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Besides the services on offer, the natural beauty of the Western Ghats adds a lot to the wellness factor at the Hilton Shillim.

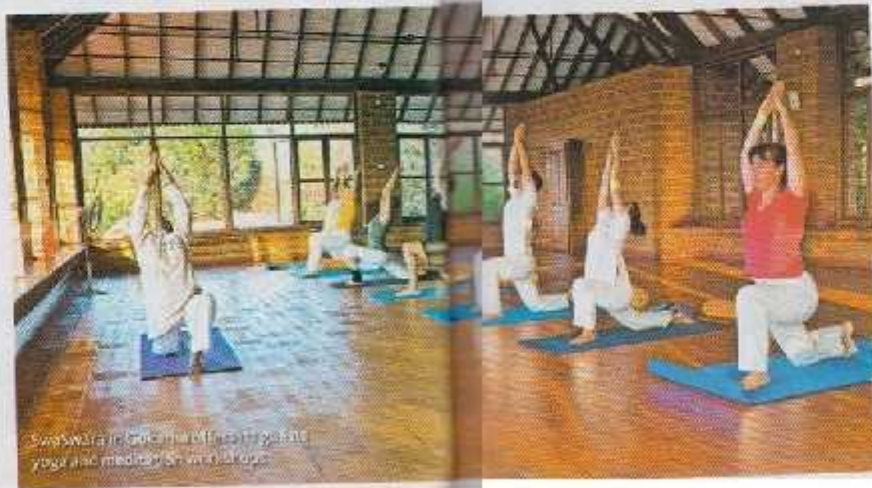
abroad were more interested in them than domestic guests. For the latter, these traditions have not held so much attraction until now, possibly because they have grown up on these. That, however, has changed in recent years. Mridula Jose, vice-president, product development and media/communications of the CGH Experience Hotels, which runs SvaSvara in Gokarna, explains that more and more Indians are choosing holidays that give them a holistic transformative experience.

Not just spas

So what exactly does a wellness holiday comprise? As Mridula specifies, this is more than just a spa experience.

"The healing traditions of India have always been inclusive of body, mind and spirit. In the west, wellness spa invariably translates into body pampering. However, now slowly everyone is moving into holistic well-being." So, at these destinations, wellness translates to a combination of yoga, meditation and wholesome diet, along with spa treatments that are rooted in India's ayurvedic tradition.

Both SvaSvara and Hilton Shillim have specifically designated areas for yoga, where a certified instructor takes visitors through various poses. The latter even has a Meditation Cave, where visitors can go for guided meditation sessions or to just meditate by themselves.



SvaSvara in Gokarna offers yoga, meditation and other wellness services.



Located in the Himalayas, the Chamdi Mountain Retreat offers healing practices that are rooted in the region.

Another example is Westin Mumbai Garden City, where emphasis is on the six pillars of wellness—feel well, work well, move well, eat well, sleep well and play well. So, besides offering yoga, meditation and spa services to its visitors, the hotel also encourages its patrons to stay fit while travelling. "Our guests may sometimes forget to pack workout clothes and shoes when they visit us. So we've started a programme where we lend out workout gear to our guests. Besides, we have trainers and instructors available, as well as a special walking track that we have created inside the property," says Stephanie D'Silva, director of sales and marketing.

What goes on the plates of visitors gets special attention, too. Both Hilton Shillim and SvaSvara grow their own herbs and vegetables and guests are encouraged to take an interest in farming. The organic produce grown here is then used in the hotel's kitchens. At the Westin Mumbai Garden City, on the other hand, a menu revolving around "superfoods" such as apples, dark chocolate, blackberries and spinach has been created.

Unique selling points

This does not mean that the con-

ventional holiday seeker won't find anything to do at these retreats. According to Uggen, Chapel, who owns the Chamdi Mountain Retreat in Bellary, Sikkim, the process of introducing guests to the idea of wellness holidays is an ongoing one. "About 70 per cent of our visitors are Indians and most of them are curious about the traditional Himalayan treatments we offer or the typical, wholesome Sikkimese fare," says Uggen. "At the same time, we do get many visitors who prefer to eat what they are used to eating and aren't very convinced by the idea of 'wellness'. We obviously don't force it, but we do try and introduce them to these ideas so that maybe they'll open up to them eventually."

Moreover, Uggen says, what will really set such holidays apart from the rest, Chamdi's USP for instance, lies in the healing traditions of the mountains. "Something like the traditional hot tubs, the Doobas are not very well known outside the region, but are traditions that we have grown up with," says Uggen. "Our visitors have quickly taken to the idea and we get many visitors for the treatment. It makes the Chamdi experience stand out, because you won't get this typical Sikkimese service anywhere else!" □