

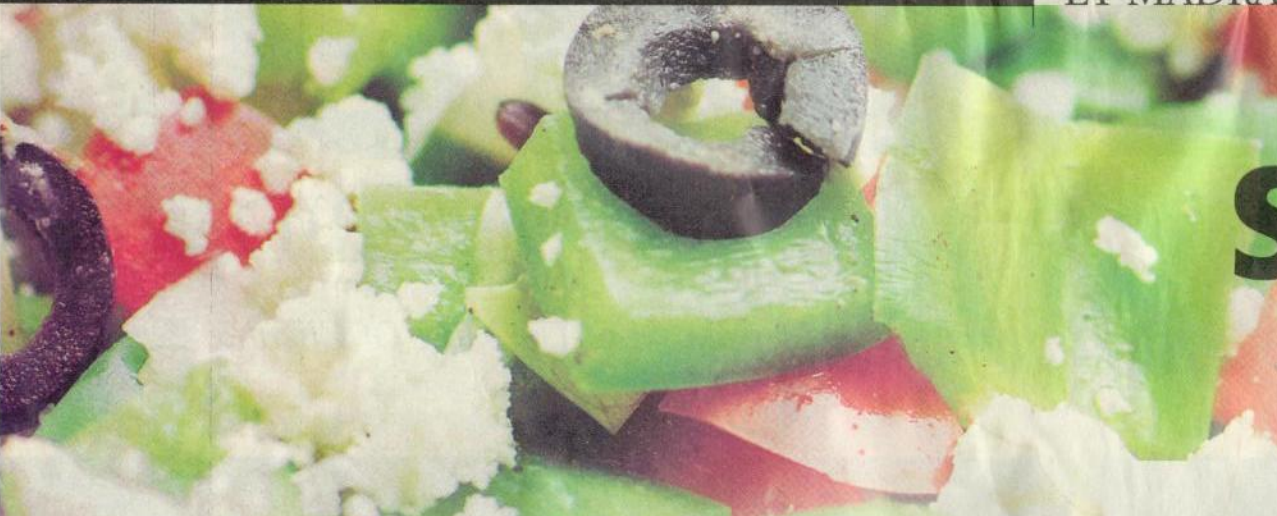
# 2 body, mind and soul

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ET MADRAS PLUS

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## Spiritual quotient

Aesthetically designed, Isha Life's Mahamudra provides food for the soul. Our food writer tells you more...



**G**oing round in circles around the frantically busy Luz Church Road in search of the Isha Life's newly opened restaurant and activity centre, reminded me that some of the best meals I have had is at various spiritual retreats. Of course, the seeker is expected to struggle up mountain paths, or jungle tracts to appreciate a greasy bowl of Yak tea mixed with barley, as I once did in Bhutan, or enjoy the frugal idly and podi that is the standard fare for visitors at the Ramana Maharshi Ashram at Thiruvanamalai. One of the best meals I have had is at the Po Ling monastery on Lantau Island near Hong Kong, but even though we slurped and chomped our way through many dishes, all vegetarian, the atmosphere was very spartan.

So, it was something of a surprise to walk into the oasis of tranquility and elegance that has been created right in the heart of one of the city's most crowded areas that form the Isha Life complex. The architecture not only makes the most of the existing old trees in the compound but also by the use of natural materials - pillars of semi-smooth granite, softly hand-shaped partition walls painted

white, floor tiles in sand and earth colours, red terracotta tiles used to line the ceiling and over-hanging roof of Laurie Baker style and plenty of natural light the designers have created a very restful-space. What makes the experience different is that besides introducing a



spiritual quotient that is obviously meant to promote the Isha Foundation's ideology, there is, for instance an extensive selection of audio and visual material on sale, a state-of-the-art spa, Ayurvedic massage, yoga, gym and a fitness centre with trained assistants on

the premise and a boutique that sells a special range of products designed and made by Isha volunteers, some of them with the help of the tribals. So, if you need to tune your body before heading for the restaurant, this is the place to be. They even refer to it as Inner Engineering.

The biggest surprise for me, however, was far from being offered Alfalfa juice by a smiling Maa Gambhiri, who is in charge of the centre. She explained that their philosophy as far as the restaurant goes is to encourage 50% indulgence - 50% healthy food. The menu is seriously attractive. It flirts with the idea of well-known international cocktails such as a Pina Colada but gives it to you in tall glasses misted with ice and decorated with the mandatory slice of pineapple, lime, or a sprig of mint, but without the alcohol. Maa Gambhiri is also a designer or has become one in the process of creating the restaurant in order (Isha plans to set up other centres in the major metropolises of the South) and some of the touches, such as the dinky bowls in black and orange to serve the salads and sauces, the glasses twined around with strips of bamboo and the matching

flatware are enchanting.

The Mahamudra Thali (Rs225) is a delicate mix of finely diced salads, delicious soups, crunchy vada, spinach poriyal, accompanied by spicy Akki roti, a truly delicious paneer and vegetable kurma, and a helping of Bisebela and curd rice, both made from broken wheat. With wheat curds and a dessert made from Sago and fruits, the meal is definitely a tribute to the imagination of Meena T, who has been in charge of feeding over two thousand members of the Isha Foundation at their headquarters.

So, if you need a bit of inner tinkering, head straight for the Isha Life centre.

Mahamudra is located at New No 117, Luz Church Road, Mylapore. Ph: 43535555



PHOTOS: A R. SUMANTH KUMAR