

Rumbles in the Indian jungle

You get no food for five days and enemas are compulsory – yet **Jane Dunford** feels curiously energised by the Beach House spa in Goa

It's day two of the "Total Body Rebalancing Retreat" at the Beach House in Goa, and I feel a bit like I'm in some strange health drive-themed *Big Brother*. One of the housemates is in the therapy room, another's in tears on the sofa, and others are completing one of the tasks of the day – perhaps having a lymphatic drainage massage, or locked away in their room for a self-administered colonic.

The set is beautiful. Right on the beach, the main house has a large, bright living area with floor-to-ceiling glass doors, comfy sofas and a coffee table laden with health-related books. The tasteful suites, mostly spread over two floors, are all dark wood and neutral decor, with two bathrooms and a separate sitting room (but the TV is disconnected and the minibar is neatly stacked with bottles of mineral water). The spa is a collection of thatched huts in the gardens.

It's all a bit different from when I was last in Goa – two weeks of secret parties in the "bamboo forest" and lazy days on the beach was definitely more retox than detox. While Goa has changed over the years, becoming less about tie-dye and partying and more about package holidays and luxury spa hotels, it's still got strong hedonistic associations. But the Beach House, a new wellness retreat on Sernabatim beach, in the south, has other ideas.

Set up by former pharmacist and entrepreneur Ajit Patel, the resort falls somewhere in between spa and clinic. The aim, says Patel, is to provide a place of healing for body, mind and spirit, using eastern and western ideas to educate people about their health, as well as offering tailor-made rejuvenating holidays.

There's a team of specialists on hand, doctor, nutritionist, hypnotherapist – and Ayurvedic assessments, therapy, nutritional advice and life coaching are all part of our programme.

"We want to get the physiological, physical and psychological in balance," says Patel. "There's an absolute link between the brain and wellness, so we're detoxing both body and mind – it can be an emotional process."

If that all sounds too much, you can actually just come here for a yoga holiday, or perhaps for the weight-loss or relaxation and rejuvenation programme. The week-long body balancing retreat I'm sampling – a kind of full MOT for body and mind – is the most hardcore.

It's a strict regime. No food for five days – just fruit and vegetable juices and clear broth, topped up with a whopping 28 supplements. We have blood, urine and stool tests, as well as bone density screening and a host of other checks. I'm pretty smug when a biological age test, based on visceral fat measurement, reveals that I'm 27 (I can continue lying about my age legitimately!), less so when a pH test shows that my body's acidity level is too high.

The best parts of the schedule are the obligatory spa treatments – two a day, anything from reflexology to Indian head massage – and juice time. The worst? A toss-up between the twice-daily DIY enemas (off you go with your



Gentle yoga each morning on the patio (above) overlooking the sea at the Beach House is followed by a programme of lectures and treatments at the spa's main bungalow (left).

litre of coffee solution, plastic bucket and tube – I'll leave the rest to your imagination) and the morning shot of aloe vera (which bears an uncanny resemblance to liquid soap).

Days start at 8am with some gentle yoga on the patio overlooking the sea. Fishermen beyond sing as they row and haul in their nets full of fish we can't eat. We're actually surprisingly busy, with our timetable of drinks, enemas, treatments and lectures, and soon feel cocooned from the rest of the world. With no decisions to make, no news and no mobile phones, you can really relax

and let go. And people do: there are tears all round as the week progresses.

Though I struggle at first, feeling tired, emotional and having strange dreams, by the third day I notice a change. I'm no longer hungry, but more energised and relaxed. Feelings of claustrophobia and plans for a bit of shopping in nearby Colva, or sneaking out for a beer, dissipate. I walk along the beach but don't feel tempted by the shacks selling cold Kingfisher and butter fish curry.

With all the enemas we're having, it becomes oddly natural to sit around talking with virtual strangers about what we've found in our toilet bowls – I even find myself having enema envy when one lady discovers a worm. People have been known to find pieces of Lego. We're told that colon cleansing helps eliminate toxins released during detox, as well as clear blockages, and can even purge old emotions stored in the intestine – though medical scientists may question that. In the fascinating daily talks we learn about all aspects of wellbeing, and everyone

makes practical plans to change elements of their diet and set themselves lifestyle goals to achieve in the coming months. (The team will follow our progress for 12 weeks when we're back.)

Day six in the Beach House, and it's time to be re-weighed and re-tested. I've lost a couple of pounds (one woman has lost nine), am no longer acidic, my skin and eyes are clearer – and now my biological age is 25. Everyone has seen definite benefits, and when the time comes to break the fast, the idea of chewing again is a bit alien.

We sit around tentatively munching on our fresh fruit platters (a complete tastebud sensation), before venturing out to explore. It's a lush, palm tree-studded landscape, and we pass villages with low Portuguese-style whitewashed houses, surrounded by bright green paddy fields. On the picture-perfect Palolem beach, 45 minutes' drive south, sun-worshippers make the most of the winter rays, and backpackers eat actual

food in restaurants – reminders of holidays in a parallel universe. It all feels a bit hectic in the real world, though, and it's nice to return to the cotton wool of the Beach House to watch families play cricket on the beach as the sun melts into the sea beyond the fence.

So would I categorise this retreat as a holiday? If your idea of one involves plentiful food and wine, seeing the sights and late nights, obviously not. But if you want to escape from the world for a while, and come back refreshed, with some helpful health tips, it could be for you.

■ A seven-night Total Body Rebalancing package at the Beach House (00 91 832 669 7777; thebeachhousegoa.com) costs £1,375. Other packages include a week's weight loss programme, from £1,110, and a five-night detox, from £850. Kingfisher (0800 047 0810; flyingfisher.com) flies to Goa from Heathrow (via Mumbai) from £520 return.

You drink fruit and vegetable juice and clear broth, with 28 supplements

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