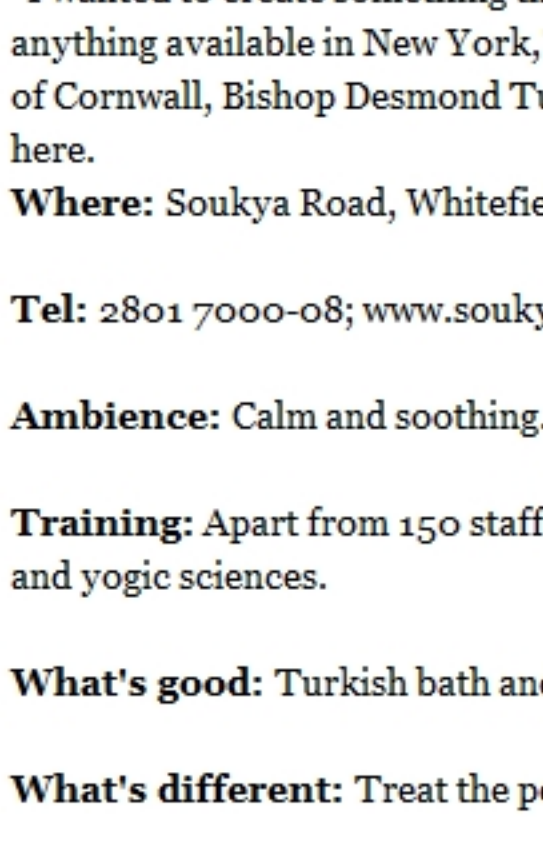


AYESHA ALEEM NA, JULY 27, 2011 | UPDATED 12:00 IST

Body treats

Actor Sanjay Khan, 70, launched Golden Palms in Bangalore more than 12 years ago. It was the city's first experience of a real spa. The next ten years saw spas mushrooming across the city. And the result is that one doesn't really need spa vacations to Thailand, Bali, Europe or even Kerala. An increased number of globetrotters, a thriving film industry and stressful lifestyles are some of the reasons that have helped support a growing fitness and wellness industry right here in the city.

Bangalore's best spas, fitness and wellness centres are in the spotlight this month. We bring you our take on the best spas and fitness centres, recommended by four panelists who are regulars at the finest spots in this category. Read on to know the places to drift in peace.



A guest at Soukya

Soukya

Rating: 9/10

Soukya, which means wellbeing in Sanskrit, believes in holistic healing through yoga, naturopathy, allopathy, homeopathy and Ayurvedic treatments. An Ashoka tree-lined driveway ending in a magnificent white fountain welcomes you to Soukya International Holistic Health Centre, a 30-acre lush green facility meant for those with serious ailments as well as those who want to experience the good life.

Dr Issac Mathai, 51, started Soukya 10 years ago. Trained in homeopathy at Harvard, London and W.H.O. Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine, China, he believes that no branch of medicine is solely capable of healing a person.

"I wanted to create something that should make an American's jaw drop and say this is better than anything available in New York," says Mathai. High profile guests such as Camilla Parker Bowles, Duchess of Cornwall, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Tina Turner and closer home, Geetanjali Kirloskar have been treated here.

Where: Soukya Road, Whitefield.

Tel: 2801 7000-08; www.soukya.com

Ambience: Calm and soothing. Bells throughout the property add to the charm.

Training: Apart from 150 staff there are eight doctors trained in homeopathy, Ayurveda, naturopathy and yogic sciences.

What's good: Turkish bath and Hydrotherapy.

What's different: Treat the person, not the disease.

Cost: Prices range between ₹2,750 per hour for medical programmes to ₹15,800 per day for wellness programmes.

Gold's Gym

Rating: 7.5/10

Gold's gym promotes unadulterated fitness facilities: no frills, nothing fancy. This place is for people who take their workout seriously. Spread across five floors, Gold's Gym on Convent Road is one of the seven properties of this global-fitness brand in the city. Gold's gym became popular after muscle man Arnold Schwarzenegger began using it.

Started in 1965 in Venice, California, Gold's Gym has grown into an expanding network of 720 fitness centres across 32 countries. Facilities include cardio, weight training, spinning on Schwinn bikes, power yoga, vinyasa yoga, zumba and mat pilates, among others.

Where: Mirza House, No.2, Convent Road.

Tel: 41477626/627/628; www.goldsgymbangalore.com

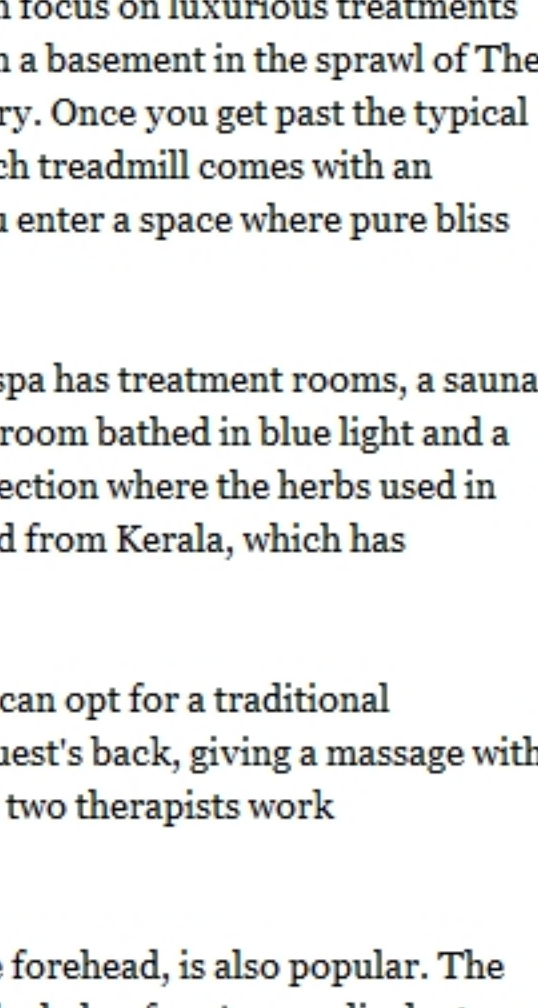
Ambience: Thumping music on each floor. Compact layout but not cramped.

Training: All trainers certified by Gold's University.

What's good: Weight training services.

What's different: Zumba classes are the rage here.

Cost: Flexible membership plans ranging from one day (₹386) to five years (₹55,150). Membership does not include group exercise sessions.



Model Sheetal Bidari at Gold's Gym

The Spa

Rating: 9/10

The Spa is an oasis of tranquillity, with focus on luxurious treatments and an ultimate experience. Located in a basement in the sprawl of The Leela, is house spa-a labyrinth of luxury. Once you get past the typical cardio area by the entrance, where each treadmill comes with an attached cable-enabled television, you enter a space where pure bliss takes over.

The western treatment section of the spa has treatment rooms, a sauna that uses hot stones, an intense steam room bathed in blue light and a whirlpool. Upstairs is the Ayurvedic section where the herbs used in the oils are on display. The beds in this section are made with Venga wood from Kerala, which has medicinal properties and helps enhance the effect of the massage.

One of the unique features of this spa is the Kalari room. Here the guests can opt for a traditional treatment where the masseuse uses a rope to balance her weight on the guest's back, giving a massage with her feet. This is followed by Abhiyanga, or synchronised massage, where two therapists work simultaneously.

Shirodhara massage, in which oil is poured through a hole in a pot, on the forehead, is also popular. The treatments here are tailored according to the guests' requirements with the help of an Ayurvedic doctor. **Where:** The Leela Palace, 23 Airport Road, Bangalore.

Tel: 25211234; www.theleela.com

Ambience: White marble floors, candles, soft music and soothing yellow lighting make for a perfect setting.

Training: All therapists in the western section are trained by Espa, UK.

What's good: Vichy Shower-a process where three kinds of scrubs are used. The treatment is finished with a body polish.

What's different: Despite being part of a large commercial venture, the spa has a very intimate feel to it

Cost: Treatments range from ₹800 to ₹5,000, and packages from ₹4,000 to ₹10,000 plus taxes.

Mirrors and Within

Rating: 9/10

About 18 years ago it was difficult to find a good salon in the city. That's when Nandini Alva, 49, and her sister, Sonia Vohra, 45, decided to start their own salon, Seniorita, which is now being managed by a different team. "In those days, beauty parlours were in garages and towels were not always washed after every use," says Vohra.

Both sisters have been trained at Christine Valmy in New York where they did sixmonth course in hair and makeup as well as at The London School of Beauty and Makeup. After Seniorita, the siblings then moved to The Taj West End and later the Oberoi and The Leela Palace, where they opened their own brand, Mirrors and Within, a salon-cum-spa.

"Star hotels in the city were chosen as locations because of the pre-created ambience as well as essential services such as hygienic laundry and ample parking space," says Vohra. Spread across 4,700 sq ft, their swanky property at UB City is the latest addition to their already successful venture.

Only nine months old, this outlet has already attracted the creme de la creme of the city. This spa-cum-salon boasts of private treatment rooms, stand alone rooms for bride and bridegroom and a larger room for more people.

Where: Ground Floor, UB City, Vittal Mallya Road.

Tel: 41738023/24/25

Ambience: Done in gold, bronze and brown, large circular mirrors, bright lights and dramatic fixtures grab your attention.

Training: Minimum seven to 10 years experience for senior staff. Trained under Sonia for skin treatments and by L'Oreal for hair treatments.

What's good: The facials here are unique and custom-made for specific skin types.

What's different: One of the few places in the city to do Keraskin treatments by L'Oreal.

Cost: Their most expensive facial is for ₹5,000; bride and groom, week-long packages range between ₹10,000-16,000.



Head fitness trainer Sameer Shetty

Before bringing his skills to Zela, Shetty worked as a fitness trainer with Shahrukh Khan for Chak de India and cricketers such as Virender Sehwag and Glenn Mc-Grath. Zela boasts of a spinning studio with 15 stations and a 6,000 sq ft gym with a separate cardio and weight training area.

Their USP is a 15-metre long indoor temperaturecontrolled swimming pool with an ozonator. This pumps in an extra molecule of oxygen so that less chlorine needs to be used to keep it clean. They also have strength machines by Cybex, USA, a provider of premium fitness equipment. The cross trainer and adaptive motion trainer machines are sourced from Precor, USA.

The shock-absorbant flooring from Mondo USA has been used in the group exercise room. Zela aims at providing fitness complete with customised fitness regimes and group exercises by Les Mills, a New Zealand-based group exercise routine that comes with its own trainers and music.

Where: The Residency, 133/1, ground Floor, Residency Road.

Tel: 43347000; www.zelalife.com.

Ambience: Plenty of glass and bright lights. There's Tarkett flooring from France in most of the rooms.

Training: The 15 instructors at Zela are trained under an in house programme called the Zela Personal Training Foundation.

What's good: Group exercise routines.

What's different: A luxury health club with a spa, and a swimming pool.

Cost: Membership plans range from six months to one year for all services. Prices vary according to peak hour and off-peak hour membership between ₹2,500-3,500 per month for individuals and about ₹6,000 per month for a couple.

Angsana

Rating: 9/10

This is one place on everyone's lips when asked about the ultimate spa experience in Bangalore. As if the treatments weren't enough, there are superb relaxation areas where guests can recline in lounge chairs while sipping on jasmine or green tea. Here, you can opt for an authentic Thai massage among numerous other treatments from the region.

Among the two couple therapy rooms at the UB City property, one comes with a whirlpool and steam facility, while the other comes with a panoramic view of the city on the twelfth floor. Angsana, a global hospitality brand, belongs to Banyan Tree, headquartered in Singapore. In Bangalore, interior designer Anjum Jung, 41, owns the three properties at UB City, Whitefield and in Doddaballapur, with her husband Omer, 42.

Where: UB City,Vittal Mallya Road.

Tel: 284 68892; www.angsana.com.

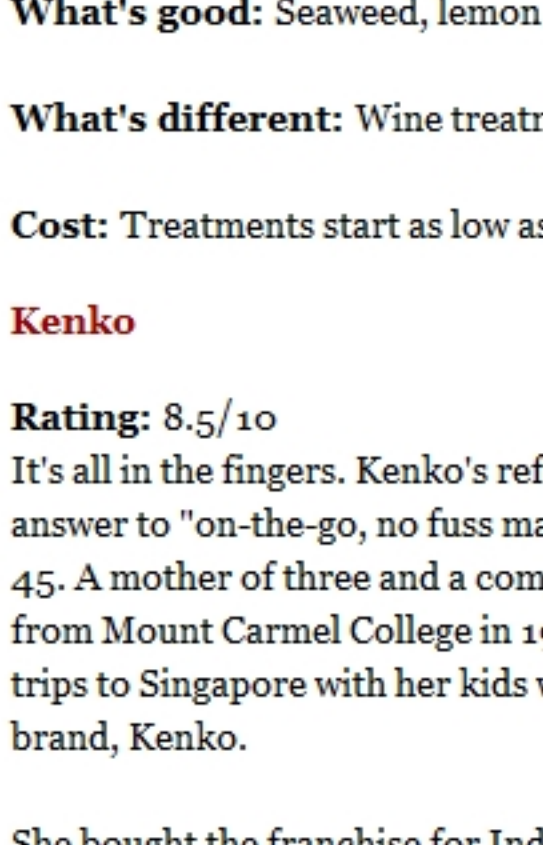
Ambience: Decor in warm colours, orange and brown, accented with gold pillows.

Training: All therapists are trained for a year by Banyan Tree in Phuket.

What's good: Angsana Massage and Fusion Massage (combines Thai and Swedish massage techniques).

What's different: No spa in the city comes close. This is the model that many other spas aspire to.

Cost: ₹1,500-4,500; couple's sessions ₹3,000-4,200 per person.



Asif Ahmed at Affinity

Affinity

Rating: 7/10

The city's who's who work out here and undergo makeovers. The brainchild of Asif Ahmed, 28, Affinity in Sadashivnagar was born in 2002. "The gym was not part of the plan initially," he says, of the five-floor structure that also has a spa. There's 1,100 sq ft group exercise area, where classes for hip hop, belly dancing and yoga are held.

There's a sound-proof spinning studio. And there are physiotherapists and nutritionists on call. The gym equipment is extensive with 10 treadmills, all of which come with attached cable-enabled television screens and are also connected to the local radio.

There are eight cross trainers, upright and reclining exercise bikes and a weight section. Ahmed used to work out but he hasn't been too regular lately. "I try to catch the weekly game of cricket in the neighbourhood." Now with a gym at his disposal, he hopes to be regular.

Where: 40/43, 8th Main, 5th Cross, Sadashivnagar.

Tel: 40896699/09; www.affinityinternational.com

Ambience: The salon is primarily white. Plenty of wood used on other floors, including the spa.

Training: Gym and spa manager,Arif Shaikh,has been certified by Canyon Ranch health resort in Arizona.

What's good: Summit trainers who combine the workout of cross trainers and stepper machines.

What's different: Summit trainers who combine the workout of cross trainers and stepper machines.

Cost: Monthly membership is ₹5,000 plus taxes. Spa treatments start at ₹1,000 plus taxes.

Oryza

Rating: 9/10

This plush spa is backed by two veterans in the beauty business: owner Latha Mohan, 53, and, the Kerastase brand of products for hair. Latha's stint with beauty began with Kanya's salon in Chennai 30 years ago. In 1985, she expanded the portfolio to include Oryza, a city day spa. Two years ago, the venture came to Bangalore, close to sister concern Bounce salon, which is operated by Mohan's children, Prarthana, 27, and Vikram, 31.

On Lavelle Road, Oryza is located in an old white bungalow. For those who don't know what Oryza means, it is a variety of Asian wild rice, which is used in many of the treatments here. Oryza offers an extensive range of Balinese and Thai therapies, hot stone treatments, Turkish bath, body treatments, wraps, facials and hot and cold infusions. The Oryza day packages mean a long session of total pampering, which also includes lunch.

Where: 19, Lavelle Road.

Tel: 41328320/21; www.oryzadayspa.com.

Ambience: Pastel colours and landscaped outdoors with a lingering aroma of sandalwood and orange blossom.

Training: The staff is from Indonesia. Trainers from Wat Pho School for Thai massage come in for sessions.

What's good: Lulur Javanese treatment with jasmine.

What's different: Wild rice is used in all the treatments.

Cost: ₹8,000 inclusive of taxes and complimentary lunch.

Manjul and her daughter Swati

Body Craft

Rating: 8.5/10

The family business takes on a completely new avatar: and a splendid one at that. Manjul Gupta, 54, owned a beauty salon in Dehra Dun, where her husband, Sushil, 61, a dermatologist in the army was posted. "I wasn't blessed with good skin and enrolled for a grooming course in Kolkata during my husband's posting there," she says. This was the beginning.

The couple then moved to Bangalore and Manjul opened a 2,500 sq ft parlour called Body Craft on Coles Road in 1999. Call it luck and fate or gut and grit, it became successful prompting the opening of an exclusive nail bar at Forum Mall in Koramangala in 2005. In 2006, the Indiranagar outlet was opened, which spreads across four floors.

Jayanagar is the largest property at 10,000 sq ft And finally, a big change from the small salon that once was, Manjul opened a flagship property in Ulsoor, with her home upstairs in December 2010. Body craft now has a staff of 300. The whole family is now involved in the business. Manjul's son, Sahil, 31, an MBA from IIT-Kharagpur, handles business and expansion plans.

Manjul's husband has clinics at all the Body Craft locations. Manjul's daughter Swati, 26, who also works with her mother, has trained with bigwigs Vidal Sassoon, Toni&Guy and Greasepaint makeup school in London.

Where: 1/3, Civil Station, Assaye Road.

Tel: 41469944/99002 48358; www.bodycraft.co.in.

Ambience: Plenty of white and bright lights.

Training: In house training programme.

What's good: Seaweed, lemon and green tea body scrub, jasmine and oatmeal body wrap.

What's different: Wine treatment, an anti-oxidant treatment from France.

Cost: Treatments start as low as ₹350 whereas spa services start at ₹1,000.

Kenko

Rating: 8.5/10

It's all in the fingers. Kenko's reflexology massages are Bangalore's answer to "on-the-go, no fuss massages," says owner Vandana Virwani, 45. A mother of three and a complete Bangalore girl (she graduated from Mount Carmel College in 1989). Virwani used to make frequent trips to Singapore with her kids when she came across local reflexology brand, Kenko.

She bought the franchise for India and started the first Kenko with fish spa treatment in April 2009 on Lavelle Road. "By focussing on pressure points, the blood circulation increases and it is possible to manage sinus-related problems, migraines and backaches." And in comparison to other places in the city that offer this service, Kenko is different because it has the technique worked out to treat a variety of ailments, she says. Her new company is still growing and that it will be some time before it grows to have all the services that a spa of its kind should.

Where: 36,Vittal Mallya Road.

Tel: 42070303/42110304; www.kenko.co.in


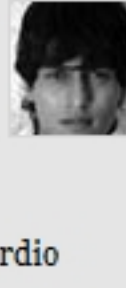
Ambience: White and tangy colours like touches of orange and lime green for a pristinespa-meets-funk look.

Training: Trainers come from Singapore twice a year.

What's good: The fish spa.

What's different: Ear candling.

Cost: ₹500 to 3,000 exclusive of taxes.

Panelists	
 <p>Geetanjali Kirloskar, Buissnesswoman A businesswoman, wife and mother, she tries to take out time for regular workout sessions.</p>	 <p>Zohab Yusuf, Model A popular model, he loves to pamper himself at the city's best retreats.</p>
 <p>Pashmeena Barker, Model A model and much-loved city face who enjoys her food, and burning it off during her cardio sessions.</p>	 <p>Adam Bidapa, Event manager His glamorous life means indulging in the most luxurious spas in the city Training.</p>

