

BEAUTY

Discover the must-visit trauma healers at this sprawling 5-star retreat

From laughing therapy to acupuncture, enjoy a variety of alternative healing practices at Preidlhof

By Helen Kirwan-Taylor

You wouldn't expect to find an ashram in the Sudtiroal (a part of Italy that once belonged to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire). It's certainly not what I expected when I walked into the shiny black and white lobby that suggests Las Vegas more than India. Perhaps that's why so few people I know have heard of what is quite frankly the best (if not only) trauma healing programme in Europe.

Within this sprawling 5-star compound hotel surrounded by glorious apple orchards and mountains is a candle-lit wellness centre that does not give much away. I was warned in advance to 'trust the system' which normally suggests I shouldn't. I was wrong. Wellness Director Patrizia Bortolin, herself an ashram habitué, has gathered the most outstanding team of practitioners (most of them ashram'ed) who between them encompass every aspect of healing. There's the magnetic and so-outspoken-he's-scary Stefano Battaglia whose profound knowledge of trauma and PTSD warrants emergency call outs to victims of war zones. He could be a Ted Talk hero (he has the physique of a bear), but healing people is his happy place. Within five minutes of entering his space, I knew *he knew* that my long covid was more than just a series of bizarre symptoms (from food allergies to severe stiffness to exhaustion). A virus such as Covid-19 is trauma, everyone but mainstream doctors know that.

Another notable healer is Martin Kirchler who has travelled the world in search of healing techniques (originally to treat his own illness) and along the way has memorised ancient scriptures. Martin performs what looks like massage but in fact, is the moving of blocked energy (in a painful way). The next day my usual stiffness had vanished.

Then there was the modest Dr. Alexander Angerer who spent years mastering acupuncture and homoeopathy on top of medicine - he performed a quick-paced ear acupuncture on me which noticeably worked to clear my sinuses. Unlike most places, the Preidlhof isn't flogging 'stuff'. Following a consultation and a host of tests, Dr Angerer sent me to the chemist to pick up a cocktail of liquid supplements which are designed to be immediately absorbed (most supplements aren't) and homoeopathic remedies.

I did laughing therapy (which literally feels like there are firecrackers going off in the brain—they're endorphins actually). I also did sleep yoga (my kind of exercise). I even went forest bathing (no actual bath but lots of lying by running water). My 'vagal tone' improved by the minute.

I spent seven days doing exactly what Patrizia prescribed. This is a healing programme designed for almost any trauma (physical or emotional), which all comes together seamlessly (though it's not obvious at first). Everything is handled with feminine, Italian charm. Foodwise, there is a 'wellness' diet, but no one will tell you off should you steal from the cheese buffet. There is time off to enjoy the many, *many* saunas and pools.

Price-wise, the Preidlhof is a much better deal than its competitors, trust me.

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com; 020 7529 8551) can arrange a 6-day Integrated Healing programme from £2,999.00 per person sharing, including British Airways flights, transfers, full board accommodation and inclusions of the programme