



ABOVE,
FERCHENSEE
LAKE. BELOW,
ROOFTOP POOL.
LEFT, DAUGHTER
TALLULAH

SCHLOSS ELMAU KRUN, GERMANY

Kids' clubs. They're a deal-breaker. Guilt-free spa-going needs an all-singing, all-dancing cracker. Leaving junior with a face like thunder in a scruffy, stuffy little room while you flee to more salubrious surroundings is not the best start to a massage.

So we opted for Schloss Elmau, a fairytale castle at the foot of the Bavarian Alps, surrounded by thick, Hansel and Gretel forests. We'd heard they had a stonking spa and best-in-class childcare, thanks to amiable owner (and father of six) Dietmar Müller-Elmau. He has cracked the code to the family/spa combo. So there's a swashbuckling club, run by bouncy, bright, capable staff. My seven-year-old, Tallulah, tore around the meadows, playing hide-and-seek with her new besties, making twig-and-paper boats and floating them merrily down the stream. She arched (with arrows), climbed, trampolined and swam, all the while gulping lungfuls of mountain air. And there's a child-friendly family spa (really), where whole clans flock to wallow in the pool, sauna and steam rooms like animals at a watering hole.

But here's the best bit: there's also an enormous, three-storey adult-only spa AND a brand new retreat with its own yoga pavilion. Content in the knowledge that my little socialite was happy, I had so much time on my hands that I didn't know what to do first. Laps in the warm-as-bathwater outdoor salty pool? Take a Jivamukti yoga class with views of the so-near-you-could-touch-them snowy mountains? Hit the enormous hammam? Book in for a magic-hands massage?

All of the above, please, starting with the physio floating massage, created by the spa's director, Dr Imke König. I floated in the warm saltwater pool while she swirled me this way and that and massaged my muscles using a special balm. I went straight back for another one the next day. There was also the Alpine fitness massage that kicked off with a mudpack followed by a hefty seeing to with anti-inflammatory Tyrolean stone oil. And the signature facial included an eyebrow tidy – clever.

We reunited for meals but, come suppertime at the buffet in La Salle restaurant, something magical happened. Just as my daughter finished her food, little eyes met each other around the room. There were nods, a scraping back of chairs and – poof! They were gone. The kids' club had sprung into action again. YES! From 6-9pm. They'd be off for an evening swim, a debate in the library and a torchlit walk, leaving us alone together once more. Did that make us bad parents? Nah – just more relaxed, fun and, in our own way, happily schloss'd. **Suzanne Duckett**

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