gain much from a full *panchakarma* (cleansing and rejuvenation programme) of several weeks, but I can feel some benefits in my energy levels and sleep in just three days. A 5000-year-old science and way of life, Ayurveda has much to teach us in today's fast-paced world. And you simply can't have a much better introduction to it than at Somatheeram.



The Details

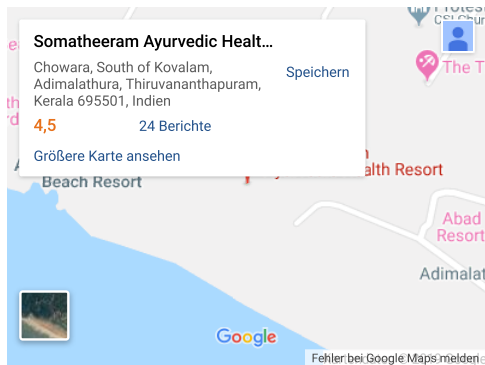
Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort, Chowara P.O., South of Kovalam, Trivandrum – 695 501, Kerala, India.

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Website: www.somatheeram.org

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Somatheeram is situated roughly half an hour's drive south of Trivandrum International Airport. Free pick-ups can be arranged on request, simply provide your time of arrival along with your flight number.



Type of Hotel: Health Resort and Retreat

Number of Rooms: Room only in a standard cottage: single/double from €56/€64 in the low season to €95/108 in the peak season. Special cottages single/double from €95/110 in the low season to €149/170 in the peak season. Deluxe cottages from €133/148 in the low season to €203/226 in the peak season. Kerala Deluxe from €164/184 in the low season to €271/134 in the high. Full board costs an additional €36 per day for Ayurvedic meals. See the website for pricing of Panchakarma packages. Complimentary Wi-Fi is available.

Price Band: Medium to high.

Insider Tip: It's worth spending the extra on a 'special cottage' for more space, greater privacy and delightful ocean views. Long stays yield substantial discounts, as do stays in the low season (May to September).

Reviewer's Rating: 10/10

Author Bio:

Kerry Walker is an award-winning freelance travel writer, author and MA-qualified translator.

Photographs by Kerry Walker