

THE LUXURY SPA SPECIAL

WHERE TO GO TO
NOURISH YOUR MIND,
BODY AND SPIRIT



S T I L L L I E

THE SUNDAY TIMES

LUNA BIJL WEARING
BOTTEGA VENETA
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
DAVID FERRUA



CLAUDIA WINKLEMAN learns how to chew. It works wonders



I'M 48 AND CREAKY. I like a buttered roll and an early night. I can bore you rigid about bridge conventions and my perfect duvet tog. I can make your ears fall off when I explain which magnesium seems to work best in regards to sleep. I know. I want to move to Eastbourne and get a lazy puppy, I've started considering wearing thermals under my clothes, and

I'd like to have a long, in-depth conversation about knees and why they click 430 times a day. I should say I love doctors now more than ever. If you are a nurse or a surgeon or a doctor and I'm seated next to you at a dinner, you should move round the placement cards, you should say you're on call and leave, you should pretend you've dislocated your shoulder. I will ask you questions until you rip up your medical licence. You've been warned.

So, did I want to go somewhere where the views knock you off your feet, somewhere where the focus is just on you? Well, weird but sure. The Vivamayr Clinic promises that, with them, my health would be in good hands: they would analyse my diet, restructuring it with personalised meal plans, and administer many a complicated-sounding medical treatment (homotoxicology, anyone?). I loved the idea of feeling super-healthy, but obviously I couldn't go alone (seriously, swimming in Lake Me would be too dull without a bystander; I can barely get through a pedicure and I've had one facial in my life), so I took my 13-year-old daughter. Atop of all the healthiness, I was excited at the thought of spending an entire six days with my daughter, just us. I explained to the Vivamayr people that she should eat pizza, chocolate and as much schnitzel as possible, and thought it would be a serious problem. "But of course," they said, "you two will have fun."

That was it, we were off. We were told that we would be swimming an awful lot and to bring comfortable clothes and possibly walking boots. I knew almost nothing about the place. Someone said, "Ah, you're going to the poo hotel", but I didn't give it a second thought. We cuddled the boys and went to the airport (via Five Guys for a burger, you understand — it's important to bulk up before any health spa visit, I think you'll agree). We flew into Salzburg and a lovely human met us with cold towels and some water. I explained slowly that I didn't believe in water and only drank diet drinks and decaf coffee with about 18 sugars. He giggled and shook his head. Interesting, I thought to myself, as we whizzed past vending machines that sold exactly the kind of stuff I like to buy for a car journey.

Arriving in Altaussee is like being dropped off on a film set, it's like you're in a dream landscape that just might be the cover of a chocolate box. We were greeted by about the friendliest people on earth and were shown our room. "Today is fun and for settling in, please go swimming and enjoy the lake. The treatment starts tomorrow," they said. We threw on our robes and flopped about in the majestic saltwater pool, we chatted and giggled in one of the many extraordinary saunas, then headed to our room for a game of cards and some snacks.

What do we all love about hotels? Big towels, a comfy bed and a minibar. There's nothing that says holiday like a miniature Toblerone. Am I right? I can feel you nodding. No minibar, no sachet of peanuts, no tiny Mars bar. Just a jug of water. Ah, maybe they forgot, I ventured. We popped back to the lobby and asked quite innocently where the Pringles could be found. I have to hand it to the receptionist, she hid her shock and laughter extremely well and instead said there was tea. Oh well, a nice mug of English breakfast with milk and sugar would keep us going for a bit, I agreed. The tea selection makes the Harrods infusions department look like it hasn't restocked in a while. Tea for liver health, tea for sleep, tea for the heart, tea for an unsettled mind, tea for a settled mind, tea for mornings, tea for mid-mornings... The list went on. We drank a

TAN FRANCE gets naked and loses track of time



LET ME SET THE SCENE FOR YOU. Lake Como — do you know it? Located in the Italian Alps, it's all snow-capped mountains, green hills and crystal waters. One of the most charming things about the lake is that it's surrounded by some stunning villages and luxurious hotels. My gruelling work schedule means that my husband, Rob, and I spend a lot of time apart (I spent only 32 days in my own home last year), so having the chance to switch off, disconnect and recharge was just what my soul, and my body, needed.

The T Spa Suite at the Grand Hotel Tremezzo is more than just a spa. It's a private spa in a cottage, separate from the hotel's regular spa facilities. Yes, it's your own spa, just for you. Rob and I were booked in for a couple's treatment. After a morning of relaxing in our room, taking in the view, sipping coffee and eating pastries, we wandered lazily out of the hotel and up to the cottage, wearing plush robes and slippers. Obviously, I seized this style opportunity, cinching the belt high and pushing



particularly good brew and it was time for supper. We could have everything and anything on the menu, and it was delicious. We ate the most wonderful fish with unbelievable potatoes. We had soups, we had rice crackers and bread and every vegetable under the sun. "Baby, this is not a spa, this is glorious," I said, and we slept like small bears all snuggled up.

The next day I met Dr Dieter Resch, who is charming and clever and explained that, basically, what we've all got wrong is the way we chew our food. I put his mind at ease and said, "Don't worry, I don't chew at all — I inhale whatever is put in front of me," and expected to get my first gold star



of the week. This, I could tell, was not the right answer. Over the following five days, they taught me (please don't laugh) to chew. The bread at breakfast was like a rock, like an actual boulder. We've all had to deal with stale bread when we're rushed and haven't been to the shops, but it can be saved with a toaster and peanut butter. No. This was bread that you had to chew slowly. The first day I fought and fought and swallowed down enormous gulps, but by the end I couldn't finish a whole piece. In between the healthy eating (they kept their promise and my daughter could eat whatever she wanted, at any time), I had massages and we walked round Lake Altaussee. I like a walk and I like a lake, but this was something else. Even the photos don't do it justice. You'll think, "Ah, pleasant", but you need to see it to believe it.

Every day I had an abdominal massage (sounds horrific but was strangely soothing), and I tried drip infusions (I napped) and the most extraordinary underwater massage. There is the issue of cleansing your system. They'll offer salts, and apparently you can lose half a stone, but have to sit on the loo the whole time. I had a lake and my daughter and potatoes to eat! So I passed on the salts, but felt unbelievably healthy all the same. The spa has now opened the most majestic family apartments, featuring vast balconies, bonkers views, ridiculously comfy sink-in sofas and a huge kitchen. So I say a huge yes to the Vivamayr. I left feeling freakishly calm — a bit like the lake we walked round every day — and well rested and more knowledgeable about eating slower.

And my daughter? She loved the countryside, the extraordinary pool, the potatoes and all the chocolate we sneaked into our room. It's an amazing place — special, clever, delicious, with the best treatments on the planet. But go with family or friends, say no thanks to the salts, and make friends with the fish in the lake. It's heaven.

■ *Claudia Winkleman was a guest of Vivamayr Altaussee. Doubles from £305 a night, all-inclusive, based on two people sharing and excluding medical treatments; vivamayr.com*

up those sleeves for the most flattering shape.

Though modest on the outside, the spa suite is modern and luxurious on the inside, all warm wood, low lighting, subtle music — everything you'd expect from a top-notch spa. There is a cascade shower, a whirlpool tub, a massage bed, tea and sweets, a sauna and steam bath... and, like I said, it's all yours. It really is the ultimate experience of private pampering.

After a piping hot shower, we were escorted to the treatment room. The process began with a full-body salt scrub, followed by a facial and then hand, foot and body massage. I've had my fair share of massages, but this was on another level. Usually the best thing about a massage is that it makes me so relaxed, I fall asleep. This time, although I didn't fall asleep, I may have actually ceased to exist for a moment. I think I saw stars. At one point I'm pretty sure I observed the full loop of space and time in its entirety. We had deep-tissue massages using Santa Maria Novella products (from £130), lying side by side — exactly what our sore muscles needed after a workout earlier in the day. By the sounds of Rob's moans, his masseuse was as great as mine. We both felt as light as air. After what I can only assume was about an hour and a half (as I said, I left our current timeline for a while), our hosts whispered that they were finished and we had the cottage to ourselves.

So we spent the next hour walking around the place fully nude, eating chocolate and biscotti, before lying like starfish on a bed, then napping for 10 minutes and doing it all over again. The only way this otherworldly experience could be replicated is if you were married to a masseuse who was also a pastry chef and chocolatier, who owned a stately villa in the Italian Alps, liked to give you long massages and didn't mind if you wandered around the house without any clothes on. That's the only way.

The whole day was exactly what we'd hoped for. It just got better with each hour, and was so calm compared with my hectic everyday life. I love my job, but I wasn't ready to give up the splendour of this special place. We left knowing we will return very, very soon.

■ *Tan France was a guest of Grand Hotel Tremezzo. Doubles from £435 a night, B&B; the hotel reopens on March 13; grandhoteltremezzo.com*

THREE MORE TO LOVE



From left Borgo Santo Pietro, Palazzetto, Tuscany (borgosantopietro.com); Masseria Torre Maizza, Fasano, Puglia (roccofortehotels.com); Capri Palace, Capri (capripalace.com)