



A BEND IN THE GANGA

Inept at yoga, VENKY VEMBU finds solace in other soul-elevating experiences in Rishikesh

Sliding into the 'downward-facing dog' posture with what, to my untrained mind, appeared to be consummate canine felicity, I sensed the searing intensity of critical female eyes on my upraised posterior. "Raise your bum," the small-framed Mukta Ghosh, who was leading us through our break-of-dawn yogic regimen, cajoled me with disarming anatomical directness. "Straighten your knees."

But attaining perfection with the Adho Mukha Svanasana—one of a succession of postures in the Sun Salutation sequence—remained an enterprise way beyond the capabilities of my bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. And watching me flail around like a neurologically challenged dog with barely-concealed amusement, Mukta, I'm convinced, was readily able to diagnose the nature of my failing: I hadn't done

a stroke (or a stretch) of yoga for even a day of my life.

And, yet, here I was at the International Yoga Week in Rishikesh, alongside some of the supplest, nimblest bodies on planet earth, whose ability to contort themselves into the most complex of asanas glaringly showed up my own pathetic inadequacies of both body and mind. You couldn't have asked for a more propitious ambience for nourishing the spirit. Ganga Kinare, the boutique hotel that was hosting the yoga week, is situated right on a bank of the serenely flowing Ganga downriver from the town. And for a whole week every March, the place resonates with the collective yogic life-forces of practitioners from all over the world, who gather here for 70 hours of yoga and meditation and spiritual discourses.

But luckily for me, it isn't just diehard yogis who undergo soul-

elevating experiences at Ganga Kinare. Arriving at the hotel, I was received with sonorous Vedic chants: resident priests Rahul and Ankit assured me that the *swasti vachan sloka* that they had recited was intended to harness the cosmic forces so as to secure my well-being. And later that afternoon, Sagar Thokade, the Ayurveda doctor who has set up clinic in the artful hotel lobby, felt my pulse and diagnosed my body constitution as being of pitta-vata type and prescribed a dietary regimen optimised for my wellness.

Everything about the resort—from the healthful all-vegetarian menu at 'Holywater', the in-house restaurant that offers panoramic views of the Ganga, to the tender ministrations of the therapists at the Ayur Ganga spa—is primed for the rejuvenation of body and soul. And that's not even counting the beneficial effect of doing deep-

breathing in the lotus position from a balcony that affords spectacular vistas of India's mother river and of the Rajaji National Park just across. Or the calmness of mind that envelopes you at dusk, when the priests lead an enchanting *aarti* at the hotel's private ghat. It would be balm for the bruised soul of any clumsy 'downward-facing dog'.

The International Yoga Week (internationalyogaweek.com) is hosted in Rishikesh every March at Ganga Kinare (gangakinare.com), a 38-room boutique hotel that is uniquely located right on a bank of the Ganga. The resort has 20 Deluxe and 14 Super Deluxe guestrooms, and four superior suites; all rooms have a river-view. During the festival, the hotel offers packages starting at ₹22,000 per person (double occupancy, includes all meals and access to all yoga week programmes). reservations@himalayan-hotels.com; 91-8447404441