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OUTLOOK

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WELLNESS

Holidays in India



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Photos Courtesy OSHO INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION, PUNE

Sufi whirling at Osho Meditation Resort's lovely Buddha grove

OSHO RESORT

THE DYNAMIC MEDITATOR

Full name Osho International Meditation Resort

State Maharashtra **Place** Pune

Location Situated in the pleasant residential district of Koregaon Park next to Hotel Sunderban, in Pune, in western Maharashtra

Distance 163 km SE of Mumbai

Route from Mumbai NH4 (Mumbai-Pune Expressway) to Pune via Panvel and Lonavla; University, Engineering College, Bund Garden and other city roads to Osho Commune (see *Maharashtra Route Guide* on page 454)

■ BY SONIA NAZARETH

Under a cloudy blue sky, upon a road lined with trees, I make my way to Osho International Meditation Resort. At the registration desk, a maroon-robed figure accepts my driver's licence as photo identification, sends me for an on-the-spot HIV test and hands me a Meditation pass from which my picture grins out at me.

The 'Welcome Morning' is a trailer to experience at the resort. A lively woman who speaks in clipped English tones is our guide. She gesticulates — here a Meditation hall, there a restaurant, everywhere the sound of running water and chirruping birds. We've looked around. Smelt the coffee. Sampled the home-made cakes. Seen the mid-morning archery in Buddha Grove. Now we dance through a few meditations as part of our induction.

Meditation for me has always been about sitting in a corner, stilling myself. Here I learn that Meditation can be active. Osho says, "Either become completely aware so that whatsoever is happening just becomes objective, you are totally cut off from it, you become a witness. Or, get involved so completely that there is no witness at all, you have become whatsoever is happening — if you are dancing you have become the dance... Both lead to the same because deep down the real thing is not whether you get lost or remain alert. The real thing is to be total: totally lost or totally aware. In both cases you are fulfilling the condition of being total."

I start my day at 6 am with **Dynamic Meditation**. I leave my slippers along with my mind in the foyer and enter the gigantic, air-conditioned Meditation hall. Maroon mat on the floor, blindfold on to help keep my eyes shut, I listen to the instructions issued by a black-robed instructress. Soon I am breathing chaotically. Arms raised in the air, I jump up and down shouting, "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" And then we freeze. Before we dance.

The morning sunlight streams through Barkha's hair. This beautiful Japanese girl confides she grew up thinking that any noise above a whimper was impolite. She waves her hands in the air and says, "How free I now feel doing Dynamic Meditation where making 'big noise' and 'loud sounds' is okay." After the morning workout I've had thanks to Dynamic Meditation, I crave a hearty breakfast. But bread cannot be bought with money here. Vouchers are the medium of exchange within the campus.

Kundalini is the mellow brother of Dynamic. This Meditation involves shaking and dancing, but there is also sitting and stillness. In anticipation of sitting on the ground without a backrest, I head for the in-house store to buy a Meditation chair. In my eagerness to try it out, I drop my money voucher. I turn to see a maroon-clad figure slip it into her bra. I ask her for it. She feigns innocence. Not

everyone in a maroon robe is a saint. Not everyone in day-clothes is up to mischief.

A photographer is taking pictures for Osho Times. I follow him into *Osho Teerth*, the adjoining Zen Garden. Peering through his viewfinder, I marvel at pictures being made. A little child hugging the statue of the Buddha. A man lying upon a bench, lost in Meditation, by a thread of water. He stares intently through a clearing in the roof of trees at the blue eye of the sky. As the sun falls, we wander back through the poetry of twilight. The photographer tells me that this gloriously green 12-acre park was once a barren patch of brown earth with a dirty stream. Before I can say, "We have Osho to thank for this ecological transformation," he's quoting the visionary himself, "You are a guest. Leave this Earth a little more beautiful, a little more human, a little more lovable, a little more fragrant, for those unknown guests who will be following you."

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→ FAST FACTS

When to go The coolest and busiest time to visit is between November and February. June-September will be rainy but quieter

Contact

Osho International Foundation
17, Koregaon Park, Pune
Tel: 020-66019999
Fax: 66019990
Website: osho.com

How to book Call directly. If you have questions to ask, email works well. Payment is by cash, card or demand draft and would be required in advance

CAUTION An AIDS test is mandatory.

Children under 12 years need to be accompanied by a parent at all times

We pause for brownies and cream in the Plaza Café. Assorted folks stop by our table to chat. I learn that the highlight of the meditations at Osho really is **The Evening Meeting**. As dusk falls, the clear water body surrounding the Meditation hall glows beneath an indigo sky. A procession of shimmering white robes crosses the bridge to this pyramid-shaped structure. The meeting starts with high-energy music for dancing and includes three uninhibited shouts of "Osho". Raising our hands to the stars indicates the longing for higher consciousness. I listen to an **Osho discourse** on video.

Next is **Gibberish** and **Let-Go**. We are exhorted to make nonsense sounds. The whole body is involved. We chatter with our arms, face and vocal chords, but meaning is absent. This is "to break the habit of continual inner verbalisation". Another drumbeat and it is time for Let-Go. The voice from the front instructs us to fall like "bags of rice". At first I deposit myself gingerly upon my mat. But in the coming days I crumple with abandon to the floor, like a flower hungry for return

to the soil. The quiet symmetry of this picture breaks with the final drumbeat. Osho's voice guides our slumped forms back into sitting positions, with the reminder "to carry this experience of witnessing into our everyday activities".

Eager to take a slice of my experience home, I subscribe to the Osho SMS. This means that every single day for the rest of the year an Osho insight is going to wake me promptly at eight each dawn. I pay Rs 700 for this service.

When the day is done, when my urge to dance is stronger than my urge to retire, off I go to the costume party under the moon. After work, life here is a celebration. A dance. A full-moon Meditation under the stars. Dressed as a jester, I bob to a seductively pulsating rhythm. My seed bangles jangle to the sound of drums. Night falls like a mist on a sea of playful, joyous people.

ABOUT OSHO RESORT

Set within a lush green 40-acre campus, white marble pathway meets elegant

Osho Nadbrahma meditation at the Osho auditorium





Celebrating life — a Zorba-the-Buddha dance party

black building. Pyramidal structures. Tropical gardens. Jewel-coloured birds. International staff.

When I am in need of exercise, I swim in the giant pool, play table tennis and utilise the gym facilities. Sometimes I head for the sauna, jacuzzi or for one of the fitness classes — aerobics, body toning, aqua floating and Yoga. When I miss home, I wind my way to the cyber café, where I chat with my boyfriend in Spain over the inexpensive Internet phone service. And, although I did not engage his services, I am told that an on-site physician is available for consultation.

Elle magazine recommends Osho International Meditation Resort with all the praise at its command: "A very comfortable paradise where you can stay a long time, with low-budget hotels nearby and very good food in the commune, with meditations free. The atmosphere is really like a fairy tale. A paradise where all your emotional, bodily and spiritual needs are met. I can advise everybody to visit for a few days and walk

around that beautiful garden where everybody is friendly."

High Life is equally pleased: "It was the sheer beauty of the place that I first fell for. Meditation was in the very air."

TREATMENTS AND TARIFFS

The **Welcome Package** available for Rs 1,300 includes: the mandatory HIV test, entrance for a day, entry card and ticket to participate in a Welcome Morning session. For attendance on every subsequent day, Indians pay Rs 150, others Rs 450. Included in the price are meditations, dance celebrations in the Buddha Grove and classes like Tai Chi, Zen Archery, Gurdjieff Movements (subject to change depending on when you visit).

The daily meditations are **Dynamic, Kundalini** and the **Evening Meeting**. The various kinds of meditations often held at the resort include Nataraj, Nadabrahma, Chakra Sounds, Devavani, Gourishankar, Mahamudra, Mandala, Vipassana as well as Whirling.



Veg meals that cater to many tastes

Work as Meditation

Sitting in a quiet Meditation hall is one thing, staying centred and aware in a busy office trying to beat that deadline is quite another. That's why the Work-as-Meditation Programme is on offer at the resort.

'Work' is often considered as a series of tasks to be performed in order to meet some objective. But work, done in a state of awareness, can be a platform for personal growth because the performance of tasks brings to the surface a host of beliefs, conditionings, habits and values.

Under this programme, they actually allot you some work, ranging widely from designing on a computer to cooking. From gardening to translating. From taking care of new arrivals to cleaning the swimming pool. The idea is to challenge ourselves to watch the body and the mind, our patterns of thinking and feeling, and our knee-jerk reactions to people and situations (as opposed to responding meaningfully to them).

THE THERAPISTS

The therapists and staff are well qualified in their respective fields. For instance, **Gandha**, a specialist in Management Education and Training, works as counsellor in Osho Multiversity. **Yogendra**, who practised law for four years in Canada, is now director and legal council for Osho International Foundation. **Amrito**, an England trained physician, is currently applying principles of hypnotherapy here. There is a continuous change of programmes, depending on who the visiting therapists are.

ACCOMMODATION AT OSHO RESORT

The most convenient place to stay, especially as I want to attend the 6 am Dynamic Meditation, is the **Osho Guest House**. Here the rooms are tasteful but minimalist in design. Rays from unostentatious lampshade meet solitary picture on the wall. All rooms have attached bathrooms. When I'm staying alone, I pay Rs 4,180 a night. If my better half visits I am charged Rs 4,730. There is an additional 10 per cent luxury tax.

If I choose to visit for a longer period with my family and other animals, I can consider renting a place nearby. Single room accommodation, cycling distance from the ashram, is let out for about Rs 5,000 per month. The price includes an attached bath and kitchen facilities.

For more details, see Wellness Listings on pages 481-482

MEALS AT OSHO RESORT

For my last supper, I make for the beautiful poolside eatery where I tuck into a candle-lit repast of cooked-to-order items: coconut-carrot-orange cream soup, mushroom bake and apple pie.

The restaurant is named **Zorba The Buddha**. In his reflection from 'Death to Deathlessness', Osho says, "My discos,

my restaurants are called Zorba the Buddha. First I am a Zorba, and then I am a Buddha. And remember, if I have to choose between the two, I will choose Zorba, not Buddha... because the Zorba can always become the Buddha, but the Buddha becomes confined to his own holiness. He cannot go to the disco and become the Zorba. And to me, freedom is the highest value; there is nothing greater, more precious, than freedom."

When healthy buffet fare is what I'm after, I head for **Meera**. Most of the rice and vegetables adorning my plate are organically grown, while the water in my glass has been tested in the commune's own microbiology laboratory. Sweets and snacks are available in the **Plaza Café**.

Wine is permitted on campus. Smoking is permitted in special zones. Meat is not permitted anywhere.

SOUVENIRS

From **Galleria**, the in-house store, I come away with maroon and white robes that cost Rs 500 each and a Meditation mat that sets me back by Rs 250. I also frequent the Visitors' Centre bookstore and browse through stacks of Meditation CDs, books, audio books.... It goes without saying that there is just one author available in the shop: Osho. On sale are also a variety of mugs, magnets and cards inscribed with Osho quotes. ■

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→ GETTING THERE

Air Pune's Lohegaon Airport is connected to all major Indian cities including Hyderabad, Bangalore, Delhi, Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Chennai. You can also fly to Mumbai (163 km/ 3¹/₂ hrs). A private taxi from Mumbai to Pune will set you back by Rs 2,300-5,500 depending on the car you choose. KK Travels (check website kktravels.com for details) operates coaches from the airport to Pune (Rs 550)

Rail The city has two main railway stations, Pune and Shivaji Nagar. Most long-distance trains halt at Pune Railway Station. Alight here. The Deccan Queen is one of the popular trains between Mumbai and Pune, with AC chair cars. Autos charge Rs 50 to the resort

Road Traffic flows swiftly and smoothly on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway. In the event of a landslide during monsoons, the highway may be closed for a day or two but this is uncommon. Public and private buses ply between Mumbai and Pune at regular intervals. Shared taxis between the cities cost Rs 300-350 (non-AC) and Rs 400-450 (AC) per head

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