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This is what happened when Louis de Rohan headed to Lanzarote to try Hollywood’s latest health craze, with the man they call the Breath Guru (he’s that guy to the right looking rather relaxed)

I’m a fit, healthy, successful, 43-year-old London business owner. I grew up by the sea in north Devon and normally get my release through watersports. But 2013 was tough: big life choices, emotional knocks, postponed plans, midlife conundrums, family, finance and business pressures all contributed to unsustainable levels of stress, clinical depression and rotten sleep. Any of this sound familiar?

Some 40-million Brits admit to stress and anxiety, according to a Mintel report from 2010: “A third have the weight of the world on their shoulders,” it says. Their main preoccupations? Money, friends and family, health and work – and there’s still a stigma associated with admitting problems, with only 6% seeking professional help.

Enter Alan Dolan, a 50-year-old globetrotting Mancunian who purports to have the answer. At least, that’s if a growing >>

troupe of followers, from CEOs to OAPs, secretaries to soldiers, are to be believed.

Known as the Breath Guru, Dolan is an authority on a technique called Transformational Breath which, he claims, infuses the body on a cellular level with much-needed oxygen and energy (aka, chi, prana or electromagnetic energy). It might all sound distinctly New Age, but he insists there's serious science involved – and people are listening. Right now, his methods are hot property in Hollywood, with a host of A-listers swearing by them as a means to curb anxiety, assist with sleep disorders and even cure allergies.

Is this just another fad from La La Land, I wondered? Or could it be the cure for our multiple modern maladies? Having never heard of the technique before, I was sceptical – but I just I knew needed help. So, I bit the bullet and booked a flight to Lanzarote, where Dolan lives, to spend some time on one of his retreats.

These are pretty full-on, with intense acupressure, deep bodywork and muscle massage, as well as breathing practice, so to guarantee that everyone gets ample attention, the numbers are limited to four at any one time. I'm nervous on arrival, but it seems I'm very much a typical attendee – 90% of his clients are white-collar professionals. My companion over the three days is a 60-something Dutch GP with chronic asthma. Together we stay in the white, hillside village of Nazaret. Surrounding us, the elemental reds, blacks and browns of the prehistoric Lanzarote landscape feel like a suitably backdrop for such an otherworldly experience, but it's Dolan's place that is particularly special. With Lanzarote's panoramic volcano sunsets visible from the Jacuzzi, a sky-blue swimming pool and shady veranda, a shaggy dog with the same name as me and pink, flowering cacti in the garden, it's certainly an idyllic setting. I can't help but wonder, though, is this to be a case of style over substance? And I'm soon to find out.

On day one, I'm summoned to a small, plain room for the first of eight treatments, comprising of six intense 90-minute breathing sessions with Dolan and a pair of two-hour dynamic-release body massages with 60-something, Sydney-native Dennis. I lie back on a mountain of pillows. The air is sweet with the smell of burnt sage. Dolan sits in the lotus position in front of me

and I close my eyes. In a poetic, hypnotic monotone, he tells me to let go of any tension in my body. He then asks me to place my hand below my navel and start to breathe. As instructed, I inhale gently from my diaphragm, pushing my belly into my hand. At the top of the breath, Dolan reminds me not to pause, and instead to exhale gently with an uncontrolled and natural exhalation as if trying to fog a mirror.

It takes time and concentration to achieve the steady rhythm of circular breathing, but I'm soon sinking. Thirty minutes in, I am well on my way towards a deep, relaxed sleep state, with Dolan supervising. "Come back," he prompts if he notices my breathing changing.

By the end of the 90-minute session, I feel like I'm on another planet. Mystical music plays on an iPad and I am virtually hallucinating. Behind my eyelids, there is the

languid movement of shapes like a lava lamp. It feels like every cell in my body is blissed out. This isn't what I was expecting at all. In fact, it's quite unlike anything I've ever done...

Later that day, I get the opportunity to catch up with Dolan, and it gives me the opportunity to find out how he ended up here. It transpires that little more than a decade ago, the softly spoken Brit was a confirmed member of the rat race – much like the people he now treats. Working in PR for a multinational in Saudi Arabia, he regularly pulled six 12-hour days a week.

"I was sharing a house with two colleagues in Riyadh," he tells me. "Dial-a-dinner was the norm. I was addicted to caffeine, cigarettes and alcohol. My life was way out of balance, leading to increased levels of stress and

depression. Driving to work one morning, it became crystal clear: I was making a very good living, but I had absolutely no life. Unchecked, my future didn't look good."

In 2003, he worked out his exit strategy. Handing in his notice, he left for a 12-month sabbatical with an idea of becoming a yoga instructor and setting up a centre somewhere.

"It was like being under water for a long time and finally coming up for air," he says. Eight weeks in, he found himself in Costa Rica and it was there he discovered Transformational Breath at the Nosara Yoga Institute. Within 50 minutes of the first session, he had his epiphany, changed his plans and decided to book a plane ticket to Connecticut, to train with Dr Judith Kravitz, the technique's pioneer.

"I couldn't believe that something so simple could



"With panoramic volcano sunsets visible from the sky-blue swimming pool and pink, flowering cacti in the garden, it's certainly an idyllic setting"

TAKE A BREATH

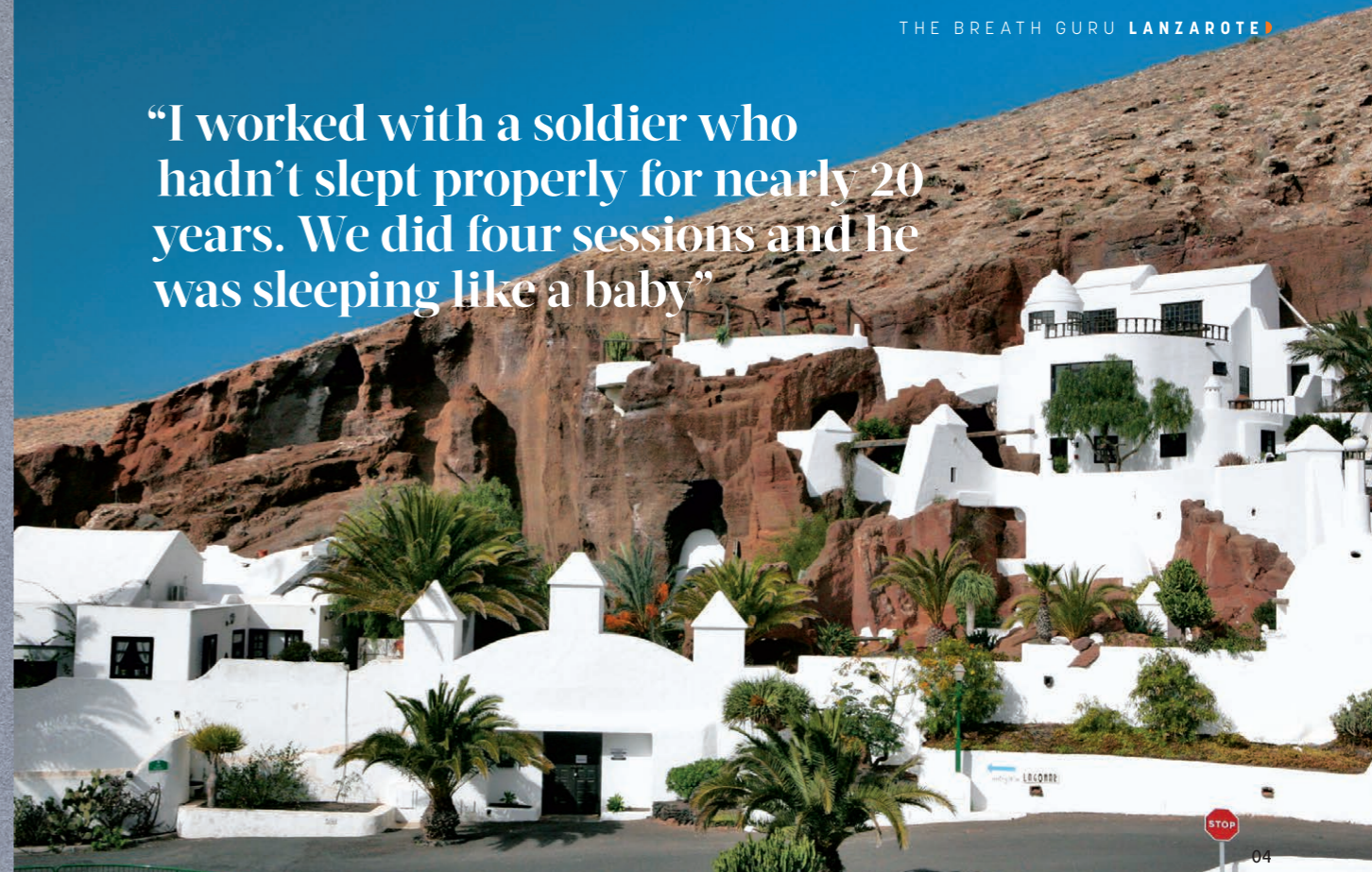
- 01 The idyllic setting for Dolan's retreats
- 02 With his dog, Louis
- 03 Lanzarote's volcanic rock gives a suitably otherworldly feel



ARTHUR & ASTON



“I worked with a soldier who hadn't slept properly for nearly 20 years. We did four sessions and he was sleeping like a baby”



create such profound change. I had two thoughts: why doesn't anyone know about this? And what would happen if I created an environment in which people could experience this work intensively? I found the perfect place. I've travelled to 72 countries, but Lanzarote stopped me in my tracks.”

The initial challenge, he explained, was the obvious one: in a world where there are increasing numbers of hokey holistic therapies, how would he convince people? His plan was to leave things to word of mouth – a plan that seems to be working.

“My first client was a lady from the south-east of England. She had lost her husband two years before and hadn't really moved on since. We did a couple of sessions, which totally blew her away. She left for the UK literally transformed – her friends said she glowed.

“I also worked with a soldier who had post-traumatic stress syndrome and hadn't slept properly for nearly 20



AIR TODAY

- 04 The nearby house 'Lag O Mar', once owned by Omar Sharif
- 05 One of Alan's Balinese Buddhas

years. We did four sessions together. I saw him some weeks later and he was sleeping like a baby. It was then I realised this was more powerful than I'd anticipated.”

Of course, Dolan isn't alone in what he's doing. It's a symptom of our increasingly stressed out 21st-century lives that more and more of us are seeking out coping mechanisms and ways to escape the grind. From digital detoxes to yoga retreats, the options are growing – as are the number of fans. According to a 2012 report by Global Industry Analysts, the alternative-medical sector is expected to reach close to \$115 billion by 2015. There are ever-more therapies, from guided imagery to tula massage. But, while some embrace an increasing variety of New Age fads, others are sceptical about the benefits.

As far as Transformational Breath, Dolan says they are unequivocal, promoting physical as well as spiritual well-being. “Breathwork infuses the body with much-needed oxygen and energy, enabling our own, often depleted, healing systems to function better.”

Of course, it also has much in common with more traditional forms of meditation. On day three, a Tibetan singing bowl is used to ease me into my transformational state. I'm getting better at the breathwork and I sink deeper. When I come out, there's an eerie silence. I open my eyes and see Dolan's blurred silhouette. Then it starts: tears begin to stream.

"What are you feeling?" he asks. I pause for a few minutes. "That I'm not bad. I feel like I'm a good person." I explain why I'm crying between the sobs.



06

WAITING TO EXHALE

- 06 Dolan leads a small group in breathwork
- 07 Where the individual sessions take place

"I realise that just because I'm gay, I'm not a bad person." There's another silence. I try to pull myself together. It's a spectacular catharsis which, I'm told, is very much part of the process. By releasing everything bodily, Dolan says, repressed emotions are also unloaded.

I'd been fearing something like this might happen. I had a phenomenally happy childhood, but at 30 I came out and it was tough. It took 10 years for me to realise I needed counselling. Nevertheless, there was still much that therapy didn't resolve: anger, frustration, loneliness, guilt. I'd been suppressing emotions for over a decade and it's these that have bubbled to the surface once the retreat has taken away my control and allowed my body to speak, as it were.

Uneasily, I shuffle out of the room in my socks. In the mirror, my face is ruddy and bloated, but there's a beaming smile that I haven't seen since I was in my 20s.

"There's a beaming smile on my face I haven't seen since I was in my 20s"



07

I feel emotionally whacked, but also relieved. I retreat to my room, sinking litres of fruit tea to rehydrate. In the evening, we eat under the stars. Too tired to talk, I just listen to Dolan's trippy chat about the universe.

It turns out to be an epic trip. So, do I know how the therapy worked or can I explain it? No. Do I think Transformational Breath can help people? Absolutely. Will I be able to keep up my regular practice at home? Well, going by my record of morning meditations over the past 10 years, not yet – but I'm working on it. See breathguru.com or transformationalbreath.co.uk for more information. Lanzarote Breath retreats start from £530 (approx €645)

PHOTOS LOUIS DE ROHAN

Lanzarote need to know

(1)

Voted Best Winter Sun Destination 2014 by the Irish Travel Agents Association



PRINCESS YAIZA SUITE HOTEL

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(23.5)

Average daytime temperature in Celsius during March

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(1966)

Year the film *One Million Years BC* was shot here



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flies to Lanzarote from London Gatwick and Liverpool See our insider guide on page 126. Book online at easyJet.com

*FOR T&CS SEE P157