

THE SPA GUIDE 2016

When we started this guide four years ago, macrobiotics and kundalini yoga were a mystery to most, and in mainstream culture few people were embarking on fasting as a means of cleansing or eating chia seeds for breakfast. How things have changed. Health is now a perennial buzz word. As we juggle more and more in our lives, never has it been so imperative to feel energised and vibrant. Our guide is sponsored by the brilliant Healing Holidays, the expert tour operator when it comes to worldwide spas. It will do all the hard work for you: sourcing the best deals, the top rooms, the right therapists and, most importantly, the most suitable programmes. Meanwhile, we act as both an unbiased filter and as global detectives, seeking out the newest and most exciting places for recovery and re-emergence. This is a guide that *Condé Nast Traveller* takes very seriously. In no small way, our recommendations put your wellbeing in our hands. Which is why our team of experts have reviewed each place in person. We demand consistently high standards, excellent service and palpable results. In an uncertain world, no one wants to take a gamble when it comes to health and happiness.

This guide is about just that. We hope that within it you will find the solutions you seek.

DAISY FINER, SPA GUIDE EDITOR AND ISSY VON SIMSON, DEPUTY SPA GUIDE EDITOR



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THIS YEAR'S WINNERS

MOST LIFE-CHANGING RETREAT VANA, INDIA (P62)

BEST MENTAL RECOVERY SPACE EREMITO, ITALY (P18)

MOST PROGRESSIVE SPA PALACE MERANO, ESPACE HENRI CHENOT, ITALY (P22)

MOST INDULGENT ESCAPE SIX SENSES DOURO VALLEY, PORTUGAL (P28)

BEST HOLISTIC HIDEAWAY FOUR SEASONS RESORT AT LANDAA GIRAAVARU, MALDIVES (P6)

MOST DIRECTIONAL CLINIC SHA WELLNESS CLINIC, SPAIN (P34)

BEST DESTINATION SPA KAMALAYA, THAILAND (P5)

MOST EFFECTIVE MEDI-SPA LANSEHOF TEGERNSEE, GERMANY (P44)

BEST FITNESS PROGRAMME BODYISM AT THE CAPRI PALACE, ITALY (P59)

ON THE COVER: LA SULTANA OUALIDIA HOTEL, MOROCCO (WWW.LASULTANAHOTELS.COM) PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAMES MEAKIN
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CALMING THE STORM

THE INDIVIDUAL Despite her ostensibly perfect life, a woman who feels a failure after suffering post-natal depression and completely changing from the person she once was

THE REMEDY Gentle nurturing at Europe's best-value Ayurveda resort Sonnhof

They called it 'the cure' at the spa. I craved it, but that also made me think of the Bob Dylan lyrics about staying up for days in the Chelsea Hotel. People flock to Sonnhof for its intensive detoxification and rejuvenation programmes, but I was here to banish the anxiety that arrived in my life like an unwanted house guest three years ago, when I was knocked sideways by post-natal depression not once, but twice. It terrified me, rising up like a macabre jack-in-the-box. That vicious internal voice mocked me relentlessly, telling me I was a failure and fraud, a pathetic excuse for a woman beside my dazzling elder sisters. Grief added an extra shot of misery as my mother died after an agonisingly long illness when I was pregnant with my youngest.

A combination of cognitive behavioural therapy and time had slammed the lid on the darkest depression, but the anxiety still jogged along beside me. Even during the lulls, when I walked a tightrope of happiness, I was wary of the moment it would pop up. Sleep, of course, was part of it. With two children under three – to say nothing of a teenager facing GCSEs and a pre-pubescent 12-year-old – sleep was a rare commodity. I'd wake at 4.30am with a stack of worries pressing on my chest. This was topped off with guilt, as from the outside I had everything: four sweet children; a publishing deal I'd worked a decade to earn; the full country-house fantasy of ponies, chickens and rolling gardens, and a husband who I truly believe is the best in the world. Admitting I felt like an utter failure made everything much, much worse.

My husband was patient, but since he lived with a weeping bag of nerves rather than the feisty party girl he'd married, he wanted me to be happy, and so sent me to Austria. Sonnhof specialises in European Ayurveda. I associated this holistic Sanskrit term with the Buddhist temples of India. Instead, I arrived at a hotel that looked like a ski lodge in the Tyrolean Alps with three inches of snow blanketing the frozen ground.

It is a curious mixture of calm Germanic order combined with copious bells and smells, including daily yoga and meditation sessions, a spa specialising in sophisticated Ayurvedic massages and a kitchen that majors largely in vegetarian food with the odd treat of Alpine cheese or salmon steak. Heat is central to Ayurvedic practices, so there are numerous saunas and steam rooms. Specialist Gaurav Sharma gave me a pulse

diagnosis and confirmed my constitution was pitta: prone to anger but courageous, with an aversion to heat. On the first day I was prescribed a full-body massage called Abhyanga, a herbal-clay sauna and late-afternoon Padabhyanga foot massage, followed by bedtime meditation – I was slathered in oil and sat there feeling self-conscious, surrounded by flagrant nudity. For the first 24 hours I was impatient. I fretted and frowned, pacing down corridors past Buddhas and joss sticks, feeling about as relaxed as a turkey preparing to be basted and roasted before Christmas. I pecked at the Ayurvedic salads, experimenting with cashew pastes and quinoa mash, and Skyped my kids, who complained they'd run out of Nutella. That night I fidgeted around my boiling-hot room before resentfully curling up like a Labrador in disgrace. This was never going to work.

Then something remarkable happened: I closed my eyes and slept. Ten hours of solid-gold sleep. By the second day I'd have renounced my family to move to an ashram if they'd told me to. I worked through the full treatment menu, basking in heavenly Mukha Abhyanga, a massage targeting insomnia and anxiety, followed by time in the bio-sauna before letting my mind drift away in the Swasthya peace room.

During my nutritional analysis, the wonderful Malini

Häuslmeier, who is also a psychotherapist, told me I must include more beans and pulses in my diet and a daily tonic of saffron threads mixed with honey and warm milk. 'It will be the mother's milk you're lacking, but that you pour every day, year after year, into your children,' she said. Later, as hot oil was drizzled over my forehead for 30 minutes during Shiroabhyanga, I silently cried. Hot, fat tears ran down my face as I felt a thread that had been tangled up inside me suddenly pull tight, then release. For the first time in 15 years, I felt the same compassion for myself that I usually save for my children.

In just five days, Sonnhof gave me that precious gift of calm perspective. Sleep is easier. Anxiety is part of my character, but it's no longer the panther that stalked me, more like a domestic cat I can tame into submission. On the final day I walked in the hills, through whispering pines and fresh snow into the shrill, brilliant Alpine air. Being alone felt electric. I saw myself from a distance, not a failure now, but the heroine of my own personal snow globe.

MY HUSBAND WAS PATIENT BUT HE WAS LIVING WITH A WEEPING BAG OF NERVES RATHER THAN THE FEISTY PARTY GIRL HE'D MARRIED

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a three-night Ayurveda Taster programme from £799 per person full board, including flights, transfers, yoga, meditation and two treatments as per the programme. Healing Holidays is the sole booking operator for Ayurveda Resort Sonnhof



PARKHOTEL IGLS

In-the-know devotees flock to Parkhotel Igls for its emphasis on nutrition, exercise and regeneration, based on Modern Mayr Medicine. Winner of Most Effective Medi-Spa in the Condé Nast Traveller 2015 Spa awards, it continues to innovate this branch of medicine under the expert direction of Dr Peter Gartner. Mayr is the theory that modern syndromes often have their origin in the digestive system, with symptoms improved or even eliminated via diet, exercise and lifestyle changes. At Parkhotel Igls, Mayr is based on six principles: resting the digestive tract via diet, cleansing the system via 'bitter water' and increased fluid intake, learning how to chew properly and adjusting dietary habits, supplementing, exercising and self-discovery. A basic programme covers examinations, a Modern Mayr Cuisine plan (seven dietary stages), group exercise, lifestyle management as well as use of the excellent facilities. This is then combined with a treatment module: Metabolism & Detox, Mayr De-Stress, Mayr Classic or Mayr Intensive – all are pure therapy. Whatever the issue, Parkhotel Igls can tailor a solution. **Healing Holidays (0207 843 3592; www.healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) can arrange a 4-night stay from £1,129 per person sharing a standard double room. This includes flights, transfers, tailored Mayr Cuisine, a medical health check, weekly activity programme and five treatments.**

AYURVEDA RESORT SONNHOF

Tyrol meets India at this unique 30-room mountain retreat. For the last 15 years the Maurscher family has been honing Ayurveda to suit European lifestyle, climate and culinary habits – their efforts resulting in Sonnhof owning the registered international trademark for European Ayurveda®. Guests come to discover a healthy holistic lifestyle, without the long-haul flight. GP and naturopath Dr Alestin Sinop works alongside Ayurvedic practitioner Dr Gaurav Sharma to amazing effect. Programmes range from short or intensive AyurDetox treatments to the 'queen' of Ayurvedic treatments, Panchakarma. A newly extended AyurvedaCentre incorporates an indoor pool, energy fountain, Finnish sauna, eucalyptus steam room, heat therapy in three themed saunas: Kapha, Pitta and Vata plus sun and moon saunas. There's a fitness room, peace room, Ayurveda lounge, 12 treatment rooms named after Indian gods and an energy garden. There's oodles of yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, a made-to-measure Ayurvedic diet and some of the best oil massages you'll ever come across. 'I feel good' is the spa's maxim – something we totally agree with. **Healing Holidays (0207 843 3592; www.healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) can arrange a 3-night Ayurveda Tester programme from £799.00 per person sharing. This includes flights, transfers, accommodation in a Tirol standard double room, full board, access to a weekly programme of yoga and meditation, use of the AyurvedaCentre and two treatments as per the Ayurveda Tester programme.**



mountain TRIO

Feel uplifted by views of snowy peaks, breathe in the purest air, eat nutritious food, sleep soundly, and be pampered from head to foot: this trio of Austrian spa retreats are perfect short-haul pick-me-ups



SPA-HOTEL JAGDHOF

At the heart of the pretty Tyrolean resort of Neustift is the award-winning Spa-Hotel Jagdhof, home to one of Austria's largest destination spas. This is a wellbeing wonderland, with an A to Z of facilities spreading over 3,000 square metres. In Vitality World there are 20 different saunas, bath and relaxation areas including a saltwater inhalation grotto, amethyst steam grotto, Kneipp circuit and relaxation area complete with stary ceiling. If that wasn't enough, Joyful has 12 treatment rooms offering an array of facials, massages, anti-ageing treatments and spa rituals using REN skincare – exclusive to Austria. Treatments are followed by a period of time out in the new Spa Chalet, a Tyrolean ode to relaxation, complete with Tea Bar & Lounge, freshwater plunge pool and sauna garden. Another recent addition is the fabulous Private Spa Suite, an intimate space with two treatment beds, a Finnish sauna, aromatherapy steam shower, infinity pool and double hammock loungers looking out over the Stubai glacier. This wellbeing labyrinth is worthy of every one of its awards. **Healing Holidays (0207 843 3592; www.healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) can arrange a 4-night stay in a Bergstall superior double room at Spa-Hotel Jagdhof from £799.00 per person sharing. This includes flights, transfers, half board and use of the Spa.**

Healing  Holidays

For further information call Healing Holidays on 020 7843 3592 or visit healingholidays.co.uk/condenast