CALL THE SHOTS

In the Black Forest there's a place where you can receive age-defying injections of stem cells. You can also shield yourself from radio waves. But these aren't the only reasons why Villa Stéphanie is this year's most exciting new European spa opening. By Daisy Finer

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

VILLA STEPHANIE OFFERS ONE of the most personalised and private spa experiences anywhere. Opened in January in the southern German town of Baden-Baden, it's incredibly well conceived and utterly discreet: a zingy, baby-grand bolthole set in gloriously groomed gardens (just a hop away from the Brenners Park-Hotel, so think of it as umbilically attached), and with just 12 bedrooms and three suites.

What is immediately apparent is that it pairs an old-fashioned sensibility with a gloriously up-to-speed outlook. The medi-team use injections of fresh pig stem cells for rejuvenation therapy (more on this later), but don't expect an all-white, space-age interior. The clinic itself is cool and clean, but unlike the Mayr centres of Austria or other medi-spas such as SHA Wellness Clinic in Alicante, Villa Stéphanie is a proper hotel. Despite the 19th-century architecture, it has modern touches such as glossy books, fresh flowers in the bedrooms and Bamford goodies and mini candles in the bathrooms. The beds are deep and comfortable. Downstairs is a floral-themed sitting room for help-yourself sandwiches and smoothies (bootcamp this is not). There are artworks on the walls. The place is more akin to a majestic spa villa than a clinic – a secret, moneyed enclave dedicated to those who want to feel better. The 15 treatment rooms aren't tucked away in the basement, but instead they have private terraces overlooking greenery, and are set just off the lobby so that guests can potter about in their dressing gowns should they wish. Nobody does, though – it is very smart. One Saudi prince checked in for six weeks for a serious body-and-mind overhaul.

Cleverly, guests are allocated a personal concierge throughout their stay, who will lend not just a kind ear but will also co-ordinate appointments with doctors, nutritionists, trainers and therapists. So not only are you superbly looked after, but you never have to repeat physical concerns or targets to the various people you see. And as the concierge sees you daily, it is easy to address new niggles, swap appointments or fit more in. There's no wrangling for slots with other guests, no queues and, crucially, no forms. It's like having your own personal spa PA: someone who gets to know you, leads you through the

whole experience and has an incredible knowledge of all the solutions offered by the medi-team (got a cold coming on? Don't worry, let's book a vitamin C drip).

But, first things first. After a short flight to Strasbourg, your first appointment will be with dynamic spa director Hans-Peter Veit, whose specialities include both nutrition and sport. He will discuss your routine (or lack of it), why you're here and what you want to achieve. A hi-tech full body analysis reveals in spectacular detail the dreaded visceral fat levels, water content and muscle tone, BMI, ideal weight, and what your daily calorie consumption should be. Even here the methods at Villa Stéphanie seem a step ahead. There is no need to undress for this test. You simply stand on a machine with your shoes off and hold the handles. There's no clumsy manual measuring or stripping down to your underwear.

Next up for discussion is food. Nothing is doled out school-dinner style. Diets are meticulously and individually designed. The kitchen creates a variety of bespoke detox menus, tweaked to the personal needs of each guest, and taking into consideration details such as allergies, intolerances and plain dislikes. Mention that you are not a fan of buckwheat, but like spelt and brown rice, and meals will reflect this. And what food. Instead of deprivation there are carefully constructed, three-course extravaganzas. For lunch, beetroot carpaccio might be followed by fresh turbot with spinach and steamed quinoa, and to finish a light blueberry pancake with a fruit compote so tasty you can't believe it's allowed. All this for only 400 calories. (Though be careful not to eat the bread and butter which the kitchen sometimes sends over). Everything is wonderfully satisfying and delicious, and though you can request to eat less, or even fast, the main idea here is that you learn ➤

IT'S MORE AKIN TO A MAJESTIC SPA VILLA THAN A CLINIC – A SECRET ENCLAVE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO FEEL BETTER

➤ about portion sizes, go for the long-term solution rather than the quick fix, and are inspired to integrate a similar approach back at home.

It is worth knowing that all the guests who stay at Villa Stéphanie are here to spa, but in the larger Brenners Park-Hotel, reached by a long interior corridor and with several restaurants, most of the people are just on holiday. (The spa town of Baden-Baden survived World War II unscathed and is very pretty, with a river running through it and the Alps all around). So if you are cleansing you will probably want to have room service to avoid drooling over cakes and chips. Thankfully, the rooms are lovely places to be, with revolutionary switches that will turn off Wi-Fi completely (the walls are embedded with a specially treated copper grid). It's yet another measure to put temptation at bay. Veit says, 'I've learnt the hard way that digital detoxing is important. A few years ago I was on my phone while on holiday and I tripped and broke my leg. My family told me they would never go on holiday again if I didn't stop taking calls from work.'

THE FRESH STEM CELLS ARE SAID TO REGULATE METABOLISM AND REPUTED TO TRANSFORM DISEASED ORGANS

THE BLACK FOREST is stunning, bubbling with waterfalls. What is wonderful is that you can reach the woods by walking straight out of the hotel. The exercise programmes include not just complimentary group classes (from aqua fitness to full body workouts, biking and Nordic walking) but also one-on-one guided treks through the trees. The forest is vast, with numerous tracks, and mountain-hut restaurants for lunch. Veit will make sure you order lean barbecued turkey marinated in fresh herbs and served with salad, which doesn't sound anywhere near as remarkably good as it tastes. (I don't think I've ever eaten better turkey). There are also excellent personal trainers and private yoga sessions for both body and mind – pranayama therapy (yogic breathing) is a wonderful way to calm down your central nervous system. Guests are also given one of those wearable devices that charts calorie consumption and encourages movement; it even lets you know when you have been sitting still too long by flashing. Anyone with a desk job should have one.

The science-driven medi-centre, Haus Julius, is designed to feng-shui principles and is one of the most comprehensive I have ever come across. It's headed by Don Draper lookalike Dr König, who is exactly the sort of man mountain that you would trust with your life. He is one of those doctors who gently diagnoses on sight: 'Your lymphatic system is a little slow,' he tells me. 'I can tell by the colour of your eyes.' Traditionally trained but passionate about a holistic approach, König has a bagful of homeopathic remedies at his fingertips, as well as acupuncture, kinesiology, osteopathy, cupping and acutapping – practised by him or a member of his team.

He also presides over a lot of fridges, filled with amino acids, magnesium and iron ('most mothers are iron deficient'), as well as fresh stem cells, kept in tiny phials labelled according to which part of the pig they were extracted from, be it thymus, placenta, spleen or brain. He is softly spoken about this therapy: 'We don't want to hard-sell it like some clinics.' But he's adamant that pigs are the safest animals to use, due in part to their similar genetic code, and that the effects are outstanding.

Generally, 10 to 20 thawed injections are administered into your bottom over a period of days or weeks. The OZE (organ cell extracts) contain bioactive substances such as enzymes, hormones and transmitters (everything cells need to function properly) and are said to regulate metabolism, slow down degeneration and activate regeneration. In short, they are reputed to transform diseased organs. König swears by it (he certainly looks young). Chinese clients, interestingly, usually opt for cells extracted from the testicles, which are meant to increase vigour. But above and beyond anything sensationalist, this is truly somewhere to come when you need help. The doctor can arrange anything from hip replacements in nearby hospitals to post-cancer care. I can't think of a nicer place to recuperate. Alongside him is a team of equal expertise, including top dentists, physiotherapists, gynaecologists and an aesthetics doctor who offers fillers, Botox and similar. 'We don't do plaster disasters,' says König, 'or cutting. We ensure you can show your face at dinner.'

A SHIATSU SESSION WITH Pierre Clavereaux or his protégé Othman Challouf is incredible, and another of the highlights at the Villa. Breathe through a painful series of vigorously quick and assisted full-body stretches, all while you lie fully clothed on a low mattress. You feel long and lean afterwards, even if you are really not. I can take or leave the facials (they are too wishy-washy for me, perhaps because all I really long for is a proper neck massage), but don't miss a physio session with Martina Nesselhauf. Her gentle mix of strokes and craniosacral therapy releases tension in all the right areas. After just two days you start to feel different, so just imagine what a week will be like.

On your last night you will be treated to a meal at the two-Michelin-starred restaurant in the original Brenners Park-Hotel, where the gourmet detox menu knocks spots off anywhere else. Caviar is served with feather-light blinis made from cauliflower; the pink roasted saddle of venison comes with savoy cabbage, glazed cherries and an elderflower olive jus. Like everything at Villa Stéphanie, it is exceptional.

BOOK IT *Doubles from £395 (www.villastephanie.com). Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; www.healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) can arrange a seven-day Brenners Vitality Detox from £3,199 per person sharing. This includes flights, transfers, seven nights' accommodation in a Stéphanie Superior room, full board, and all inclusions as per the Brenners Vitality Detox programme – from an entrance interview with the detox specialist, full body analysis and a personalised daily menu to treatments such as a deacidifying alkaline bath, body scrub and two training sessions with a personal trainer.*