

BEST FOR A REBOOT

DRAMATIC LIFE-CHANGERS THAT WILL SWITCH YOU BACK ON AGAIN

KURHOTEL SKODSBORG **REVAMPED**

NORTH ZEALAND, DENMARK

THE BENCHMARK OF NORDIC LIVING

Danes joke about their weather even more than the British, but outside the sunny blue-sky days of summer it's Denmark's chill that has made candlelight and cosiness such a national obsession. And both manifest themselves brilliantly at the country's oldest wellness hotel, which is 20 minutes by car or train from Copenhagen. King Frederick VII used to holiday in the low white buildings and grand villa that make up this 19th-century sanatorium-turned-spa, a welcoming world of reindeer-skin throws, squishy sofas, antlers above open fires, rugs on wooden floors and shelves stuffed with books. Upstairs in the bedrooms, hot-water bottles are tucked under cloud-like duvets and bathrooms have vases of fresh flowers. The whole place was immaculately renovated last year and it is beautifully run. Thomas Rode, head chef at the Michelin-starred Kong Hans Kaelder, is now in charge of nutrition and lifestyle. After giving up the late nights and starting to exercise, he stepped out of the kitchen and, among other things at the hotel, now runs a 'new kind of men's club. No port, no cigars'. Instead, there are 7am weekday meetings for a group of CEO types who cross-fit train, swim in the sea and then convene in Rode's kitchen for breakfasts of muesli and yogurts, goat's cheese, salmon and avocado. There are more than 180 classes on offer at the spa, as well as 25 physiotherapists on hand and a top-level medical centre, but the real reason to come to Skodsborg is to get outside into those freezing Oresund waves. Only after you've sat in one of the super-hot saunas in the spa for

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half an hour. If you're already an aficionado of Scandinavia's sauna culture you will know all about the extraordinary elation that results from a dip in icy water after sweating in intense heat. But if you're someone who wears thermal vests all winter and cannot bear to shiver, daring to follow the instructions of the sauna master will be a revelation. Those arriving as sceptics leave as addicts, converted to a cause backed up by numerous studies proving the health benefits of regular saunas – not only in clarifying the skin, detoxing internal organs, and improving mood and energy, but even protecting against Alzheimer's. A palmful of ice in each hand helps hugely as more water is added to the coals. Just when you think you really cannot bear anymore it's time to leave the cabin and walk across the garden, along the jetty, down the steps and into the sea. What is so astonishing, the first time you do this, is how you genuinely don't feel cold. The heat of the sauna so permeates your body that you feel insulated, as if wearing the thickest wetsuit. As you lower yourself into the 3°C shallows the change of temperature registers, but not painfully. Against all expectation it makes you feel exhilarated, surging with energy and delight, and eager to do it all over again. And judging by the glowing cheeks of everyone here, the manager's aim that the hotel should become the number-one health resort in all of Scandinavia seems entirely feasible.

INSIDER TIP Like Kneipping, part of the joy of discovering you enjoy saunas is that you can try them pretty much anywhere you go.

BOOK IT Doubles from about £165. The three-day detox retreat costs from £660 per person, including a personalised programme, fitness classes, cookery lessons and full use of all the spa facilities(+45 4558 5800; skodsborg.dk).



PHOTOGRAPHS: CLAES BECH-POULSEN; JENS MARCUS LINDHE; ALONA VIBE

