

in search of the self

A week at Sadhguru Jaggi's Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore proves to be a spiritual challenge that's ultimately rewarding. On the cards is a daily dose of vigorous yoga and a wholesome diet, says **Ambika Muttoo**



Balancing act

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 Velliangiri 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-oily, 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 faces showed utter bewilderment.

the Ishafamily

In Sanskrit the word 'guru', means 'dispeller of darkness', and *sadh* 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 Sampurna* 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 Dhyanalina meditation shrine on the ashram 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 (feigned) 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 a, '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*, an essential yoga *asana*, became easier to perform within the space of two days

under their guidance; I could stretch more, breath easier and pushed myself to a physical *limit that was punishing* and rewarding at the same time.

The course that Sadhguru was conducting personally for us, was 'Inner Engineering', an intensive programme that offers tools to 're-engineer' one's self through the inner science of yoga. The sessions with Guruji, are supposed to generate an awareness of the world that surrounds us, and how we can affect it, rather than the other way around. For example, he observes that advancements in physical sciences and technologies have resulted in greater prosperity, yet a sense of personal fulfilment and joy is tragically absent. A simple statement, said with no judgement whatsoever, but it resonated with everyone sitting in that hall.

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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.

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. Sometimes, it helps to let go of your apprehensions and take that step into the unknown. •