

LIVING  
IN-STYLE





# Where nature marries luxury

*A unique concept by Hilton hotels, The Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat and Spa houses probably the world's largest spa. With 99 ecologically designed luxurious villas and a restaurant that serves organic food, the retreat focuses on environment sustainability and holistic rejuvenation of the mind, body and soul, says **Jyoti Balani**.*





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Away from the hustle and bustle of Pune, Hilton hotel's first resort in India is set in the heart of the Western Ghats in Maharashtra, an unexplored location which is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. In fact, Shillim village was unheard of until this resort came up here. The hour and half drive from Pune to Shillim took us past villages, magnificent views of the picturesque expanse of Shillim valley and peaks of the Sahayadri mountain ranges. Those who travel from Mumbai airport will have to drive for two and a half hours. The retreat offers helicopter transfers on request which can transport a guest from Mumbai to Shillim in 30 minutes.

As we stepped into the resort which is spread over a massive 350 acres, all that the eye could see was greenery and vast open spaces, a refreshing change from the concrete jungle that Pune has become. A warm welcome by the friendly staff was accompanied with a refreshing drink and a muesli bar. A buggy transported us from the reception to a luxurious villa, which seemed to blend in harmoniously with the surroundings. Our villa came with a magnificent view of the Shillim valley, a garden and a private heated pool equipped with an outdoor shower. This stylishly designed villa featured a 47 inch HD TV in the living room and large glass doors with sheer curtains in both the living room as well

as the bedroom. The mini bar was equipped with an espresso coffee maker as well.

We were given a tour of the property which consisted of a visit to The Shillim Institute, the spa, the four villas, the restaurants and the Meditation Cave. All the 99 villas with living spaces of between 100 and 150 square meters have been constructed using local and natural materials. The Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat and Spa houses many kinds of accommodation options that include the King Deluxe Valley View Villa and King Spa Pool Villa. The spa villas and the spa pool villas fall into the spa zone and where one can avail of the conventional sauna, infrared sauna, outdoor hot tubs, hydrotherapy tubs as well as meditation sessions and yoga sessions. Even when the resort was being constructed, the objective was to avoid disrupting the natural surroundings as much as possible.

The Shillim institute offers guests a chance to gain insight into the indigenous culture and way of life by means of workshops, courses and excursions. The idea is to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Western Ghats and to promote discussions on sustainability in the region. The Meditation Cave is a perfect spot to go within as it has absolute stillness all around. The property tour was followed



by lunch at the Terrazzo, which is a multi cuisine restaurant. Post lunch an activity schedule was given to us, like a time table for the entire week.

For example, 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Sunday one could attend an Ayurveda talk on how to balance the body type at the Tea House and head for the Yoga Nidra Meditation at Meditation Cave from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in the evening. Aqua yoga, cycling, jogging, swimming, watching movies, herbal tours and tea discussions are other interesting options for activities. We chose to spend the afternoon at the spa which is spread out into seventy acres of land and has 17 individual treatment rooms that offer a variety of therapies such as Ayurvedic massages, acupuncture and acupressure, Reiki, Shamanic therapies, hydrotherapy and colour therapy. The treatment rooms are scattered throughout the valley such as the Ayurvedic treatment rooms with the traditional wooden table for Shirodhara, a Thai Therapy Room with a teak mattress stand, two beauty rooms complete with the latest hydraulic tables, a hydrotherapy room with a chromo-therapy couple's Jacuzzi, bodywork rooms and massage therapy villas. After a consultation with Dr. Rajneesh Kumar, The Spa Director, (who suggested that we try Release-by Sundari) we were escorted to the treatment room, an individually built

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*Picture Courtesy: Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat And Spa*



structure, located about 10 minutes walking distance from the spa reception. Release-by Sundari, a full body marma massage, blends mobilization techniques, positional release and breathing to soothe the body into a pain free range of motion where tensions melt away and new movement patterns become possible. The spa comes with an Antariksha Shanti Wet Zone where we were advised to relax after a spa treatment.

This zone consists of both conventional and infrared sauna facilities, a steam bath, a Jacuzzi and a large swimming pool for those who wish to go for a dip. Apart from Terrazzo,

we had an option to dine at The Green Table, their organic restaurant, or the Mountain Bar and Pool Bistro for regular fare.

We decided to try The Green Table where an interesting set menu for dinner was presented by the Chef De Cuisine. First up was the Shillim Garden Walk (greens grown in and around Shillim), followed by a creamy Porcini consommé, shitake, crispy bread and garlic chips. The main course featured a chicken accompanied by XO sauce, mushroom sauce with baby greens and mashed potatoes. This excellently plated meal ended with hazelnut chocolate accompanied with berry compote garnished with lemon curd and garden flowers. Chef de Cuisine Binit Pandey and his efficient team whip up a unique menu using only local organic produce, top quality meat and seafood sourced from sustainable fisheries. “The idea is to provide our guests with not just a world class gourmet experience but an emotionally rich experience that lays emphasis on simplicity and purity of the ingredients,” says Pandey.

The natural beauty of this retreat, interesting cuisine dished up by expert chefs that was complemented by efficient service ensured that we had a fabulous stay at Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat and Spa. This retreat is the quintessence of everything that luxury seeking travellers expect when it comes to rejuvenation amidst natural surroundings.