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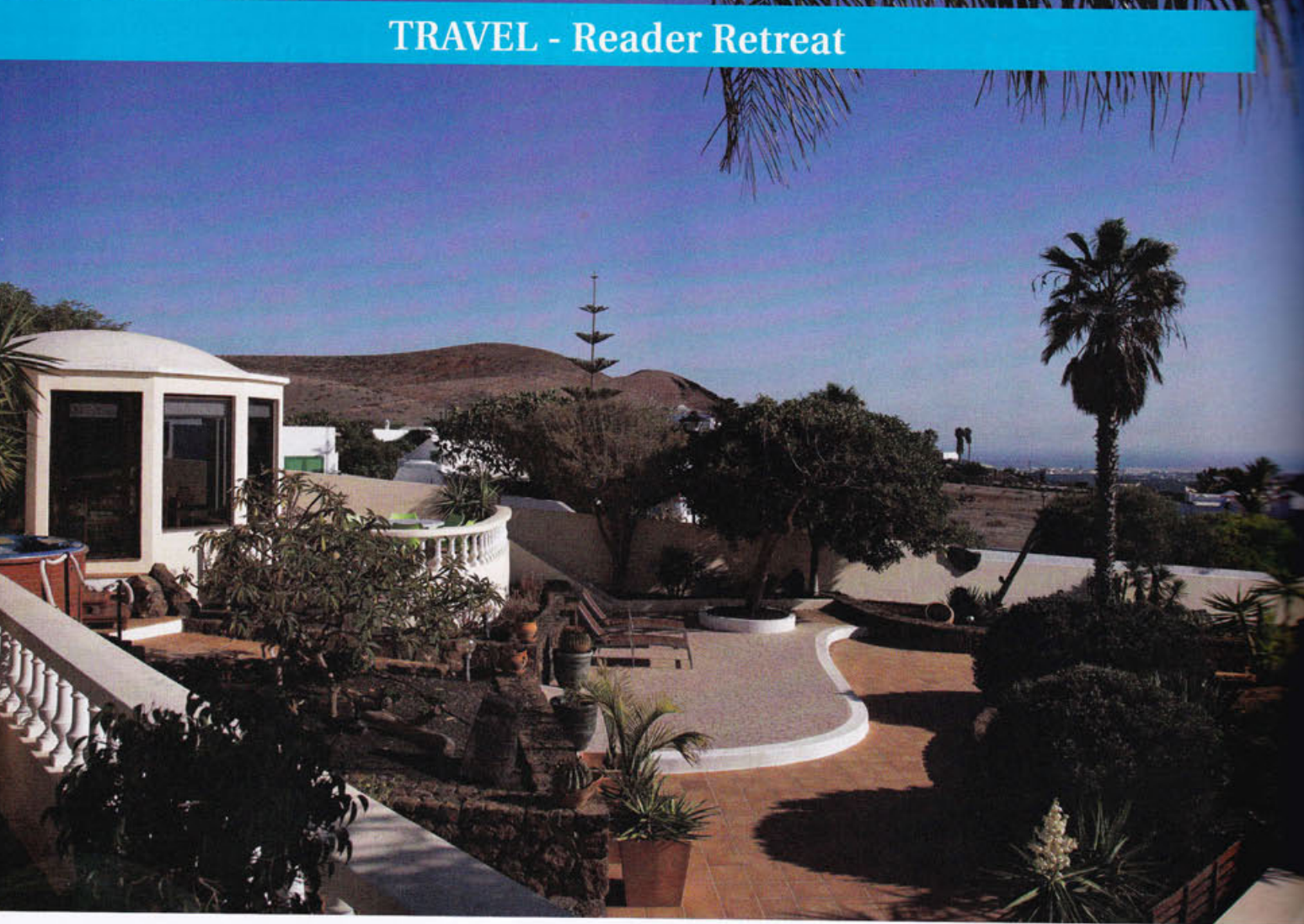
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Diving into the breathing ocean

Ariadna Bakhmatova enjoys a transformational break in Lanzarote with breath guru Alan Dolan

Wellness retreats can be one of the best ways to facilitate positive change – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually – over a short period of time. Having been on numerous wellbeing spas and resorts over the past year or so, I couldn't agree more. I've always been on the lookout for places that are holistic from the inside out, and ones that help their guests bring at least one new healthy habit into their daily lives.

My recent discovery, a transformational breathing retreat with Alan Dolan (pictured opposite, top left) (breathguru.com) on the beautiful island of Lanzarote, turned out to be something quite different to what I've experienced so far. It was the kind of retreat that not only facilitates positive change, but is capable of bringing permanent shifts across your entire spectrum of being. The nature and the depth of those changes are entirely individual, and the journey to them is just as fascinating as the destination.

Transformational breathing

The technique itself – transformational breathing – wasn't new to me, so I knew what to expect. I've experienced this technique a few times during group workshops with Dolan in the UK. I've been doing them to enhance my daily yoga practice, clear out some recently accumulated emotional garbage and top-up my energy levels. At the end of each workshop, Dolan used to say that each session is like dipping the toe in the water; the one-to-one wellness retreat is a real swim in the ocean. So I got myself together and dived in.

Put simply, transformational breathing is a special breathing technique with no pause between the inhale and the exhale. It's an abdominal breath through the mouth, with the inhale being deep and the exhale short and light. All you do is lie there and keep breathing. The story that's going on within you during those sessions, however, is big enough to write the sequel to 'War and Peace'. Like many other healing



modalities, transformational breathing works progressively, so the more you breathe - the more you do it - the more shifts happen.

Wellness retreat

The retreat itself offers three programmes to choose from: basic, intensive and super-intensive. I opted for an intensive one, which included one two-hour breathing session and one bodywork session a day. Perhaps I should mention that, having dipped my toe into the ocean of transformational breathing before, I was, frankly, quite scared of all the change that four one-to-one sessions with the breathing guru can bring. That fear got me thinking that we are generally reluctant to let go of faulty beliefs and emotional patterns that are so deep-seated we think they are our indispensable parts. But there I was, on this magical island of Lanzarote, in front of Dolan in his cosy treatment room, ready to let go, inhaling and exhaling, time and again.

My four-session breathing experience was an intensive journey within, unveiling, acknowledging and healing layer after layer of my being. Most of these layers have been skilfully hiding from my attention for quite some while. Dolan's role during each session is that of a multi-tasking guide: he makes sure the breathing technique is correct; he applies some acupressure to help release blockages from various parts of the body; every now and then, he gives positive affirmations to the person's sub-conscious.

Private sessions

My first session was a general energy fill up, waking up of the body and an identification of the areas that needed further work. Through the observation of a person's breath and the response to the acupressure, Dolan identifies different aspects that require the person's attention. The very first session made it obvious that my major themes are grounding, slowing down, coming back into my body as well as self-expression and self-love. Sounds easy, hey?

During the second session, as I was breathing, I could hear my various sub-personalities being very busy sorting things out amongst



themselves, and all I could do was keep breathing, observing the chat. More themes kept popping up during the sessions and Dolan kept pointing them out to me. Some of them I couldn't immediately relate to, such as "embracing my masculine side" (I consider myself an active person with the "just do it" attitude, isn't that quite masculine?) The answers aren't always obvious, and that's part of the journey.

Letting go

Transformational breathing almost always ends up in tears; people often let go of some suppressed emotions as they keep breathing, finally inviting them onto the surface. Those are arguably the sweetest tears; the degree of relief I felt after my weeping that had finally happened at the third session was something akin to an orgasm, but with a longer after-effect.

During my final session we worked on the heart area. As Dolan explained to me, doing transformational breathing is like building a house; it starts off with creating a strong foundation - clearing out the abdominal area; then the person moves up their body, releasing the blockages from the solar plexus, finally reaching the heart area. Letting love in was the theme for me - again, something I was sure I had no issues with. But the body doesn't lie, and so I took note of yet another confession it gave out to me.

Another equally important part of my retreat was daily bodywork sessions I'd been having alongside my breathing practice. Delivered by a surfer-by-day, healer-by-night, Denise, the bodywork sessions were just as transformational as the breathing itself. Think deep tissue massages meets acupressure meets Thai massage, plus many more.

The four days of the retreat seemed more like four weeks. I left feeling more grounded, tranquil and centred, and having opened the door to the new journey I'd been set on: a journey of a relationship with myself. I've also left with a deep assurance that I'm yet to experience all the benefits the retreat had given to me, as I go back into my daily life and watch the results of those inner changes taking place.

