

# DIVINE INTERVENTION

As Rome embraced a new holy era, I put my faith in the Palazzo Fiuggi medical spa just outside the city to transform my physique. Could seven days of targeted treatments and exquisite restraint grant me a billionaire body? By Astrid Joss

**THEY SAY ROME WASN'T** built in a day – something I've been telling myself over frustrated attempts to 'fix' my rather sad-looking body. My husband has taken to making not-so-subtle hints that I need to work out, while my children ask me why I wobble so much. Slim I may be, but a gym bunny I'm most certainly not. 'Who cares!' one friend exclaimed in a desperate effort to comfort me as I relayed tales of being so body-conscious I was too nervous to leave our Maldivian villa during our Easter family holiday. 'When you're runway-thin, darling, it's a catwalk every day!' If only. This concept, which once washed, has been single-handedly derailed by a thing called age. Being slim means nothing when you're untuned and unfit.

I had heard of a magical place, an Italian commune called Fiuggi. Located an hour outside of Rome, it's said to produce healing water from its springs. Water so powerful, I was informed, that when Michelangelo fell ill in the midst of painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Pope Julius II sent him to Fiuggi to drink it – and he recovered. I had also heard of Palazzo Fiuggi, the commune's medical spa where supermodels, film stars and international high-flyers flock to guzzle the water, seek first-class

medical advice and work on their billionaire bodies. Surely this place had the power to gold-plate my body, too. I booked my ticket.

Flying into Rome days ahead of Pope Francis's funeral, I was hit by Catholic guilt. Instead of following the rest of the passengers to the Vatican City, I was on a self-centred quest to perfect my own physical state. But a happy body includes a happy heart, essential to living a kind and meaningful life, as good Catholics must. And if I wanted a miracle, I had to go the distance, just like Michelangelo.

From the point of arrival, the importance of water is evident: the

bespoke medical and nutritional plan was put in place incorporating exercise and wellness treatments. I was to undergo a full-body detox. I'd be hungry, but the promise of coming out shiny and new was tantalising.

To avoid too much prodding and poking, the most urgent tests were taken on day one. These included blood tests, gut tests, vitamin and mineral screenings, electrocardiograms checking heart rhythm and rate, and a bioelectrical

**The water is so powerful that when Michelangelo fell ill painting the Sistine Chapel, he was sent to Fiuggi to drink it**

trickling fountains by the palazzo's grand façade were matched by an impressive marble interior with yet more fountains. This health home trusted by Oprah, Jude Law, Hugh Grant and Kate Moss was now mine. Whisked into the doctor's office, I offloaded my long list of concerns – fatigue, brain fog and a body I want to hide, which all resulted in general unhappiness. After some probing questions, a

impedance analysis testing body fat and muscle mass. Over the coming days, there was also an ultrasound of my abdomen, thyroid and parathyroid, carotid arteries (neck veins that carry blood to your brain), with a body scan, cardiology check-up, colonic and lung check also streamed into my programme. Intense, yes, but it was essential that the experts understood me. A strange mix of

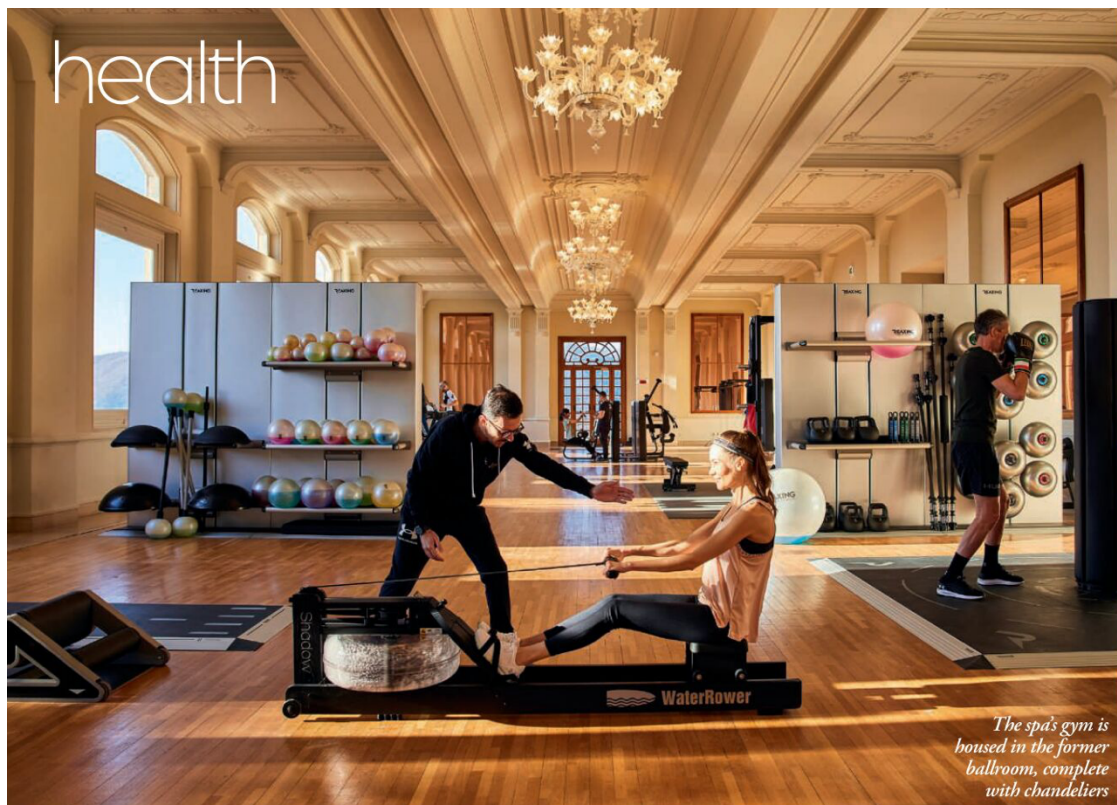
excitement and nerves over what they might find ensued. I shut my eyes and downed the Fiuggi water.

My suite was comfortable and plush – not glitzy or overly done, but an undistracting element of a paradigm-shifting experience. The luxuries were certainly there – in a pillow menu and a marble bathroom, for example – but the focus was on the health transformation. Indeed, it had been clearly explained to me that the key to my physical makeover would be to both rest and work hard in equal measures. 'You cannot be body beautiful without being mentally fit first,' the doctor insisted. Light relief came from exemplary wellness treatments designed to support the detox process, which were cleverly woven between medical appointments. I lived for the daily 'deep detox bodywork', where therapist Alessandro masterfully worked to open up my meridian lines (which traditional Chinese >



*At Palazzo Fiuggi, robes at breakfast are the unofficial dress code*





*The spa's gym is housed in the former ballroom, complete with chandeliers*



*The cryo game: Astrid steps into the cryosauna*

◁ medicine recognises as aiding in your body's flow of energy) with a bespoke massage. This was my moment to relax and process each step of my wellness journey, content in the knowledge that my organs were having a workout

without me having to move a muscle. Cryotherapy, IV drips and sound therapy healed the inside; and a Hydrafacial, followed by a couple of tweakments with Dr Fabbio Cantarella (Rome's hottest aesthetic doctor) delivered external

vim. The jam-packed itinerary also included group sessions – everything from neuromuscular training to herbal infusion masterclasses to improve long-term wellbeing.

Wild pangs of hunger coloured my first two days, accompanied by thumping headaches thanks to caffeine being cut firmly off. (I amused myself over the thought that Pope Gregory X had once rationed food during the conclave in an attempt to give spiritual clarity of mind and speed up the decision-making process.) But if you cave in, Fiuggi will happily serve you a frothy cappuccino or even a glass of red wine. Prefer spirits? They're also available, but not advised. The doctors' point is, while Fiuggi will meet you where you are 'mentally', you must make these decisions alone to lay the foundations for a shift in mindset – the golden aim. I, for one, left Fiuggi thinking coffee was in cahoots with the devil.

Thank the Lord, then, for the outstanding menu, overseen by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck. I may have been rationed to 1,200 calories a day, but what I was served looked like a work of art and tasted like heaven. Dining periods were glorious occasions.

Obviously, I made a mad dash to each one; but mercifully, Fiuggi understands that a fine-dining experience is key to guest happiness... and survival. Most people wore dressing gowns to breakfast and lunch, or the white Fiuggi tracksuits provided, while dinner was a home-clothes affair. I gazed upon glamorous, toned, bronzed French and Italian ladies, comparing notes with their companions about what their doctor had just said. One evening, an incredibly svelte American couple sat down to celebrate a £42 million win on the stock market with a bottle of fizzy Fiuggi water. *The White Lotus* season four was practically unfolding in front of me.

My breakthrough arrived on the day of the Pope's funeral. Having finally reached crystal-clear clarity of mind, I put my best black tracksuit on and dutifully entered the hotel's packed plush cinema, where the ceremony was being livestreamed. As a sea of red cardinals and world leaders took over the huge screen, accompanied by guests' cries of 'mamma mia!', I watched in awe. So overcome by pride and peace, I happily missed my scheduled morning snack. When it was time for my mud





*The palazzo is in the medieval spa town of Fiuggi, an hour from Rome*

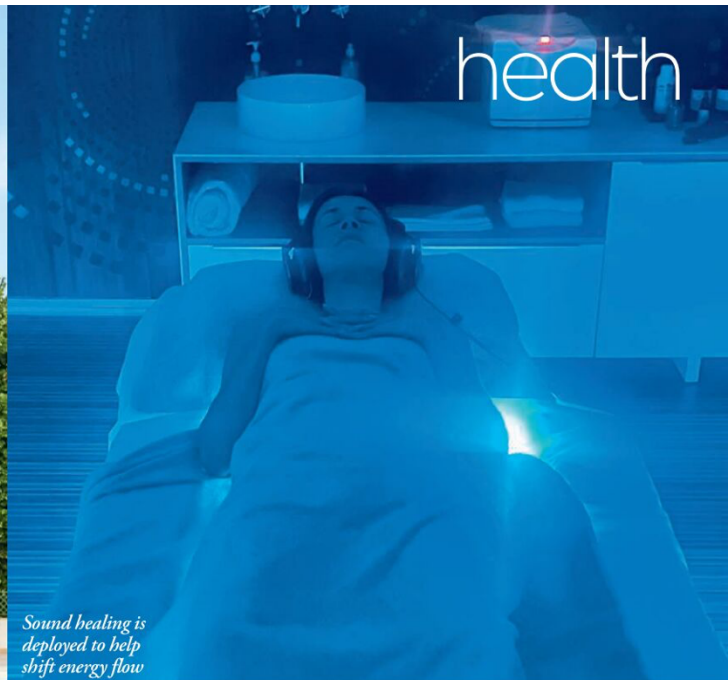
## One evening, a svelte American couple celebrated a £42 million stock market win with a bottle of fizzy water

wrap, holes were attentively cut through the plastic to free my arms, so I could continue watching the event on my phone. It was all anybody could talk about and, when I was driven downtown in an emergency dash to the pharmacy, still wearing my dressing gown, not a soul flinched, because nobody cared. Italy was in mourning.

Back at the palazzo, feeling mentally strong and able, it was time to bring in the big guns, aka the high-performance method team. Employing a unique set of tools, from machines to highly developed software, Stefano and his gang of athletic pros evaluated my functional capabilities. Every detail was analysed: posture, strength, stability and reactivity, culminating in an in-depth biomechanics test. I had to stare at red lines with my eyes open and shut, lean against walls and walk on the treadmill. A gait analysis reported that my left ankle is weak, which could spur future osteoporosis

issues, so I was directed to the gym, where trainer Frederika watched hawklike as I was run through helpful military exercises targeting my Achilles' heel. Tiptoeing the length of the chandelier-hung gym (once a ballroom) like a catwalk, I wondered if Kate Moss had benefited from this exact procedure. With my lack of muscle thrown up by initial tests, a gruelling strength-training regime had been invented, while I was reassured that the in-house osteopath and physio were on call.

It was decided that my last day would be best spent on a hike to celebrate my new state of being. I felt fabulous. Energised, focused, weightless in mind and body, and high in spirits. As I climbed to the San Domenico monastery in the Apennine Mountains, I could feel and see my newly toned legs, arms and even abs. While the medics found nothing serious, they'd cleaned, polished and reset me. Best of all, I had been given the



*Sound healing is deployed to help shift energy flow*



*Astrid in the spa's signature white tracksuit*

tools to eat more healthily, exercise more effectively and eliminate my caffeine addiction. I had survived my own conclave – cut off from the outside world, I re-emerged a week later into the era of my billionaire body. □

*Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com) can arrange a seven-night Longevity Full Body Check-Up programme at Palazzo Fiuggi from £10,499, including transfers, full-board accommodation and inclusions of the programme*