

Brain overload. Anxiety. Complete body MoT - oh, and weight loss too! As wellness holidays boom, why this year you should... reach for the spas

- Here's our guide to help you find the right retreat, from weight loss in Germany to nature therapy in Iceland
- The list also features a full detox high in the Austrian Alps focusing on gut health, good nutrition and exercise
- Also check out the new Cottonmill Spa at Hertfordshire's Soppell House - part of a £14 million investment

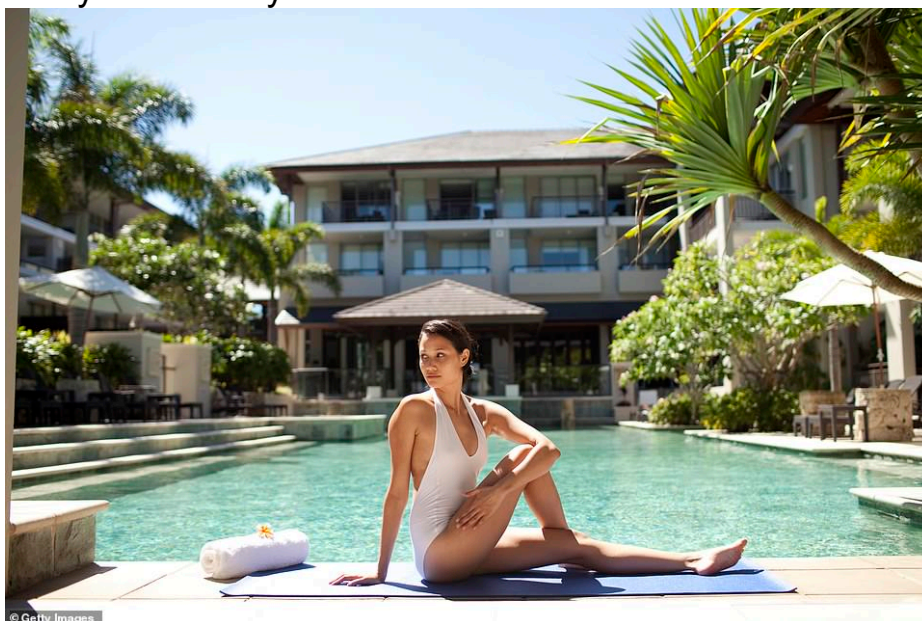
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Once upon a time, a 'wellness' holiday was known unceremoniously as a 'fat farm'. Most guests had checked in under duress and wandered around in white towelling robes, claspng timetables. That was in the Seventies.

Come the Eighties, the health farm started to garner more prestige. It was all about beauty services and pampering — facials with fizz, simultaneous manis and pedis and fairly basic massages.

As we headed for the new millennium, spas started to get with the programme — they sensed the effect of the [iPhone](#), the never-out-of-office lifestyles and they had solutions.



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• **'When it comes to a proper spa break, the challenge is finding the right retreat to deal with whatever is your issue', writes Suzanne Duckett**

The health farm became 'the spa'. Massage specialists were brought in and complementary health practitioners were the new stars. Today, the wellness industry is reportedly worth £3.2 trillion. Even spa sceptics who simply don't buy into the whole spa movement can't deny that you can now expect a thoroughly good massage and a stint in the sauna when you book into most hotels.

But when it comes to a proper spa break, the challenge is finding the right retreat to deal with whatever is your issue. So, here is our guide.

WEIGHT LOSS AND TUMMY HELP

Buchinger Wilhelmi, Germany

The home of five-star fasting, Buchinger Wilhelmi, on Lake Constance, is where its founder, Dr Otto Buchinger, devised his fasting method over a century ago. Vegetable broths, herbal teas and laxatives are usually the only things to pass your lips. Turn to yoga, meditation, hiking and an array of body treatments to take your mind off just how much you miss chewing.

DON'T MISS: An appointment with Dr Martine van Houten — what she doesn't know about intestinal cleansing isn't worth knowing.

DETAILS: Ten-day fasting programmes start from £2,290 pp including two consultations with a doctor, daily nurse check-ups, food/drink, fasting provisions and daily activities. Visit buchinger-wilhelmi.com.

Grayshott, Surrey

This has always been a retreat for the gut but since being bought by Austrian-based health-resort specialists Lanserhof Group in 2017, Grayshott has upped the ante. This month sees them being the first registered facility in the UK to offer an eight-night residential Mayr-fasting cure.

Blood will be drawn at dawn, infusions prescribed and a regimented Mayr diet adapted to the 21st century — toasted bread roll and milk for meals. The bread is a 'chewing trainer' and chewing is key to resting the gut.

Fasting does not mean being hungry — when you chew properly and you rest (no phone, no book) you feel your own satiety.

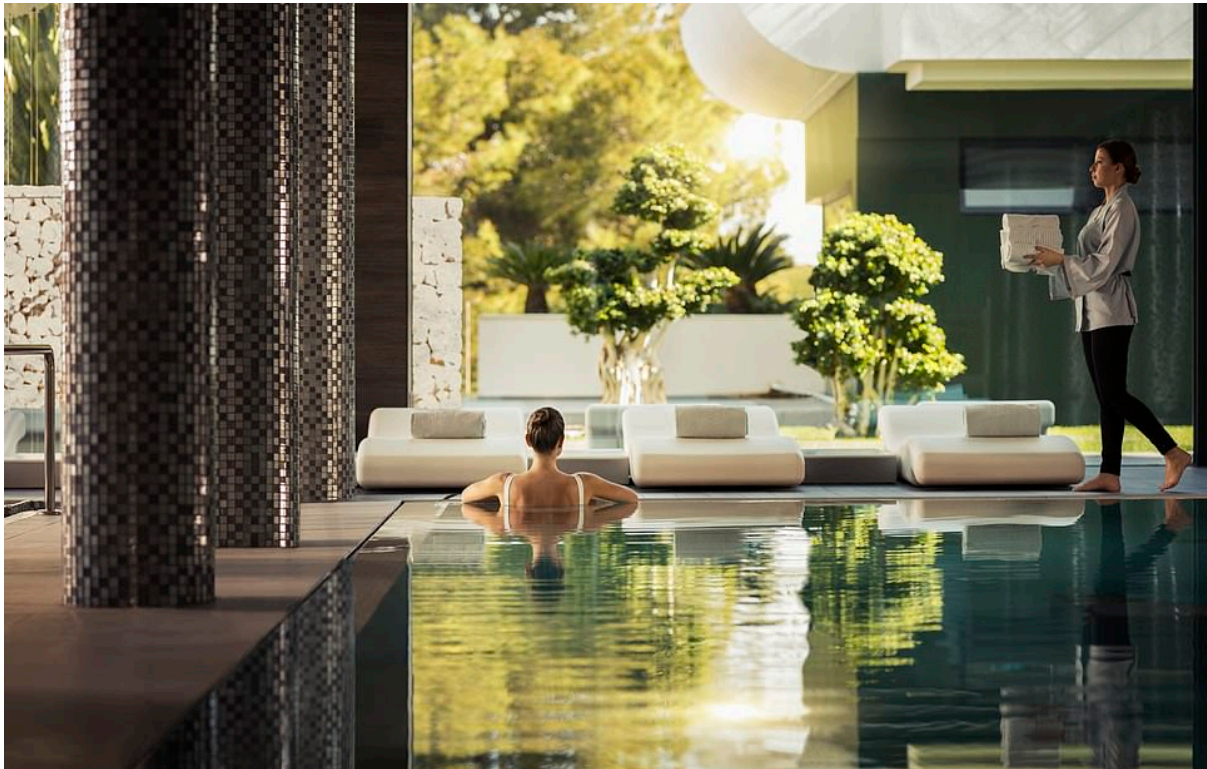
DON'T MISS: Book a Manor suite for a less institutional feel.

DETAILS: Costs £3,994, for an eight-night fully inclusive stay, including all consultations and therapies, meals, accommodation and use of facilities.

Visit grayshotsspa.com.

BRAIN OVERLOAD

SHA, Spain



- **Relax: SHA in Alicante offers neurological assessments that monitor attention span, recollection and reaction time — with the aim of boosting brain function. Pictured is the swimming pool**

Brainiacs say your brain is like a muscle – it can get tired just by being used, and cognitive dysfunction can arise even if your body is well rested. Modern, clinical SHA, in Alicante, is on the money with its cognitive development unit. Neurological assessments are carried out — sensors attached to the head that monitor attention span, recollection and reaction time — with the aim of boosting brain function.

DON'T MISS: A brilliant session with Professor Ribeiro do Couto.

DETAILS: Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com, 020 3111 0809) has a four-night Rebalance programme from £2,299pp, including flights to Alicante, transfers and full-board accommodation. Visit shawellnessclinic.com.

Vana, India

This retreat is a headquarters for mindfulness. Set in the Himalayan foothills, even the architecture is a mental balm, with its curved walls and huge windows with forest views.

Treatments include Ayurvedic Shirodhara — pouring liquids over the forehead to slow down the mind. Expect lots of staring into candle flames and Tibetan meditation.

DON'T MISS: A trip to Rishikesh on the River Ganges is a surreal, spiritual mind-altering experience in its own right.

DETAILS: Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com, 020 3111 0809) offers a five-night Ashram programme from £2,399, including BA flights, transfers, full board accommodation and the programme. Visit vana.co.in.

DEPRESSION

Euphoria, Greece



- **Euphoria is a quirky wellness retreat in the Peloponnese in Greece. It has a cossetting comforting design and an extensive spa treatment menu**

A quirky wellness retreat in the Peloponnese owned by Greek ex-banker Marina Efraimoglou, who retrained in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

Euphoria has a cossetting comforting design (all Byzantine domes and elegant curves); cocooning facilities (the main pool is a womb-like affair with hydro jets and dolphin music); and an extensive spa treatment menu fusing East and West TCM, theta healing, meditation and biomedicine.

DON'T MISS: Molecular nutritionist George Leon, who offers innovative testing that looks at the influence of lifestyle on individual gene expression.

DETAILS: Three-day Euphoria Inner & Outer Glow programme from £1,614 based on two adults sharing a Classic double room for three nights in January. Visit euphoriaretreat.com.

Hotel Post, Austria

Hotel Post Bezau is situated in a pretty, sleepy village surrounded by life-affirming mountains, fairytale meadows and pristine Alpine air. The pocket-sized spa has a small team of doctors specialising in both general and TCM, as well as highly qualified therapists and beauticians. Tailor-made retreats focus on everything from beauty, detox and yoga to outdoor fitness.

DON'T MISS: The TCM detox acts a little like natural Prozac, stimulating sluggishness and lowering cholesterol and blood sugar.

DETAILS: The Discovery Retreat at Hotel Post Bezau by Susanne Kaufmann three-night package with Irma Signature Cuisine, Detox Cuisine or Weight Management, a treatment and classes, £604 for a single room.

Visit hotelpostbezau.com.

NATURE THERAPY

Stanglwirt, Austria



- **Revitalise: Tyrolean family-run lodge Stanglwirt in Austria has Europe's largest mineralised saltwater pool**

Tyrolean family-run lodge Stanglwirt in Austria is an organic farm with a hotel and a nature-comes-first attitude to architecture, sustained and heated by its own squeaky-clean mountain spring.

The new zero-emission Herbal Spa is the latest addition — more than 12,000 sq m dedicated to guilt-free wellness, with Europe's largest mineralised saltwater pool.

DON'T MISS: The Herb Hike with psychotherapist Ava Annama.

DETAILS: From £545 per room for three nights' B&B and £25pp to be redeemed in spa. Visit stanglwirt.com.

Eleven Life, Iceland

Nature Calls at Eleven Life is in Deplar Farm, in Iceland's isolated far north. A team of outdoor-adventure specialists will have you hiking, surfing, cross-

country skiing and snowshoeing. Evenings are more soporific — yoga and floating on your back in the geothermal spa pool, while staring at the Northern Lights.

DON'T MISS: Endorphin-releasing sauna-and-cold-plunge sessions.

DETAILS: From £1,750 per room per night (based on two people sharing), including consultation and wellness programme, guides, all meals, minibar, house alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, and round-trip transfers to Akureyri Airport. Visit elevenexperience.com/eleven-life-deplar-farm.

BACKACHE RELEASE

Hotel Palacio, Portugal

Just 25 minutes drive from Lisbon, the Estoril Wellness Center is brimming with back and joint healers. Sure, these magicians will fix you up there and then, but they want you to stay well and therefore have a passionately preventative ethos.

DON'T MISS: A powerwalk to Cascais.

DETAILS: Physical Rehabilitation seven-day programme, £758pp. For accommodation, check palacioestorilhotel.com. Prices vary according to season and room category.

Chiva-Som, Thailand

Welcome to the ultimate tropical spa, just a couple of hours drive from Bangkok.

A much-needed £18 million renovation has injected a new lease of life. The already-crack team of physios has a new Re-functional Studio with shiny equipment to measure muscles and mobility. Add in Gyrokinesis, personal training, reformer Pilates, yoga and exercise rehab, and guests practically skip out.

DON'T MISS: Physio Phon Thakorn has been known to fix chronic back pain in just two sessions.

DETAILS: Price from £5,450pp (double) / £7,415 (single) for seven nights in February including full board and the Discover Chiva-Som programme. Visit chivasom.com.

FULL MOT

Grand Resort Bad Ragaz , Switzerland



© Supplied/Health and Fitness Travel

- **Clean break: Still the ultimate in world-class health resorts, Grand Hotel Quellenhof was 150 last year**

Still the ultimate in world-class health resorts, Grand Hotel Quellenhof was 150 last year. Like many of its regulars, it's looking good for its age.

DON'T MISS: Dinner at Verve.

DETAILS: Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com, 020 3111 0809) has a two-night health check programme from £1,985pp sharing. This includes BA flights, transfers from Bad Ragaz station, accommodation, breakfast, a medical history discussion and tests and personalised general health advice. Visit resortragaz.ch.

Park Igls Mayr Clinic

Expect a full detox high in the Austrian Alps. It follows the Mayr principle of gut health, good nutrition and exercise. Cutting-edge medical testing, alternative procedures and renowned experts from Innsbruck's university hospital help focus on preventative medicine.

DON'T MISS: Swimming before bed.

DETAILS: From £130pp per night based on two sharing, B&B. All therapeutic and diagnostic modules start with basic programme, £1,794pp. Visit park-igls.com.

FITNESS KICK START

Yeotown, Devon

This five-day rural retreat goes from strength to strength — all eco cottages with woodburners.

Get set for coastline hiking, outdoor circuits, archery, sea kayaking, wild swimming and surfing with a delicious plant-based menu. You will go to your edge but a punishing boot-camp this is not.

DON'T MISS: Sessions at dusk in the outdoor hot tubs.

DETAILS: From £1,950pp for an all-inclusive five-day programme, including transfers from Tiverton Parkway train station. Visit yeotown.com.

Preidlhof, Italy



- **Fit for a holiday:** Take part in HIIT circuits, abs sessions and aerial rope workouts at Preidlhof in Italy (stock image)

As well as Nordic walking, mountain hikes and vineyard trails, there are punishing indoor workouts: HIIT circuits, abs sessions and aerial rope workouts. The six-floor spa tower has state-of-the-art fitness facilities and 16 steam, sauna and relaxation options plus five outdoor pools to soothe those aching muscles.

DON'T MISS: Borrow a hotel Vespa.

DETAILS: Price is from £136pp (based on double occupancy), per night, on a three-quarters board accommodation basis plus complimentary sports and fitness classes and use of sauna tower Visit preidhof.it.

SPA TRIP TIPS

- Plan well in advance to make the most of all there is to offer.
- Check the small print because a package's 'included' treatments aren't always what they are cracked up to be.
- If fasting, go alone or with someone who won't be offended when you start comparing bowel movements (and you will).
- Detoxing can be tough so start cutting out obviously unhealthy things in advance (especially alcohol, caffeine, meat and sugar).
- Good facilities (sauna, steam room, pools) top and tail treatments, so use them.
- At a good day or hotel spa with a thermal suite and a pool, you can turn a 60-minute massage into a three-hour relaxation session by arriving a good one to two hours before your treatment begins.
- If you are a nude prude, be aware that countries such as Germany and Austria frown upon swimwear in saunas for hygiene reasons.

DEEP RELAXATION

Cottonmill Spa, Herts

The new state-of-the-art facility at Hertfordshire's Sopwell House is part of a £14 million investment.

Two membership tiers give different access, to members, hotel and spa guests, to what is a fab hotel spa with indoor pools, sauna, steam and relaxation rooms, great gym and fitness classes.

DON'T MISS: Elemis Amber & Quartz Body Restore Ritual.

DETAILS: £154 per room per night on a B&B basis, treatments from £50. Visit sopwellhouse.co.uk.

Bulgari Hotel, London

After making the descent five floors underground, below the lobby of the Bulgari Hotel, so silent and serene is the place, you will forget that you are deep beneath bustling Knightsbridge.

At 200m², it is one of the city's most spacious and glamorous escapes — a maze of dark-wood treatment rooms, saunas, swirly onyx-marble steam rooms, ice fountains and a vitality pool with gold-leaf mosaic.

Spa trippers need to spend two hours or £250 to get free reign of the place before shuffling to the relaxation room, all flickering fires and silence. Well worth it.

DON'T MISS: The ginger tea.

DETAILS: 90-minute Kloris Stress Melting Ritual, £270 including full use of facilities. Visit [bulgarihotels.com](https://www.bulgarihotels.com).