

How Forest Essentials is taking Ayurvedic luxury skincare global

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Mira Kulkarni, the managing director of Forest Essentials, on opening a store in London and promoting the idea of India through luxury beauty and skincare

It all started with a soap. Homemaker Mira Kulkarni was in New York, visiting her student son, when a friend suggested joining a handmade soap-making workshop as a way to enjoy the city and meet new people. Intrigued, she signed up. “They were using natural things like almonds to make a soap,” recalls Kulkarni. “I thought to myself, ‘It’s 2000. Why doesn’t India, despite all the Ayurveda history, the love for home remedies... have its own natural soap?’”

In Delhi, she posed this question to friends, family and Ayurveda experts. Their responses were similar: Who will spend ₹100 on a soap? This was a time when Khadi, the post-liberalisation baby that claimed to offer all things natural, hadn’t yet launched its colourful blocks of soap (they cost ₹240 a piece now) and the two-digit priced Lux soaps were perhaps the go-to in case you bought into the idea that it could give you the skin of Indian film stars. If you wanted a luxury experience, an imported soap was the only option.

Thus began Kulkarni’s “obsession” with creating an all-natural luxurious bath soap—for personal consumption.

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