A journey in search of inner peace can take you far and wide, and truly test your limits for every ounce of that coveted tranquillity. My personal odyssey took me all the way to the Isha Yoga Centre, nestled in the foothills of the Vellangiri Mountains in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. A couple of flights, a long stopover, and one very bumpy bus ride later, I was finally at the ashram, not really knowing what to expect. The surroundings were idyllic, with a bird’s-eye view of the mountains, sprawling grounds and more greenery than any city slicker could hope for. The jolt came right after, over a soothing hot cup of hibiscus tea with honey.

We were told that the trip would serve as a sort of detox, no stimulants (read: No coffee, the first real shock); wake-up calls at 5:00 am for yoga, a non-odorous, light vegetarian diet, and healthy doses of exercise (long walks into the jungle and yoga three times a day). This monologue was given to us by the wonderful Swami Ullasa (one of our hosts and yoga teachers), who, with due credit, kept a straight face when our hosts and yoga teachers, who, with due credit, kept a straight face when our faces showed utter bewilderment.

The Isha family
In Sanskrit the word ‘guru’, means ‘dispeller of darkness’, and saadh means ‘within’. Isha yoga is Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev’s offering to the world, in the effort to help a person attain his full inherent potential. A mystic who has mastered the science of yoga, all of Sadhguru’s endeavours have been dedicated to bringing physical, mental and emotional well-being for his followers, through yoga and a series of scientifically-structured programmes.

Rejuvenation treatments such as the Ayur Rasayana Intensive, Ayur Samporna and Yoga Marga, contain a synthesis of yogic practices, diet, massage, therapeutic baths and wraps, rejuvenation tonics and Siddha medicines (traditional medicines older than Ayurveda). Plus, visits to the beautiful Bhyanalinga meditation shrine on the “calming” grounds do wonders even in a week. The idea behind Isha Yoga is ‘self-transformation’ following the credo that you cannot change the world unless you can better the self.

Sadhguru himself sets an example, and works with global forums such as the World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders and Alliance for New Humanity, with the aim to relieve human suffering. His social outreach endeavour, Action for Rural Rejuvenation, has helped over 7,50,000 people in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu. Children are a huge part of his vision, with the Isha Home School and Isha Vidhya, both equally committed to raising the level of education and literacy in rural India.

The philosophy is driven by a sense of oneness and love, with a strong focus on health, and Isha (which means the formless primordial source of creation) now functions through over 150 centres worldwide.

The week that followed
An apprehension about the diet proved to be completely unfounded. The food was not only delicious, but wholesome (we were fed copious amounts, and not starved as misconceptions go). Immediate results were achieved, with just the negation of caffeine from the system. My body felt less ‘blocked’, and breathing seemed to generate all the way from the stomach rather than just the lungs.

There was a lot of complaining at first, as 5:00 am isn’t really a time we’re used to starting the day. There are no compromises at the Centre, including (regained) sickness. The volunteers themselves have an intense faith in Sadhguru, and try telling them you have fever or a stomach ache and you’ll be faced with “Just come to the session, Sadhguru knows what he’s doing.” There is some truth in that, as just a couple of yoga sessions later, excuses and mysterious ailments did magically disappear.

The reason that yoga is such an integral part of this programme is because it is said to transform and liberate human beings, making us aware of limitations that are essential for the individual's evolution. These physical limitations make us strive harder, and take us one step towards potential transcendence. Small steps were taken as we were encouraged by the Swamis who assisted Sadhguru. The Surya Namaskar, a brand new day
Recovering from the meditation takes a while. It leaves you a little shaken and unable to speak, intensely aware of your body and mind. It’s Sadhguru’s energy that connects every individual to a hitherto unknown universal essence.

Just that one week left a remarkable impression. The skin glowed and felt healthier, the body felt stronger, and the mind was a lot calmer.

The idea behind Isha Yoga is ‘self-transformation’ following the credo that you cannot change the world unless you can better the self.

The climax of the programme is the initiation into the Shambhavi Maha Mudra. Only Sadhguru himself is allowed to perform this initiation; it’s a meditation that can’t really be described, only experienced. It brings you to a trance-like state with tribal drum beats in the background making you lose track of space and time. The Maha Mudra is supposed to completely purify the system and improve the health and productivity of the individual.

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Just that one week left a remarkable impression. The skin glowed and felt healthier, the body felt stronger, and the mind was a lot calmer. Sometimes, it helps to let go of your apprehensions and take that step into the unknown.

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