



THE SUNDAY TIMES

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NEW
BEAUTY
SPECIAL
THE SPA
DIARIES

INDIA KNIGHT
GETS HER BEST
NIGHT'S SLEEP

CLAUDIA WINKLEMAN
LEARNS HOW
TO RELAX

JEREMY CLARKSON
STRIPS OFF
(YES, REALLY)

PLUS
BOLD MAKE-UP
LOOKS

Whisper this

BUT I RATHER ENJOYED IT

What happened when we sent spa refusenik **Jeremy Clarkson** to spend a weekend in waffle robes? Where does **Claudia Winkleman** go to get away from it all? And could **India Knight** learn to get a good night's sleep? The *Sunday Times* star columnists review the best treatments from around the world



JEREMY CLARKSON GETS PLUCKED AT GRAYSHOTT HEALTH SPA

The final hangover from last year was still coursing through my head when I arrived with a face the colour of a motor torpedo boat at the Grayshott health farm, which is located in the part of Surrey the ashamed locals call the Surrey-Hampshire borders. This is not the sort of spa, we are told, where hen-nighters spend all day in a whirlpool bath giggling about anal bleaching. It's billed as a "medical" spa, and it's owned by the Lanserhof group, where Germans and Austrians go to follow a strict regime of fasting and doing star jumps. And picking up divorcees.

The place is full of people from north London, who are mostly on a week-long course that involves lectures on how to chew everything 30 times before swallowing it. Every weight-loss and health routine has a USP. Some say you shouldn't eat carbs. Some that you should fast for two days a week. There's even one in Georgia where you lie for a day in a bath full of red wine. Really, to choose which one is best, you need to visit the website I use for weather forecasts: www.whatyouwanttohear.com. Then you have places that practise Chinese medicine, which all sounds very sage.

But let's not forget that in China, it's a commonly held belief that erectile dysfunction can be cured by snorting rhino horn.

At Grayshott, you learn that exercise is not important (deep joy); on the downside, though, you must never again eat grain, potatoes or sugar. Even apples are not allowed. You'd certainly pick Grayshott if you love a lentil. Lentils are tremendous, apparently. I hadn't the heart to point out that they form part of the staple diet in India, where the average life expectancy is about five. Whereas in southwest France, where they live on foie gras, everyone lives to be 112.

I also learn that I have 4lb of bacteria in my gut and that there's more bacterial DNA in my body than there is human. It was all quite interesting, but I hear some of the other lectures are a bit happy-clappy armpit hair.

I went with my girlfriend, Lisa, who loves all this stuff. She believes in chakra points, and that acupuncture can be used to cure radiation sickness. I, on the other hand, would rather put

Illustrations
Amrita Marino





my trust in the Swiss drug companies. Hearing the word "wellness" actually makes me ill.

Over dinner, she had some socialism in a Corbyn sauce. I had duck. There was wine on offer, but we were being good so, despite the sugar risk, had something called "lime cordial".

Chewing everything 30 times is annoying. And if it's a mushroom, it's impossible, because it'll just sort of slip down after only a very short time. Plus, when you are chewing, you can't talk, which makes mealtimes a miserable experience. For many of the guests, this didn't matter, as they were dining with nothing for company but a book called *Watermelons in Greece*, and their Golders Green hair.

And if we're honest, it didn't matter to me, because in between the Trappism of feeding times, there's much to keep you occupied.

Tennis and swimming and t'ai chi (which is slow-motion kung fu) I can do at a proper hotel, so I decided to have a massage. I went to our room — decorated very much in the style of my mother — changed into a dressing gown

and some slippers that didn't fit, and shuffled off to a dimly lit under-stairs cupboard, where a Polish woman asked me to undress and lie down on a large piece of polythene. "Oh no," I thought. "I've seen Dexter. She's going to murder me." But the music suggested otherwise. It was a curious mix of panpipes and whale song, and once I'd got over the fear that I was about to be wasted, it wasn't so bad really.

I've had massages before, of course — two, in fact. The first was on the eighth floor of the old Caravelle hotel in the centre of Saigon. This was a popular haunt among American officers during the Vietnam War, so let's gloss over that and move to the second. This was conducted in Barbados by a big German woman who had learnt all she knew from torturing downed airmen in the war. God, it hurt.

The Polish woman's efforts were somewhere in between the two. At one point, she put me in a half-nelson and dug her elbow into my kidneys, which was a bit horrible, but then she pulled my pants down and played an imaginary piano on my buttocks, which was quite nice. Well, it would have been had I not been consumed by an eye-crossing need to break wind. This would become a constant problem for my girlfriend, especially on her left-wing diet of pulses and beans.

After 40 minutes or so, I was wrapped in the polythene I'd been lying on and, as I lay there like a supermarket lettuce, she played this Little Piggy with my toes. Happily, because I was in a bag, I was able to let one go, knowing that it'd all be contained. Perhaps that's what the polythene is for.

The next day, we went for blood tests, which revealed that my girlfriend scored 17% for body fat, whereas I got 29%. I also won the gamma GT contest, scoring 110 to her laughable total of seven. But it doesn't work like that. Big figures, I was told, are a bad thing. This caused an argument because the gamma score measures the health of your liver. And my girlfriend is Irish. So a low score for her, on that front, is actually impossible. In a huff, I went to have the sewage flushed out of my bloodstream. This involved lying down in a room full of George Harrison sitar noises, while a woman stroked me with a brush like a dog.

Later, I went for some eyebrow shaping. To do this, a woman pulled out the hairs one at a time. It was extremely painful, so after she'd done the right one, I asked her to stop. Hence I now look a bit lopsided. Occasionally, I'd pass my girlfriend skipping down a corridor in

Lisa and Jeremy in matching dressing gowns at Grayscott Health Spa



the opposite direction, beaming because she'd had a cranial orgasm and her knees were all tingly. She was loving it all.

Grayshott is like any other holiday hotel, but instead of separating meals with sunbathing and snorkelling, you are rubbed and wrapped in polythene. It sounds silly, but as a way of launching myself into dry January, it worked quite well. Whisper this, but I rather enjoyed it. That said, I still maintain the best advice I ever had about living a healthy life came from a dietician in Toulouse. "Always sit down when you eat, and over dinner, laugh and take your time. Don't share the table with ugly people. Drink red wine and eat the fat from birds." It's better than lentils and silence, that's for sure.

...AND WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SPA WITH THE NEANDERTHAL, BY JEREMY'S GIRLFRIEND, ACTRESS LISA HOGAN

When you start writing affectionate emails to the marketing manager of the farm you're about to attend, you know you're in need. I'm the only person I know who hadn't been to Grayshott Spa, but that's not surprising, as healthy minibreaks are not high on the getaway list for the Neanderthal and me. However, after a gleeful festive period of painting every town and field red, it was time.

On arrival, I go for a de-stress massage, but the Neanderthal, in his sophistication, is aghast as I leave our room in a waffle dressing gown and slippers. "Have you no sense of decorum?" he bellows after me. After his plastic-bag detox, he arrives back glowing, but not in a good way. Anything he brushes against or drips on turns toxic. On the upside, he is quickly institutionalised and looks well cute in his seersucker twinset that matches what all the other inmates wear all day.

On the first morning, we do our blood tests before breakfast to see what we are allergic to. I already avoid dairy, most old cheese and, having not had alcohol for the past two days, the Neanderthal. We have both stopped boozing for the month but, for sanity, are freebasing nicotine gum. The blood is squeezed into small phials via a tiny pinprick to the finger; my blood seems reluctant to leave, as it takes three fingers to get the small amount needed.

Later, Elaine, who has been here for 30 years but looks about 28, tells me from the state of my Chinese pulse diagnosis that my liver has been "overworked". She pops in some acupuncture needles, then starts on cranial osteopathy that feels like spearmint

NEED TO KNOW GRAYSHOTT SPA

The seven-day Health Regime starts at £1,950 per person (based on two sharing a room; £2,150 for single occupancy), inclusive of accommodation, all meals and £550 worth of treatments; grayshottspa.com

coursing through my body until it whooshes out through my feet. She is known as the white witch; rather wastefully, the Neanderthal remained utterly resistant to the amazing feeling of healthiness she casts over me.

During her talk, Stephanie emphasises the importance of sugar management, how to retrain the 100 trillion bacteria that live in our gut, why cooked food is better than raw, and the advantages of breaking your fast at lunch several times a week, to give the gut more time to repair. Then lo, a miracle happens: the Neanderthal asks why we are having lime in our fizzy water as it has sugar in it, and holy moly, the next morning asks for honey in his coffee instead of a kilo and a half of white sugar.

We spend our last day playing tennis and having facials. In a selfless act of compassion for the dear Neanderthal, I give him the eyebrow-shaping slot. The time had come to tame the Clarkson two. The result is wondrous, both in terms of how the therapist made such progress, and how adorable he looks with just the one perfect eyebrow.

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CLAUDIA WINKLEMAN GOES TO BABINGTON AND FINDS HER HAPPY PLACE



Here's the thing about spa breaks. The spas may be run by people with magic hands; they may boast nine different body wraps; their menu might cover a whole booklet that weighs the same as a small truck; and they might give so many facial options, your head starts spinning. They may be on top of a mountain, on a perfect lagoon or they may be hidden in the deepest, darkest forest. This is all cool, fantastic even, but if the hotel attached isn't the best hotel on earth, then basically you're travelling for hours and paying for a massage table and possibly an orchid display. Once the massage/stretch/pedicure/humming session is over, then you are back in your hotel room with just a tasteless £25 kale juice and your iPod. You might lose a few pounds, the honey-drench salt body scrub might make your skin feel soft, but the whole experience is a bit meh, a tiny bit depressing.

So then, the greatest thing about the Cowshed Spa is that it's part of Babington House, which is, let me explain, simply the best hotel in the world. I know, I know. You're shaking your head: maybe you've been to an establishment in India which you say beats it; maybe you're extra keen on Florence. This is all well and good, but I'm here to tell you that Babington is the original and the all-time best away-from-home experience in the universe. Here's why — the staff are the same staff that



NEED TO KNOW
COWSHED AT BABINGTON HOUSE
Rooms from £125 a night for non Soho House members. Treatments include deep tissue massage, £110 for 90 minutes, and mud treatment, £45 for 60 minutes; babingtonhouse.co.uk

started here almost 20 years ago, the bedrooms are vast and comfortable as well as sexy (literally, this breaks science, as you usually get either one or the other), and the food is outstanding. Now, I love a spa and I'm very keen on being pulped, plucked and scrubbed, but I also really like a roast potato and a cheeseboard. Babington has all of this, a fun bar with the best cocktails and a log room that's always brimming with scones and coffee cake (theirs is extraordinary), but when you want to disappear and have a bit of your time (I know, this phrase makes me feel nauseous too), then head to the Cowshed, which is hidden away from the hubbub. Beautiful oak tables are laden with mint water and coconut and date balls. Freakishly friendly therapists will lead you to your room for the best massages (try the deep tissue one), unbelievable mud experiences (don't be alarmed, you will look 11 after this) and life-enhancing facials.

The treatments are great, the enormous, generous rooms are seriously relaxing and, when you're done with looking after you, then you can skip back to the hotel of dreams for a mac'n'cheese and a shandy. Win-win.

INDIA KNIGHT GETS SOME SLEEP AT GLENEAGLES



Sleep, or rather the lack of it, is the 21st-century disease, and we now know what catastrophic consequences can ensue from bad sleep — if you don't know, read the neuroscientist Matthew Walker's book, *Why We Sleep*, a deeply serious work as opposed to a pop science one. It links sleep deprivation to, among other things, increased risks of heart attack, Alzheimer's and cancer.

Gleneagles, the five-star hotel and golf resort in Scotland, has put sleep at the centre of its wellness programme. Naturopath Louise Westra takes a particular interest in circadian health, which is about natural daylight and biological cycles. She's your woman if you have seasonal affective disorder, but she's also very much worth seeking out if you have any kind of sleep-issue, and also if you feel tired all the time for reasons you can't entirely explain. She will work out why and offer practical solutions during a consultation.

"This aspect of our health is largely neglected," she says, "but it is also fundamental to wellbeing." Cheerfully, it can be addressed in all sorts of manageable ways, from the time you eat supper to the darkness of your bedroom to when to eat breakfast. She also recommends downloading f.lux (justgetflux.com) to your laptop to reduce blue light emissions as the day progresses. To oversimplify terribly,



blue light is the enemy. Westra is intelligent and engaging, uncranky and rational, and you should expect reasonably quick results.

Elsewhere, Gleneagles — which was, in the past, pointlessly overformal and stuffy — has new owners, who have undertaken a significant makeover, leaving it with a jaunty new spring in its step. There's an excellent traditional spa: from the vast menu of treatments, using Espa products, I had a facial, a massage, a manicure and a blow-dry, all perfectly executed. Because of where it is — an especially ravishing part of Perthshire — and because the estate is vast, you can use the place as an outdoorsy haven as easily as you can lounge about in a robe indoors.

There's golf, obviously, but also riding, shooting, fishing, archery, falconry — they'll even lend you their Labradors for gundog-training purposes. There's a gym, there are pools, there's a sports centre, there's pretty much whatever you fancy. It would be entirely possible to treat your visit as a strict spa break, with food to match. But now that the bars have been David Collins Studio-ed and are glitteringly sexy, and now that the rooms have been redone in a lavishly comfortable way, you might want to spa part-time only. (I loved the old-school silver clothes and plenty of flambéing of the Strathearn restaurant.)

If you've been before, you should know that the vibe is now younger and much jollier — the golfers, attracted by the world-class courses, are still there, but less overwhelmingly so. The mix works brilliantly, and the whole thing now feels relaxed and friendly. There are still women with done hair swishing about in mink gilets, but there are more mooching about in bathrobes. The spa is going to be redone, too. I hardly think it needs it, although it's high time spas moved on from that orchid-and-banana-leaf, "let me touch your feet" thing, and maybe this will be the brave pioneer.

It's also worth noting that, unusually for a posh hotel or a spa, new Gleneagles is entirely child-friendly. They're all charging about in mini bathrobes, though you can also park them in their own lair, called Little Glen, while you go off and get pummelled and exfoliated. Or just practise sleeping — the mattresses are divine and there's a pillow menu.



LS HILTON HEADS TO THE CAUDALIE VINEYARD

I'm not really a spa sort of person. My idea of "me" time mostly involves a bottle of claret and a solitary novel on my trusty tear-soaked sofa. You say self-medication, I say mindfulness. So, ingrate that I am, when I learnt I was to review a spa, I was less than rapturous. There might be Inca flute music, hosepipes of icy water and ladies with scary-looking electronic face massagers telling me to relax.

"It has wine," Phoebe, the assistant beauty editor, said.

"When am I leaving?"

Situated in the vineyards of Château Smith Haut Lafitte, just 20 minutes outside Bordeaux, Les Sources de Caudalie is as blissfully removed from the spartan rigours of the wellness industry as it is possible to be. The site is an enchanting collection of Landaise-style pavilions reminiscent of Marie-



Antoinette's *hameau* at Versailles. There are three restaurants, including the Michelin-starred La Grand Vigne, huge airy suites furnished in a blend of rustic French chic and sharply modern elegance, and not a chia seed in sight. With bicycles to explore the vineyard and collection of modern sculptures, fascinating tours of the chateau cellars and three springwater pools, I was so contented, I almost forgot about the treatments.

Caudalie was founded as a beauty brand in 1995 to exploit the properties of procyanidolic oligomers (PCOs), by-products of winemaking that have been proven to possess anti-ageing qualities. After half an hour in a properly steaming hammam, I found myself being immersed in a barrel bath, from which wafted

NEED TO KNOW
GLENEAGLES
Rooms from £275 a
night, B&B. Crcadian
health consultation
with Louise Westra.
£140 for 75 minutes;
gleneagles.com

the scent of iris root and exfoliating grape marc to hypnotic effect. Floating in the huge whirlpool bath, overlooking the paddocks where the horses who work the vineyard graze, I felt transported. Virginie, my therapist, left me to brew in a warm wrap of honey and wine before scrubbing me down and performing a 50-minute massage that left my whole body as radiant and bouncy as a ripe merlot grape. The Premier Cru facial that followed used the Caudalie patented premium line serum, moisturiser and eye cream, and the effects on the raddled old visage were nothing short of magical. My skin was smooth, plump and gleaming, and remained so even after several glasses of Lafitte's finest and the flight home.

To say I'm a convert would be an understatement. Les Sources is the perfect destination for the spa sceptic, in that it is wonderfully grown-up, life-affirming and joyful. The Cathiard family — proprietors of both vineyard and spa — have created an extraordinarily luxurious and sophisticated experience that is nonetheless welcoming and profoundly, dare I say, relaxing.



DOLLY ALDERTON RECOVERS FROM A HANGOVER IN PORTUGAL

The New Year's Eve party at my flat wraps at about 4am. My taxi to Gatwick arrives three hours later, followed by an easyJet flight to Lisbon. It is safe to say that by the time I touch down — Edina Monsoon sunglasses and grimace firmly slapped on my face — I am in much need of some rest and rejuvenation.

I don't think I've ever arrived at a hotel as blissfully silent as Sao Lourenco do Barrocal. It is busy and booked out, yet, other than the odd moo from one of the cows that roam the surrounding farmland, or the soft jazz that plays in the bar and restaurant, I am ensconced in the tranquil sound of nothing.

The ancient farming village and estate, now transformed into a luxury yet understated hotel, has been in the same family for more than 200 years and is a two-hour car journey from the airport. One of its standout features is its spa, housed in a converted building with beautiful views across farmland and up to the nearby hilltop village.

The spa and its products are by Susanne Kaufmann, whose original property is in the Austrian Alps and whose founding philosophy is holistic, organic and natural. I am excited at the prospect of a facial after meeting the spa manager, whose perfectly clear and dewy skin makes her look like a teenage milkmaid fresh off the Alps. The benefit of the signature Anti-ageing Intensive Facial Treatment, which includes an enzyme peel, deep cleansing, pore extraction (disgusting and wonderful), ultrasound treatment to work in the active ingredients, a head massage and rejuvenating fascia massage, is immediately noticeable and leaves my skin smooth and my pores refined and clear long after my stay is over.

The Detox Massage, stimulating lymphatic drainage with light to medium pressure, begins with a warm alkaline footbath and the therapist asking me if I'd like music and, if so, what kind. The experience feels personally tailored and leaves me deeply relaxed and re-energised. As well as these individual treatments, the spa facilities include a female and male sauna (rare and completely brilliant, particularly if you're a solo traveller who wants to let it all hang out, proverbially and literally), a workout area and gym and a warm cedarwood bathtub, with views out onto a verdant garden filled with orange trees.

The attention to detail makes it feel like true luxury, from the daisies and lavender, fresh

NEED TO KNOW
LES SOURCES
DE CAUDALIE
Rooms from £243
a night; Premier Cru
Facial, £120 for 50
minutes; sources-
caudalie.com



NEED TO KNOW
SAO LOURENCO
DO BARROCAL
Rooms from £136 a
night, B&B; full-body
massage from £80 for
50 minutes; facials from
£110 for 80 minutes



from the garden, that float in bowls of water next to each treatment-room door, to the variety of Susanne Kaufmann herbal tea blends in the relaxation room. Most design features in the hotel are artisanal and produced locally — look out for the Instagram-worthy runner rug in the bar, woven by two local women over the course of a year.

As well as relaxing in the spa, guests can use bikes to explore the surrounding farmland (my seat broke slightly, which I am blaming on what can only be described as record-breaking mince-pie ingestion in the week before the trip), ride horses, taste wine, stargaze, take a trip in a hot-air balloon or do historic tours of the local area. The restaurant serves delicious Portuguese food — most of the ingredients are grown or reared on site.

By the time I leave this noiseless nirvana, my bag heavy with Portuguese pottery from the chic hotel shop and Susanne Kaufmann rose oil from the spa, I feel utterly restored and ready for everything 2018 has in store.

SOPHIE GURESHI TRIES A BREATHING WORKSHOP

● Tell me a bit about yourself Stressed-out city slicker who is feeling far from slick. I need to relocate my inner calm (it's gone Awol) and sort out my sleep. A traditionalist open to new ideas, provided they're not too kooky.

● Desperately seeking A stately but non-stuffy spa with a new-age twist to help me find inner calm and survival strategies for city life. Must have a generously proportioned pool and all mod cons.

● Go to A breathing workshop at the Landmark London's newly revamped spa. The Marylebone hotel's red-brick exterior and fabulous glass-ceilinged atrium, complete with towering palm trees, are like something out of a Wes Anderson movie, but the spa is decidedly modern, as is its partnership with the Breathguru, Alan Dolan. "Conscious breathing" (also known as transformational breathing) is tipped to be one of 2018's hottest wellness trends, promising to banish anxiety, cure insomnia and alleviate stress and depression. Dolan's approach is brilliant



if you're normally too fidgety for traditional meditation methods. His "connected breath" technique — mouth wide open, long inhale and a shorter exhale, with no pause in between — not only fills the body with energising oxygen, but also requires considerable physical focus (which stops the mind meandering back to unsent emails).

Unlike many modern-day "gurus", who create dependency on their services, Dolan promises he can teach you this life-changing technique in just one session (though when you meet him, you can see why people keep going back). You'll walk out feeling not only relaxed but inexplicably lighter, as though your lungs are somehow larger. You breathe about 20,000 times a day, so why not make the most of them?

● Try this The Simple Power of Breathing package includes an 80-minute private session with Dolan and a full day pass to the Landmark London Spa & Health Club, with access to gym, chlorine-free pool and Jacuzzi. It also includes a one-hour massage. (I highly recommend the Mediterranean by Candlelight, in which knots in muscles are kneaded into oblivion with warm wax.)

NEED TO KNOW
LANDMARK LONDON
SPA & HEALTH CLUB
Rooms from £264 a
night; the Simple Power
of Breathing package
with Alan Dolan, from
£395 (March 5-9,
March 19, summer TBC);
landmarklondon.co.uk





Laura Atkinson goes uber-luxe

● **Tell me a bit about yourself** An anti-wellness luxury sloth, who loves the finer things in life. Think Princess Margaret on the Jubilee Line.

● **Desperately seeking** A perfect no-nonsense massage and facial for my overly sensitive skin (past treatments have left me red and angry — of both face and mind — for days).

● **Go to** Tata Harper at Spa Le Bristol, in Paris. Tata Harper is the ecoluxe brand of the moment, using 100% natural ingredients from a farm in Vermont (of course), and everyone, including Gwyneth Paltrow, raves about it. As someone with ludicrously sensitive skin, the natural thing appeals to me: surely products made from home-grown herbs can't bring me out in hives?

Happily, the spa at Le Bristol, one of oldest and most fabulous hotels in Paris, is the first European destination to partner with the brand; it even has a gloriously green — the colour of the Tata Harper garden, obv, and Le Bristol's signature colour — treatment room to showcase the range (the rest of the spa is by La Prairie). Even more happily, it's at Le Bristol, guys! The hotel was opened in 1925 and named after Frederick Hervey, Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, an 18th-century "globetrotting hotel connoisseur" who was famous for his love of luxury. You can guess what you're getting here: history, extravagance and high living.

So while everyone else was Instagramming their Veganuary, I decamped to Le Bristol for a weekend of fine wine, fromage and, mon dieu, red meat (there are two Michelin-starred restaurants on site). Ask for room 760, a recently renovated attic suite with a view of the Eiffel Tower, which has a brilliantly curated library (I have since bought two of the books I found on the shelves), and then take a swim in the sixth-floor pool, which overlooks the rooftops of Paris. The good life — and not a wellness expert/cosmic crystal to be seen. Praise be.

● **Try this** The Tata Harper Liquid Gold Organic Body Massage. No fancy frills, no whale noises, just a bloody good massage with superluxe products that suited my skin perfectly. They smell heavenly, the massage oil doesn't leave you coated in grease that you're then encouraged not to wash off (really? I have to go to dinner), and if you ask for Peter, the salon's "star therapist", well, you are in for a treat, my friend. Also try the Tata Harper facial (book Delphine): three days later and I still have that "glow". Take that, January!



NEED TO KNOW
SPA LE BRISTOL
Rooms from £1,152 a night; Tata Harper Liquid Gold Organic Body Massage, from £180; Glow and Go: Natural Brightening Facial, from £180; oetikercollection.com/le-bristol. One-way fares to Paris on Eurostar cost from £29; eurostar.com



Sarah Jossel finds her inner peace

● **Tell me a bit about yourself** A hopeless romantic desperately seeking some R&R. All movie clichés most welcome: sunsets, boats, rose petals on arrival, and please, no use of the dreaded d-words: diets and detoxes.

● **Desperately seeking** A magical floating palace on water. (Not too much to ask?) A simple itinerary of eating, sleeping and massaging will do. Nothing too hi-tech required. I'm more interested in crystals than colonics.

● **Go to** Jiva Spa at the Taj Lake Palace in Udaipur, India, is your perfect match. It used to be summer palace for the royal dynasty of Mewar, and the setting is so romantic that at least two couples a day get engaged at the hotel. (I did not.)

The spa is like a mini-palace inside a palace, with a menu offering everything from spice scrubs to Indian foot massages. The most popular is the Mewar Khas, a cardamom-infused scrub that leaves skin noticeably softer and firmer after one treatment.

When you're not being pampered, you must eat. A lot. Give yourself a compulsory carb day and head to the hotel's renowned restaurant, Neel Kamal, where there are more than nine different types of naan bread on offer. Enough said. When it comes to choosing a room, they all have lake views and no two sumptuously decorated interiors are the same — many have four-poster beds. There is even round-the-clock butler service. No, really, there's a button on the telephone called "palace service". As they say on arrival: "Call us any time."

● **Try this** My boyfriend and I were whisked away on a speedboat for a couple's treatment on our very own spa boat. (Who needs one

boat when you can have two?) On board there was a rose petal-infused bath and a relaxation area for watching the sunset, plus two glasses of wine. The treatment starts with a quick steam, followed by 60 minutes of head-to-toe slathering in 100% natural, silky-soft body oil. To finish,

we were treated to a deep-relaxation face rub. When the lights came on, much to my surprise my boyfriend's hair had been braided into a Heidi-style halo plait. A head massage was unfamiliar territory for him, so he couldn't distinguish between a massage and a braiding session. Apart from the fact he looked like a girl, watching the sunset in that romantic setting was like something you only see in the movies. »



NEED TO KNOW
JIVA SPA AT THE TAJ LAKE PALACE
Rooms from £296 a night; treatments on board the Jiva Spa boat cost from £133 for one person; tajhotels.co.uk