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THE SPA GUIDE 2016

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spa reviews from
22 countries*

A GLOBAL GUIDE
TO THE GREATEST
SURF SPOTS

+ THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY RETREAT IN THE WORLD



TAJ FALAKNUMA PALACE HYDERABAD, INDIA

IN BRIEF Gentle downtime in a glorious hilltop mansion

THE LOWDOWN Once the property of Osman Ali Khan, seventh Nazir of Hyderabad and the richest man in the world (according to a 1937 *Time* cover story), here is a hotel that remains off the beaten track to almost everyone except true Indiaphiles. Thanks to its diamond mines, the Mughal stronghold of Hyderabad was so wealthy its nazirs could resist the encroachments of the British Raj to a much greater extent than the maharajahs of Jaipur and Udaipur. The sumptuousness of their palaces, even in ruins, as at the British Residency, puts a lot of what's on show in northern cities in the shade. You may well be the only Westerner wandering around Golconda Fort, with its harems and bathing pools, or through the fountained gardens of Chowmahalla. What's most agreeable is that, for all its comfort and formidable beauty, Falaknuma is a bargain compared to some palace hotels. And the place to collapse, stupefied by sightseeing, not to mention your driver's likely propensity to calmly take a short cut at a busy roundabout by driving around it the wrong way, is in the elegant Jiva Spa. Unlike the rest of the hotel (which has been restored to museum standard), it was newly built onto a wing of the building. And it is small. Four high-ceilinged, candle-lit treatment rooms open onto a long terrace with wicker day-beds overlooking one of the great lawns. There's a shop that sells essential oil of sandalwood and a stack of yoga books, and an ornamental pond. That's it. There certainly isn't a timetable crammed with classes or legions of practitioners. But it's enough. To start the day with pre-breakfast yoga under a banyan tree with teacher Muyrali and finish with a muscle-smoothing massage in the late afternoon when the heat has subsided is to wrap up your experience of Hyderabad nicely. It also leaves you primed to wander through the immense multi-chandeliered rooms before ending up on the Gol Bungalow terrace ready for dinner. There are two restaurants: Adaa serves traditional Hyderabadi dishes and Celeste has a lighter Mediterranean menu, so you can alternate between a robust biriyani one night and grilled sea bass the other, before heading back to the 1895 billiards table for a game before bed.

INSIDER TIP Shop for exquisite fabrics at Meena Bazar in the city.

BOOK IT Greaves India (+44 20 7487 9111; greavesindia.com) offers four nights from £1,750 per person, including breakfast, flights, transfers and a 60-minute spa treatment.