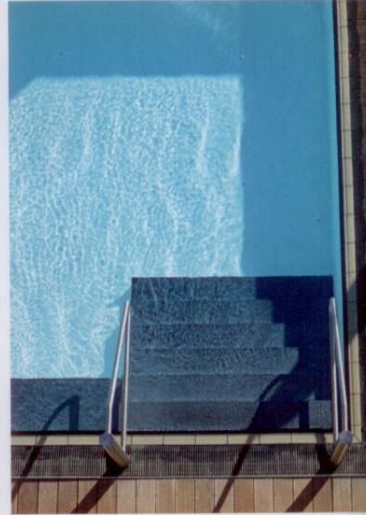
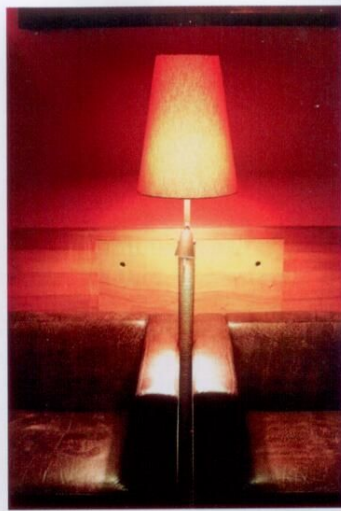




**2018
WINNER**
BEST FAMILY
GETAWAY



SCHLOSS ELMAU BAVARIA, GERMANY

KEEN-EYED GERMAN EFFICIENCY PLUS ASIAN KNOW-HOW NEAR THE BLACK FOREST

At this end of the Elmau valley, where the road peters out, mountain peaks dominate the horizon and the air is nose-tingly bright – civilisation feels far away. Lush green pastures are dotted with shepherds' huts and edged by dark thickets of pine. It's a setting so pristine and cut off from the world that they held the G7 summit here, the entire basin cordoned off with tanks so that Obama, Merkel, Cameron could gather in what is more regularly the yoga room to chew over world policy. Hopefully they managed to dip into one of the four spas, because they are truly excellent. This is not just somewhere to slink to for a soothing massage or cleansing facial (though they are available, of course). The emphasis is on physical healing at a deeper level. The wellbeing programme was initially set up on the basis of the five senses, the most important being touch. But intuitive and motivated spa director Dr Imke König introduced traditional Chinese medicine 18 months ago as a response to not being able to treat guests' ailments with touch alone. The teaching of traditional healing arts in Germany has a long-standing pedigree and the experts on the ground are first class. There is lots of energy work focusing on clearing chi, aromatherapy, qigong, dynamic yoga and acupuncture, all done with the curtains open to let in serotonin-encouraging daylight. A probing, deep-tissue tuina session with Dennis Neubauer is not the sort of massage you nod off in. Instead, the attention is on releasing emotional blockages, which can be excruciating as he works right in under your armpits to reach knots you never knew you had. But more gentle treatments such as cupping and moxibustion, acupressure and Ayurvedic practices are also on the exten-

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sive but considered list of therapies. Plus there's a hammam to beat all hammams, a huge space of hot and cool chambers complementing the six pools (one indoor and five outside, where steam rises up in winter and sun beds are laid out around in summer) and a wooden deck where morning yoga classes take place. The main castle, built by Dr Johannes Müller 100 years ago, was more recently remodelled by his grandson. Various additions over the years culminated in the construction of The Retreat, the part you want to stay in. Huge picture windows let in that sharp mountain light, Andrew Martin fabrics bring texture and, with filament strips and polished concrete in the bathrooms, it's certainly not Alpine twee. This all makes it sound terrifically grown-up but children are fully embraced too: the smallest can crash around the welcoming kids' club and the older ones have the run of

the grounds, with den-making in the forests, bicycles to roam far and wide on, and daily activities. They even have a spa all to themselves, with saunas, steam baths, swimming lessons and a family relaxation room.

As the heads of state probably didn't have time to discover, here is an utterly safe wellness wonderland in a fairy-tale setting.

INSIDER TIP Make an appointment with Marina Nemes, the gifted young Croatian physiotherapist, who has a particular interest in how external energies impose upon the body. After an hour with her you walk taller.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a five-night Wellness Experience from £1,580 per person, half board, including flights, transfers, weekly activities, spa access and a dining voucher for about £44 per person.