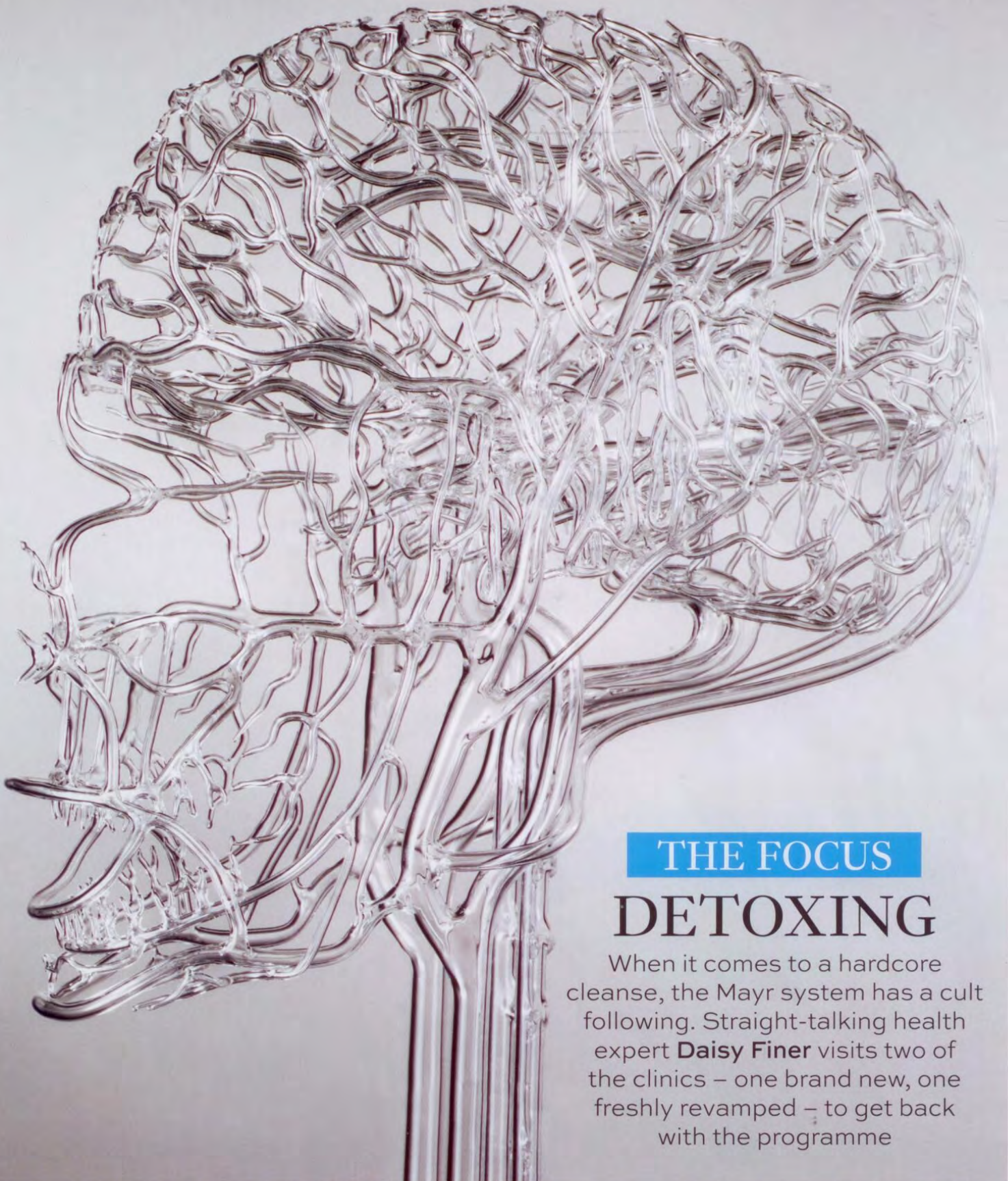


# THE EXPERTS

This month's Health Gadgets Advice

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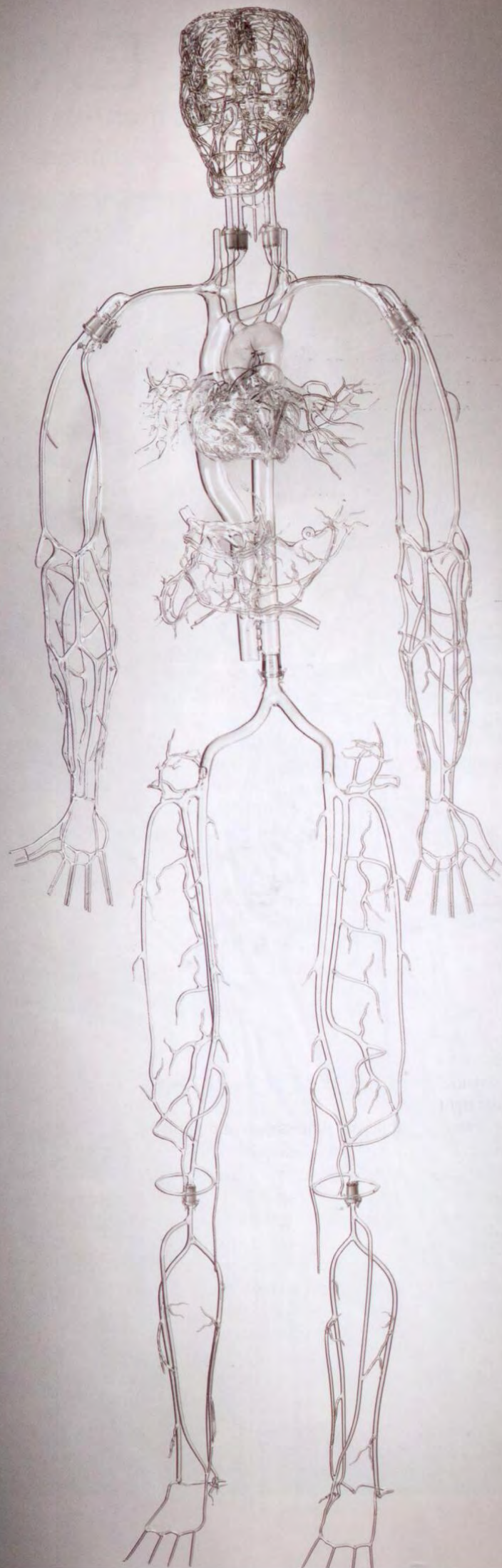


## THE FOCUS

### DETOXING

When it comes to a hardcore cleanse, the Mayr system has a cult following. Straight-talking health expert **Daisy Finer** visits two of the clinics – one brand new, one freshly revamped – to get back with the programme







I HAD THOUGHT it would be hard to improve on Austria's Viva Maria Wörth. It has always been my favourite of all the Mayr clinics, of which there are now more than half a dozen, including the Original FX Mayr Health Center just 15 minutes down the road. But I am happy to report that after a year's closure for an extensive revamp, the whole place has now got extra sparkle. The renovation has been subtle: new lifts so you can dash to your room when the Epsom salts set in, a whole new tea bar and chic sitting room downstairs, a swanky medi area, all white-on-white, and, cleverest of all, a reshift of vistas so the focus really is on the view of that impossibly pretty lake and the mountains beyond. You can even now soak up the panorama from the tub; a window in the bathroom means you are never without a reminder of the Alpine pureness outside.

This is the only Mayr clinic that sits right beside the water, with lawns rolling down to the shore. At the Original FX Mayr you need to cross a road to reach the lake, and while the rooms have been redone there too (and the new fat-freezing treatment is gathering a fan club), Viva still has the edge. Yes, it is puritanically stark, but there is something incredibly meditative about its location, and two pontoons give easy access to the water for bracing immersions that are as therapeutic as the powerful massages (ask for Harald) you'll receive on the detox itself.

THE MAYR CONCEPT is a curative eating regime – known as 'the cure' – promoted by pioneering doctor Franz Xaver Mayr

at the turn of the 20th century based on the principle that good health starts with good digestion. It is not just a weight-loss fix. Rather, it is a holistic approach that tackles complex issues such as IBS, allergies, chronic fatigue, auto-immune disorders, migraines, insomnia, bloating, serious skin problems and anything from obesity to sore joints. Purge the gut and you purify your entire system, is the idea.

Mayr hallmarks include not just the standard characteristics of a detox (no sugar, no caffeine, no alcohol) but also chewing each mouthful of your food at least 30 times, drinking Epsom salts to encourage elimination, undergoing daily

## IT'S NOT JUST A WEIGHT-LOSS FIX BUT A HOLISTIC APPROACH. PURGE THE GUT AND YOU PURIFY YOUR ENTIRE SYSTEM

abdominal massages, and applying compresses (basically hot-water bottles) to help cleanse your liver. The infamous spelt bread is served a day-old to ensure it's tough enough to be eaten in slo-mo. If you're lucky, your doctor will allow you small portions of protein – chicken breast, goat's-cheese spread, half an avocado – and a small bowl of homemade soup. Other guests are doomed to broths and herbal teas only. The results are palpable. Most pertinent are the tales you hear from returning clients: a complete recovery from arthritis; the discovery of a liver complaint undetected by British GPs; easing years of gut problems; the joyous bride who easily fitted into her

wedding dress. No wonder the place is humming with fans, so much so that now solo travellers are sometimes asked to share a table and there is no longer space for last-minute bookings.

Little surprise, then, that Viva has opened a second outpost, a medi-centre in a brand-new location, that's already causing a stir. Viva Altaussee, a three-hour drive away or a short flight to Salzburg from London, is one of the most exciting spa arrivals of 2015.

COMFORT IS IMPORTANT when you are so hungry you could punch someone, and then two seconds later so emotionally

whacked you feel as if you might break down and cry. The design at Viva Altaussee, which opened in April this year, makes it a supremely restful place. The building itself is like a gigantic, modern chalet, clad in oak, clean-lined and the epitome of simple grandeur. Inside, the duvets are thick, there are separate freestanding showers in the bathroom (missing at the original Viva), tall mugs not silly little teacups for your herbal fix, and underfloor heating exactly where it's needed.

Looks-wise, the biggest difference from Viva Maria Wörth is the use of colour. A pop of berry purple on an armchair, a floating lilac curtain, sage-green shaker ➤



► tiles; there are even vases of lavender and geraniums on your dining room table, where a mini silver teapot holds your name card. Be warned: if you don't like your table you should speak up – it's yours for the week, and set with all your recommended supplements and tinctures. The vibe is not just colourful, it's fun and almost flouncy. This is no spartan medical surgery. And the staff are sweet and funny, dressed in

sound off-putting but there is comfort in its provenance and naturalness.

DAYS IN THE HOTEL are a flurry of appointments: infusions of vitamins and antioxidants (sit back with a drip), nasal reflexology (cotton buds up your nose doused in essential oils, slightly spiky then strangely releasing), foot electrolysis (where the water in the foot bath turns brown from drawing out your toxins)

## DIAGNOSTICS ARE A BIG DRAW. THERE IS A MARATHON OF TESTS TO WAKE YOU UP TO THE STATE OF YOUR HEALTH

traditional Austrian attire; it's not a costume, people in the village are wearing the same thing. It seems comfortingly jaunty when you've just been told by your doctor that your free radicals are high (think of them as your stress markers) and your antioxidants are low (bring on the blueberries).

The diagnostics are what many guests come for. Blood, mineral, cardiovascular, urine and intolerance tests – it is a marathon of checks, used both to wake you up to the real state of your health and as a means to decide what therapies you should undergo while you are here, in the geographical heart of Austria. The area is renowned for its mountainous backdrops, lakes and cavernous salt mines, which became a huge repository for stolen art hidden by the Nazis during World War II, including 6,500 paintings, among them Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* and works by Michelangelo and Vermeer.

'It is a mystical place,' says fresh-faced doctor Ingrid Eysn, who worked in a hospital before Viva Altaussee and is terrifically pleased with the view from her new office. And they make the most of that salt, which is still being mined. There are saline air inhalations – unremarkable as an experience but wonderful for arthritis and inflammation – and invigorating salt scrubs in the hammam, and, in a key point of difference to Viva Maria Wörth, the salt water you drink here is drawn straight from the depths of the quarries. Because it is milder, you need to take it twice a day, not just once. The double whammy may

and, unique to Viva Altaussee, an oxygen treatment akin to altitude training called Interval Hypoxia Hyperoxia Therapy.

The credentials of this treatment are impressive. For years it was used by Russian astronauts to improve their performance and is said to reboot your health on a cellular level, balancing your nervous system, improving your stress tolerance and strengthening your immunity. Strong claims indeed, and it wasn't until I deciphered this from the literature, which needs to be improved, that I decided not to cancel my last session, as I have to admit that lying back with a rather tight gas mask on, breathing in oxygen released at different pressures for 45 minutes was proving a little dull. It is worth knowing that you

don't visit any of the Mayr properties for candles or counselling. Across the board, from the Viva properties to the FX Mayr Health Center and Parkhotel Igls, I have found the massages to be straightforward and functional, with little concern for your modesty. But this does not mean that the results are not remarkable, just that you should seek solace for your soul elsewhere.

I think it is incredibly important to get out of the hotel. You can feel low, tired, angry and tetchy. You don't need to add cabin fever to the list. The walk around the lake at Viva Altaussee takes

an hour and half and is fairy-tale pretty: forest mists, deep waters, meadow flowers, streams, wooden cabins. It is *The Sound of Music* come to life and will infinitely pep up your perspective of the hotel, which could otherwise be conceived as more of a motel. Do also swim and steam in the evenings. It's a great way to kill time when you've had your dinner at 5pm (eating early is another recommendation of the cure). And if you are not sleeping well, inform your doctor, who will magic up homeopathic pills with ingredients such as chamomile, passionflower and melatonin; they really help.

So WHICH OF THE TWO Vivas should you opt for? The ideal would be a twin-centred trip such as mine where you stay in both, experiencing a change in scene and rhythm (you are meant to do the cure for at least a week, if not longer). If pushed, I have to admit I prefer the on-lake location of Viva Maria Wörth, and the deep assurance that comes with a team of staff who have worked together, and with the Mayr philosophy, for years. You can throw anything at them and they know the answer. Perhaps this is why the old hotel remains the more expensive one, despite the newness of its little sister. But I have every confidence that Viva Altaussee will find its soul and become one of the most accessible, friendly and effective places to undergo the most famous detoxing system in Europe. Oh, and in case you are wondering, I lost half

## THE RESULTS ARE REMARKABLE: RECOVERY FROM ARTHRITIS; EASING YEARS OF STOMACH PROBLEMS

a stone in a week between the two clinics. For me a diet of no sugar, but one where potatoes and bread are allowed, really works. And I left feeling more balanced than I have done in a while. ►

A week-long programme at **Viva Maria Wörth** (+43 4273 31117; [www.vivamayr.com](http://www.vivamayr.com)) costs from about £2,425 per person. A week at **Viva Altaussee** (+43 3622 71450; [www.vivamayr.com](http://www.vivamayr.com)) costs from about £1,985. Book in for consultations in London before or after your visit at **Grace Belgravia** ([www.gracebelgravia.com](http://www.gracebelgravia.com)) and **The Health Doctors** ([www.thehealthdoctors.co.uk](http://www.thehealthdoctors.co.uk))



# LEAN AND MEAN

If chewing stale bread and getting tough love from Mayr doctors isn't your thing, here are three other ways to clean up your act – and the perks and pitfalls to expect along the way

TYPE OF DETOX	AYURVEDIC PANCHAKARMA	VEGETARIAN EATING	FASTING
BEST PLACE TO DO IT	<p>If you can't face long-haul travel, Germany's <b>Parkschlösschen</b>, an hour from Frankfurt, is the most authentic Ayurvedic spa outside India. <a href="http://www.ayurveda-parkschloesschen.de">www.ayurveda-parkschloesschen.de</a></p>	<p>For sunshine, outstanding yoga, delicious food and weight loss, devotees flock back to <b>Absolute Sanctuary</b> in Thailand. And it's seriously good value. <a href="http://www.absolutesanctuary.com">www.absolutesanctuary.com</a></p>	<p><b>Buchinger Wilhelmi</b> offers long-lasting results – this is an all-out starvation cleanse on the glistening shores of Lake Constance, Germany. <a href="http://www.buchinger-wilhelmi.com">www.buchinger-wilhelmi.com</a></p>
WHAT ON EARTH?	<p>A 10-day cleanse eating ghee, porridge and veggie meals according to your dosha (biological energy). Plus treatments and yoga.</p>	<p>A week of super-healthy food. If it weren't for the colonics, you'd almost think you were on holiday.</p>	<p>Nil by mouth. A minimum 10-day super-strict and controlled diet supported by doctors. So no cheating.</p>
INMATES	<p>Scary old French countesses, purposeful young Berliners, models and TV industry types. Far more Europeans than Brits.</p>	<p>Middle-aged Italian couples, retired spa managers who know a good deal when they spy one, Moroccan and Qatari royals loyal to Australian super-nutritionist Janelle Castle.</p>	<p>Serious-looking German and Swiss guests with white robes and black rimmed glasses – all hell-bent on shifting flab. No mobiles or smoking allowed.</p>
SCIENCE	<p>Five millennia ago those Indian sages were pointing out that once a year it does the body good to stop eating too much, <b>purify inside and out, be calm, rest, do nothing for a while.</b></p>	<p>Eating a lot of fibre and vegetables, and drinking gallons of water to slough out undigested food that gathers and festers in the intestine.</p>	<p>This place was founded more than 60 years ago by Dr Otto Buchinger. A stay here means fasting in an effort to send your body into a self-healing state.</p>
WORSHIP AT THE ALTAR OF...	<p><b>Ghee.</b> It's clarified butter that helps to draw out toxins. It sounds yuck and smells slightly rancid, and you will be required to drink it neat. Somehow, though, you get weirdly addicted.</p>	<p><b>Sugar- and gluten-free food</b> and mostly raw vegetables (dear old vegetables), brightened by coconut water and juices at the poolside bar.</p>	<p><b>Thin air.</b> Apple-skin tea for breakfast, a dash of yogurt with honey for lunch and a supper of broth.</p>
LOW MOMENT	<p>Lying in bed in the silence of rural Germany at 3am feeling hungry and sad. And the process of cleansing your sinuses by <b>passing a strip of linen up one nostril and out of the other.</b></p>	<p>Dinner on the first evening in the hilariously named Love Kitchen: <b>gloomy lighting straight out of a Weston-super-Mare caff.</b></p>	<p><b>The first three days.</b> You are cold, dizzy, teary and depressed, and have bad breath and a tongue thick with white fur. There are daily enemas too.</p>
HIGH MOMENT	<p>Borrowing one of the <b>hotel's bikes</b> to explore the nearby village, wrapped up because your skin feels paper thin but with every sense on stalks.</p>	<p><b>A massage with ex-Kamalaya therapist Ting</b>, a genius with strong hands and a sweet giggle, and then realising that at £35 a pop you can see her every day of your stay.</p>	<p><b>The next three days</b>, when you start to think you might actually survive. You are bursting with energy and excitedly embracing the swimming pool, the personal training and even the hikes.</p>
SURVIVAL TACTIC	<p>Taking <b>lots of books.</b> It is intensely peaceful and quiet. And there are no TVs in the rooms.</p>	<p>Catching the free shuttle down to tranquil <b>Cheung Mo beach</b> to discover life on the outside.</p>	<p><b>Going to the spa.</b> There are osteopaths, reflexologists and physiotherapists; the integrative therapy with Dr Schroder is a particular highlight.</p>
RESULT	<p>This is less about weight loss and more about rebalancing your system. Leave awash with ideas and resolutions, and <b>totally centred.</b></p>	<p>Kate Moss was right, 'Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels'. A week here is an education and the <b>effects of colonics leave you feeling light as a feather.</b></p>	<p>Buchinger is bang on with the notion of no pain, no gain. <b>Half-a-stone weight loss is the average</b> but it can be even more. Our tester lost 10 pounds. DF</p>

