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RHYTHM of the NIGHT

In need of a decent kip, **Amanda Bown** headed to an Italian retreat which promises to reset sleep cycles using eastern and western medicine

I'm a poor sleeper. I regularly miss out on deep sleep cycles, which has an unhealthy effect on my health, wellbeing and skin. So I when I heard

about Lefay Resort & Spa in Italy, which offers a five-night sleep retreat, I jumped at the chance to go. The resort uses combined principles of classical Chinese medicine with modern, western techniques to help guests restore their energy, sleep cycles and their mind and body balance. Treatments include energy body massages and facials, acupuncture, reflexology and moxibustion sessions combined with physical activities: yoga, thai chi, qi gong, and stretching of the meridians. So, I signed up... and couldn't wait to arrive!

Location, location

Lefay Resort & Spa is located within hills and mountains, set among acres of land; gentle slopes, olive tree terraces and woodland, and offers breath-taking views over Lake Garda. After arriving, and enjoying my welcome drink, looking out through the floor-to-ceiling windows I steadied my breath inhalations, feeling a sense of calm and peacefulness for the first time in a long while. As you'd expect, the food is delicious and plentiful. Breakfast kicks off the day, offering a huge variety of delights, including juicing your own cocktail from the plentiful supply of fresh fruit and vegetables.



My sleep retreat started in the early evening, beginning with a guided walk through the holistic gardens – approximately 2km in total. You'll find compass points within the energetic garden which heavily relate to Chinese medicine. They represent major body organs and their functions, and there are some locations your body will resonate with. They're designed for quiet meditation and psycho-physical activities such as stretching of the meridians, qi gong and soft muscular awakening. For those who are keen on fitness, there are eight stations for improving muscle tone and elasticity, and a running circuit. I resonated with the heart and 'centre' location, and this was duly noted by my guide then later discussed with the doctor during consultation.

Chinese wisdom

Any health programme worth its salt requires a consultation with a doctor. And, Lefay's residing Chinese medicine doctor was great. He certainly knew his stuff; during my check up, he took my pulse, checked my tongue and discussed my lifestyle and stress levels. Although the language barrier was tricky at times, we got there in the end. As I suspected, I was running on empty, my energy was low, and for good measure, my red-tipped tongue indicated that I was full of anxiety.

I found it highly reassuring when the doctor tweaked my upcoming programme based around his findings. For example, he changed the style of massage to suit my disorder and my body's needs, the therapeutic massage oils, location of



the moxa stick (for moxibastion treatments), and generic body points worked on during other Eastern-style treatments within the programme.

I confess that I felt a little emotional during my consultation; I couldn't help but feel relieved that I was being looked after and given the opportunity to simply relax and de-stress daily.

One of the high points for me was Lefay's salt lake cave pool, which is booked for private dips. This means you can be naked (albeit wearing a pair of paper pants!) in the warm water for half an hour. My skin was cracked and chapped in places on my body (a side effect of stress and anxiety), which gently 'smarted' against the highly mineral and saltwater content, but this felt healing at the same time. Low lighting, an old tree trunk



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Dream location

The Lake Garda setting is amazing; plentiful olive trees on the outdoor routes and gardens, many lizards, dragonflies and butterflies all going about their business. And, for the 'ahhh' factor, various church bells toll regularly within the surrounding hills, giving a highly Mediterranean feel to your day. The resort's green credentials are impressive too, from using a biomass plant, which is fed by wood chips to produce thermal energy (reduces CO₂ emissions), to rainwater that is collected, stored, and re-used within green areas.

and a lovely 3D moon hovering above means it was utterly restful and grounding; the perfect place to switch off and float effortlessly in the pool... alone.

I found my body massages to be hugely helpful too; professional therapists, gentle in their approach, who worked with me as an individual. Although – heads-up – both male and female therapist do treatments, and some of the energy massages involve the whole body, so for those who are a little self-conscious, it may be worth checking with spa reception beforehand.

Sleep at last

As my programme progressed, my sleeping patterns changed – for the better! I arrived with a pattern of two or three-hour cycles, and graduated to four or five-hour ones just during the retreat. And since I returned back home, I'm able to sleep for longer cycles, without waking up, and I feel much healthier in myself. There's nothing more rejuvenating than a good night's sleep, and thanks to this retreat my body's been reset and I can finally enjoy proper rest again. Thanks Lefay!

More information

A five-night sleep programme at Lefay Resort & Spa Lago di Garda costs £1,852. Visit lefoyresorts.com or call +39 0365 241 800. Price excludes flights; there are regular ones with Easyjet and British Airways to Verona. For *Natural Health* readers on the sleep programme, Lefay Resort offers guests your own personal herbal tea blend, Lefay SPA candle and SPA mug – just quote *Natural Health* when booking. The offer is valid for travel up to and until the end of June 2014.