

BELLA ITALIA



OK! DISCOVERS A SPARKLING LAKE GARDA SPA GEM...

Set high up in the mountains, with sweeping views of Lake Garda, the Lefay Resort & Spa in northern Italy is the perfect place to relax and unwind – especially if you're eagerly awaiting the birth of your first baby! So OK! sent father-to-be Danny Ledger and his heavily pregnant partner Polly to the idyllic resort for a well-deserved pamper, just weeks before they welcomed beautiful baby James.

OUR HIDDEN SPA RETREAT

After a two-hour flight to Verona, we're collected by private limousine and take in the sights along the winding Lake Garda shoreline, passing picturesque towns, majestic medieval villages, castles and rustic villas set within lush gardens. Approaching the sleepy marina village of Gargnano, north-west of Lake Garda, we begin to climb higher, zig-zagging our way through the olive and citrus groves of the Alto Garda National Park, before reaching the hidden spa retreat. The Lefay Resort & Spa has been designed with the topography and geography of the land in mind – eco-sustainably is something the resort prides itself on and the low-lying complex is neatly nestled in the hillside, out of view from neighbouring towns.

THE ROOM – AND THE VIEW!

On arrival, we're welcomed with a refreshing drink of zingy lemongrass, ginger and lime, and escorted to our room. One of 90, our suite has a large spa bath, a walk-in power shower, king-sized bed, mini bar and flat-screen TV. The floors are made out of natural local walnut, with Verona red marble in the bathroom. Stepping out onto the balcony we can't believe our eyes as we gaze across Lake Garda and the snow-capped mountains beyond – you can just make out the pretty villages across the lake.

GRUB'S UP!

Once we've freshened up, we head for the hotel's restaurant, where we're seated at a special table looking out onto the lake. Having dinner at La Grande Limonaia feels like you're eating in a lemon grove high up in the mountains! The waiter guides us through a special low-calorie menu, offering alternative high-in-taste and low-in-salt dishes such as salmon carpaccio with herbs and grilled swordfish with vegetable ratatouille. The à la carte menu sounded just as tasty, so we plump for duck-filled tortellini with morel mushrooms, followed by fillet of sole meuniere with toasted almonds, spinach and cardoncelli mushroom salad. Even the extra virgin olive oil is made locally. The wine list is vast – we lose count of how many pages there are!

TIME TO HIT THE SPA

After a healthy breakfast, we enjoy a walk around the peaceful resort before heading to the spa. It has 21 treatment rooms, all with impressive lake views, a fitness area and a gym. There are steam baths, aromatic saunas and Finnish sauna rooms, plus a ladies-only sauna. There's also an

Above: OK! holed up at the Lefay Resort & Spa, high above Lake Garda (below)

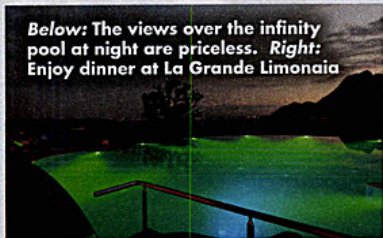


outdoor, 36°C whirlpool bath, a 25m outdoor pool and an indoor/outdoor 33°C saltwater infinity pool, with Jacuzzi areas and jet-wash showers. There's a feeling we're the only ones here – although we're told the resort is full! Just opened is the new royal pool and spa suite, a huge three-bedroom apartment comprising your own private spa with treatment area, its own infinity pool and a lake-view private hot tub. Perhaps the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge might plan a visit after their bundle of joy arrives!

A REAL TREAT – I THINK!

The spa offers many treatments, from hydrotherapy massages and reflexology, to beauty treatments such as manicures, pedicures and hair treatments. It >

Below: The views over the infinity pool at night are priceless. Right: Enjoy dinner at La Grande Limonaia



Below: Take a bath with a view or head to one of the experience rooms at the spa (bottom left)



specialises in being a temple of wellness and deals specifically in offering tailor-made treatments and packages to regenerate mind and body.

On arrival, every guest gets an energy interview from the on-site doctor. He asks questions about my diet, fitness, stress levels, sleeping patterns and even my dreams, to tailor-make a package unique to me. The doctor says I'm low on energy (maybe a precursor to my impending fatherhood!) and have slightly incorrect posture, so recommends a selection of re-energising treatments and a course of energy-stretching exercises.

First up is the anti-ageing energy massage, an ancient Chinese treatment stimulating the parallel lines of energy which go up and down the body via the kidneys. Once finished, I do feel quite rejuvenated! The doctor also prescribes a moxibustion heat therapy treatment, which can only be described as a very hot candle being melted onto specific energy points on the skin near my kidneys. Strange at first – it almost feels as if the skin is burning – but my masseuse knows just when to stop before the pain/pleasure line is crossed!

WET AND NOT SO WILD

After all this activity, I decide to go for a swim. The resort has an indoor/outdoor pool, so you step into the heated indoor pool, swim towards the sliding glass doors, which open automatically, leading you to the steamy outdoor area of the pool. To first swim indoors

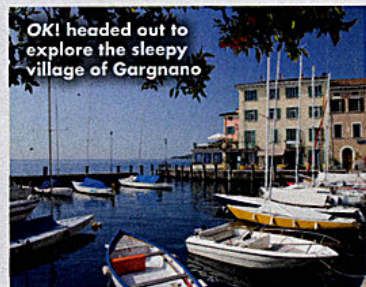
and then feel the cool alpine air on my face outside, while taking in the stunning views of Lake Garda, was unforgettable! Swimming at night outside high up in the mountains is also a memorable experience.

An activity that Polly and I can do together is a trip to the indoor saltwater lake. It's like stepping into a prehistoric cave, down a series of stone steps leading to a dark, cavernous room with loungers and a deep, still lake filled with warm saltwater. Here we float away for 20 minutes feeling totally weightless and fully relaxed. A ten-minute stint on a lounge completes the experience.

HEAD OUT AND EXPLORE

On our last day after breakfast, we venture out of the resort building and walk around the grounds, taking in the picturesque mountain scenery. There are parks, paths and gardens where you can stroll, cycle, meditate, experience treatments or do a bit of yoga while taking in the spectacular views. Certain areas are themed, with different gardens symbolising differing meanings of renewal and healing.

After lunch, we take a trip to the lakeside town of Gargnano, just 15 minutes away – the resort has a courtesy bus that takes you down the mountain to the town and picks you up again. It's a sleepy marina town with small souvenir shops and lake-view restaurants and cafés. We enjoy an ice cream and a coffee watching the small boats and yachts bobbing up and down in the tiny harbour. Seeing this small town was the perfect end to our Italian mountainside getaway – and just the tonic before the pitter patter of tiny baby feet!



HOW DO I GET THERE?

Kuoni (01306 747 008; www.kuoni.co.uk) offers three-nights staying at the five-star Lefay Resort & Spa (www.lefayresorts.com), including flights with British Airways from Gatwick, private transfers in-resort and breakfast, from £1,270 per person. Price is based on two sharing and valid for July 2013 departures. To book, quote KE2150. **OK!**

REPORT BY DANNY LEDGER EDITED BY NANCY BROWN
TWITTER.COM/NANCYOKMAG PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY IMAGES

TRAVELLER'S TALES

MELINDA MESSENGER

THE 'COWBOY TRADERS' STAR ON HER RATHER ADVENTUROUS SIDE...

What's your favourite holiday destination?

In this country it would have to be St Ives, Cornwall. I love it there as it has everything – beaches, cafés, gorgeous walks, cute shops, and it's perfect for the kids.

What's been your worst travel experience?

Probably when I was in Bali. We went to Ubud up in the mountains and stayed in a beautiful villa overlooking a gorge. Unfortunately I got really sick and spent most of the time wrapped around the loo. I ended up in a wheelchair as I became so weak that I couldn't walk! It turned out I had E. coli from some prawns I'd eaten there. It didn't stop me loving Bali, though – it's a beautiful place and I want to go back and take the kids to the Green School out there.

Who's your favourite holiday companion?

That's a hard one! I generally travel a lot with others and really enjoy their company, but there's also something really rewarding in travelling alone. You do things you might not do if you were in a group and you meet all sorts of interesting people.

What's been your most adventurous travel experience?

Going to Nepal. We travelled to Kathmandu then Chitwan and went on an elephant safari and kayaked among the crocodiles. Then we went to Pokhara, where I went parashawking – where you paraglide with a hawk that lands on your arm – up above the mountains. I then went off to Begnas Lake to do a Vipassana meditation retreat, which is ten days in silence – it was incredible. Then I spent a few days seeing the temples in Kathmandu. I'm off to Peru next – from Cusco to Machu Picchu – so that might be a close second!

What's your best piece of travel advice?

Relax and enjoy being somewhere new.

MELINDA PRESENTS 'COWBOY TRADERS' ON CHANNEL 5, THURSDAYS AT 8pm.



5 OF THE BEST AT-HOME SPA TREATS



1 ESPA SKIN RADIANCE MASK, £34. www.espaonline.com.

Dull, tired skin gets a new lease of life with this brightening mask, which smells divine thanks to its delicious combination of ingredients – mulberry, bearberry, liquorice and pumpkin.

2 WAX LYRICAL SOY CANDLE IN CHILL OUT, £9. www.mycraftcandles.co.uk.

Bring the serenity of a spa home with this scented candle, fragranced with pear, plum, peach, soft patchouli and chamomile.

3 AROMATHERAPY ASSOCIATES MINIATURE BATH & SHOWER OIL COLLECTION, £32. www.aromatherapyassociates.com.

Turn your bathroom into a spa with this gorgeous collection of minis, designed to relax, de-stress, unwind and revive.

4 ILA SPA BODY SCRUB FOR ENERGISING AND DETOXIFYING, £47. www.ila-spa.com. If you're feeling run down, this is the spa treat for you, designed to lift your spirits, boost circulation and soften skin.

5 ELEMIS TIME FOR YOU SPA AND SKINCARE COLLECTION, £39. www.timelospa.co.uk. Hit the road and take the spa with you with this travel-sized kit containing everything you need for ultimate relaxation. Heavenly!