

TATLER
SPA GUIDE 2018
AWARD-WINNER
NATURAL
HIGH



KURHOTEL SKODSBORG
SKODSBORG, DENMARK

Water cure

Suzanne Duckett washes away the grief

The aftermath of a storm is often the hardest part. The calm that creeps in behind chaos is not comforting; it's terrifying. The silence, the stillness – no noise, no drama to hide in. My storm had been putting my father into a nursing home, and it had been hellish. Eighteen months of horrific surgeries, numerous forms denying resuscitation should his heart fail on the operating table, sleepless nights, relentless stress, bureaucracy and family feuds leaving only grief to unite us.


The lull that followed was intolerable, so I booked myself and my husband Andy into a sanatorium-turned-spa in Denmark's oldest wellness hotel, 30 minutes' drive from Copenhagen, in the first week of freezing January. 'Some us-time,' I'd said. 'No stupid diets,' he'd said. I won't lie, it was a bleak backdrop, and as we pulled into Kurhotel Skodsborg's driveway, I avoided his eyes. But we were in the home of *hygge*, so the welcome was warm, the interior a cosy, candlelit haven with crackling fires, velvet sofas and reindeer-skin throws. We perked up even more when we met our Functional Lifestyle Mentor, Thomas Rode, a former Michelin-starred chef, now a fiftysomething, ripped Danish hunk of a man. All abs, ink and attitude, he is Denmark's poster boy for Paleo and CrossFit.

Once unpacked, I headed to the beautiful banqueting room for my kundalini yoga session with Lone Hunaeus, a small, blonde powerhouse. Her series of dynamic breathing with intense repetitive movements, meditation, and cathartic chanting was transformative. The stress hissed out of me, rock-hard muscles relaxed, my jaw softened. My itinerary wove in massages with physiotherapists, spectacular Bioeffect facials (Iceland's top anti-ageing range), more yoga and meditation. I hung out in spa pools with locals of all ages and shapes, and Andy and I ate quietly together: wholesome Nordic dishes such as open sandwiches on nutty Paleo bread, steamed halibut and beef tartare with pepper mayonnaise.



Then came the shocking highlight: the SaunaGus, an extreme mental and physical reset taking us from an extended stint in the sauna to a plunge in the freezing waters of the Oresund strait outside. The female *gusmester* cooked up herbs and aromatherapy oils on the hot coals and flicked a towel at us, creating intense waves of heat. Just when we felt we couldn't take another second, we were marched outside in our robes, across the road to a wooden jetty and down the steps into the choppy waves. I swore, I squealed, I thought I might cry, and emerged with my thighs covered in scarlet blotches where the intensive circulation boost had brought fresh blood to the surface. Then it happened. I laughed, harder and heartier than I had in months. Andy and I stood there with our teeth chattering, euphoric in our robes, laughing like loons.

You might not get palm trees here, or sandy beaches, but it is very special. Skodsborg is about community spirit and camaraderie, and the SaunaGus has a host of health benefits – boosting circulation, easing muscle tension, helping to relieve stress, aiding sleep. But it also stimulates the secretion of endorphins: happy hormones. It chased out the grief, the sadness, that had stagnated in my body. The storm was over, and the aftermath was suddenly bearable.

 *Healing Holidays* (healingholidays.co.uk/tatlerspaguide; 020 7529 8551) offers three nights from £999, half board, including flights, transfers, a massage and a cookery class with chef Thomas Rode. *Healing Holidays* is the only UK tour operator that works with Kurhotel Skodsborg.