



How a spa visit eased one man's long Covid symptoms

The film director Nick Love went to SHA in Spain as a spa sceptic. He returned a changed man



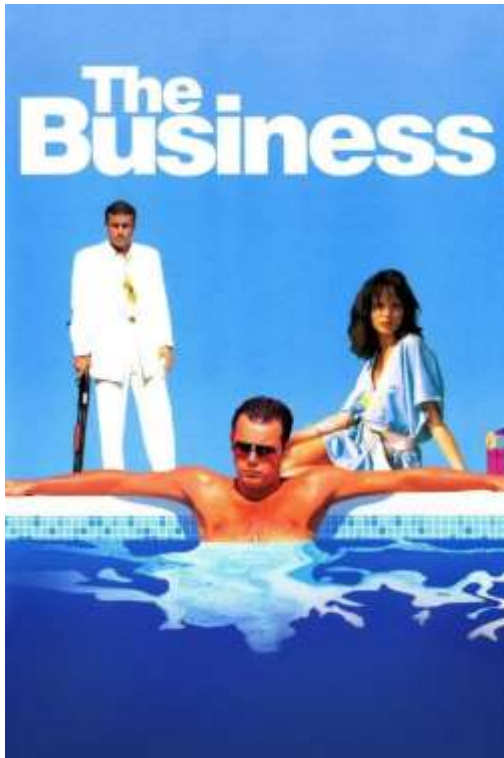
Nick Love recreating his film, *The Business*, at SHA Wellness Clinic in Spain

Nick Love

Saturday September 04 2021, 12.01am, The Times

I am lying on a bed in a nappy in a sterile room as a stout woman, who in another life could be an Olympian, is heading for me with a pipe in her hand. Moments later the pipe is inside me and I am being flushed clean. I fear that, with one false move, the white room will turn a different colour.

I have suffered post-Covid symptoms for several months. Feeling genuinely worried that the constant fatigue, respiratory problems and relentless brain fog would never end, I decided to visit SHA Wellness Clinic in Spain to trial a new post-Covid programme that claims to be able to reboot the system. (A pipe in the arse – colonic irrigation to the uninformed – is one of the more familiar ways to cleanse and reset the body.)



Intensely sceptical but desperate, I signed up to the seven-day programme. I imagined it would be like one of those German madhouses where they starve you while you hungrily climb the walls with foul fast-breath. But the macrobiotic-inspired food at SHA – despite being calorie-restricted and free of salt, sugar and animals – was surprisingly tasty.

Arrogantly, I arrived thinking: “Oh well, if the Covid programme’s rubbish, a nice holiday will do.” But I instantly liked this gaff – a place where you might bump into Patrick Bateman – with its wedding-cake white buildings and sleek medical wellness facility, its amazing rooftop ozone swimming pool with

views of the Sierra Helada mountains. How wrong I would have been to ignore the incredible specialists and therapies on offer.

My week started with a consultation with Dr Vicente Mera, the clinic’s head of internal medicine and anti-ageing. Within minutes of talking to him about the past few months of feeling physically vacant and, dare I admit it, depressed, I felt he really knew what was going on inside my body. He didn’t claim to know how Covid discriminates or why people less fit than me don’t have post-viral fatigue. But he tailored my programme to include breathing techniques to help stimulate my depleted respiratory system, sessions with Professor Bruno Ribeiro, who leads the cognitive behaviour department and would help clear my brain fog with photobiomodulation, and physiotherapy to repair some of the physical damage Covid has inflicted. He did suggest psychotherapy, but I passed, seeing as I’ve been in therapy most of my adult life and am still an unhinged lunatic.

I spent nearly every morning lying on a rush mat learning pranayama breathing techniques and by the second session I wept in front of a woman I had never met before. She was so calm, without being a Notting Hill pseudo-guru, that I followed her every word. By the end of the week, I could feel my chest fill with air for the first time in nine months.

Next was Ribeiro, who had me kick back in a Parker Knoll recliner wearing a “photo biomodulator hat”, which delivered intense light to stimulate the mitochondria in my brain, to kick-start my frontal cortex. After three sessions I went from feeling sluggish and discombobulated to almost hyperactive and talking bollocks again. Boy, I’d missed my vim and vigour, although I am not sure my girlfriend felt the same.

The final part was seeing the physiotherapist Dr Jose Luis Tabueña, who looked like Pep Guardiola, but less surprised, and such a dish that I really didn’t object to him getting his hands on me. He took one look at me and said: “Do you box?” After years of boxing training, my shoulder and hip had a fair amount of wear and tear, and he explained that Covid likes to attack any weakness in the body. (I am lucky that it was my shoulder and not my kidneys or liver.) He set about using electromagnetic pulse acupuncture on my various ailments, and within days I had a freedom of movement I hadn’t felt in years.

With little faith in my symptoms improving, I went to SHA for a rest and some sun more than anything else. But I got a hell of a lot more than I bargained for. I think a leap of faith is required to allow the various therapies and procedures to work, but there’s nothing like debilitating pain to humble a person and open the mind. And without question I came home feeling wholly different to the broken man that had turned up.

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com) can arrange a seven-night post-Covid programme at SHA (shawellnessclinic.com) from £3,549 per person sharing, including British Airways flights, transfers, full-board accommodation and treatments