

SPAS

The spa at Hotel Preidlhof in South Tyrol review — mountain high

Kate Reardon visits a retreat that blows her mind and changes the way she looks at her life



It's 11 o'clock in the morning, I'm stone-cold sober and I'm levitating. It's beyond exhilarating. Next, I'm lucid dreaming that I am a large bird flying (somewhat majestically) across a sunset. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. How did I get here? By lying on the floor, covered in a cosy towel, while a lovely young woman called Norma Jean simply tells me to think of various things.

I arrived at Hotel Preidlhof in the South Tyrolean mountains sceptical of the much vaunted "Transformational Wellness" packages but happy to co-operate if I could have some nice naps. I spent the first day very cross – there was an elaborate schedule of treatments, all of which appeared ridiculously airy-fairy, far from my usual spreadsheet-based attitude to health and wellness. But by the morning of day two I cracked. Yoga nidra (the aforementioned lying down under a blanket) was on the menu and my mind was blown, so much so that I was an enthusiastic participant in the subsequent full-moon forest ritual, which included smoke baths made with resins, herbs and barks, and I didn't even snigger at my hour-and-a-half-long "mindful apple-eating" session. Preidlhof's location in Italy, perched on the 46th parallel where the Mediterranean begins, with 315 days of sunshine a year and palm, lemon and olive trees growing alongside mountains covered in snow, would put anyone in a good mood.

The 71-room, adults-only hotel is a little weird. There are a lot of sparkles, hot pink, crushed satin and velvet. The spa, however, is extraordinary. 5,000 sq m devoted to wellness with six swimming pools and five hot tubs/hydrotherapy pools. There is a “sauna tower” with 16 sauna, Kneipp and relaxation experiences, all with incredible views of the mountains. Which is just as well, because pretty much everyone is naked in the sauna.

Slightly less alarming is the food. I was given the wellness healing gourmet menu, which claims to improve quality of sleep, reduce inflammation and increase happiness. It did indeed increase my happiness by proving that I can eat a plant-based diet that is free of lactose, soya, gluten and refined sugar for a week and not be hungry or annoyed.

But really you come to Preidlhof for the practitioners, who are among the best in the world. The team includes the internationally renowned Stefano Battaglia and Andrea Martinelli, who taught me the martial art qigong and gave me a life-changingly moving zen-shiatsu massage. The spa director, Patrizia Bortolin, is the guru, complete with a wardrobe worthy of *Nine Perfect Strangers*. She created the “Preidlhof way”, a wellness concept based on her “glowing flow lifestyle” philosophy that incorporates two types of wellbeing: hedonic and eudaimonic. Hedonic wellbeing, she says, “is experienced in the most joyful and hedonistic terms, in beauty and a pleasant external realisation. Eudaimonic wellbeing is achieved when one confronts one’s past, heals, strives to reach a higher purpose and shares with the community.”

Bortolin has designed 12 retreats for Preidlhof, each packed with therapies and treatments. I was one of the first to sign up for the brand-new menopause retreat. At first I was frustrated that they didn’t seem to engage with specific symptoms. But I can now see that while Preidlhof’s intuitive therapies lack initially obvious focus they are a profound and necessary adjunct to a strictly medical way of approaching this time in a woman’s life. The work that Bortolin and her team facilitate has enabled me to frame this period in a genuinely positive and optimistic way. Considering half the population go through menopause, it’s extraordinary that so few dedicated programmes are available. I was given the time, space and support to examine my life in a way that would have been impossible and infinitely less powerful at home. My conclusion is that I’m on day one of the second half of my adult life, and I get to decide what the rest of it looks like.

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com) can arrange a six-day menopause retreat from £3,299 for one person, including flights, transfers, full-board accommodation and some treatments