

The Daily Telegraph

Reclaim Your Self retreat, Marrakesh

Spa Spy: our health sleuth tests the curative claims of wellbeing retreats worldwide.

Published: 7:00AM GMT 08 Feb 2010

The spa: Less an actual spa, more a "chillaxing" four-day, body-and-soul retreat at a private family riad in Marrakesh. Led by London-based massage therapist Julia Sampson, Reclaim Your Self offers wellbeing holidays across Europe, Africa and India which combine nutrition, yoga, life coaching and holistic therapies.

Spa Spy's symptoms: Spy has sensitive digestion, which often leads to bloating. It gets worse after eating and when she is stressed.



Sunset in Marrakesh

The prescription: A combination of nutrition, yoga, breathing exercises, hammam treatments and life coaching to support the body, de-stress the mind and kick-start an improvement.

The procedure: Spy filled out a detailed health questionnaire before arriving, so the team were prepared for her. On the menu was a vegetarian, cleansing diet designed to aid digestion, daily yoga *asanas* such as leg poses, leg rotations and cycling, and breathing techniques such as *Bhastrika Pranayama* (a rapid and rhythmic movement of breath) targeted to strengthen digestion. Hammam treatments were added to get the lymphatic system moving. Life coaching was essential to get to the root cause of stress.

The verdict: Spy was impressed with the expertise and friendliness of the team. The food was delicious, and carefully designed by specialist health chefs. It included gluten- and lactose-free foods cooked with digestive

Moroccan spices such as turmeric, live yogurt for healthy bacteria, plenty of ginger tea to aid digestion and linseed tea to hydrate the colon.

The medical opinion: "The body is designed to remove waste products and toxins, and there is no evidence that 'detox' regimes benefit the body in any way," writes Dr Max Pemberton. "Gluten- and lactose-free diets will only benefit those with genuine intolerance to these substances, and this should be established through medical investigation before embarking on a restrictive diet. The concept of 'hydrating' the colon is not one supported by Western medicine. Yoga has been shown to improve mood and reduce levels of reported stress."

The feelgood factor: Being cocooned inside an incense-filled, candlelit riad reduced Spy's stress and reminded her how to relax. Her stomach felt freer and lost its bloated feeling and, armed with nutritious recipes to take home, she felt inspired to keep up a more structured diet.

Details: A four-day weekend in Marrakesh costs from £450 for a shared ensuite; book with Reclaim Your Self (020 8350 8943, www.reclaimyourself.co.uk) (<http://www.reclaimyourself.co.uk>) easyJet (0905 821 0905, www.easyjet.com) (<http://www.easyjet.com>) flies from Gatwick to Marrakesh from £95.98 return. Forthcoming Reclaim Your Self breaks include Cotswolds, March 19-21 and Marrakesh, October.