

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

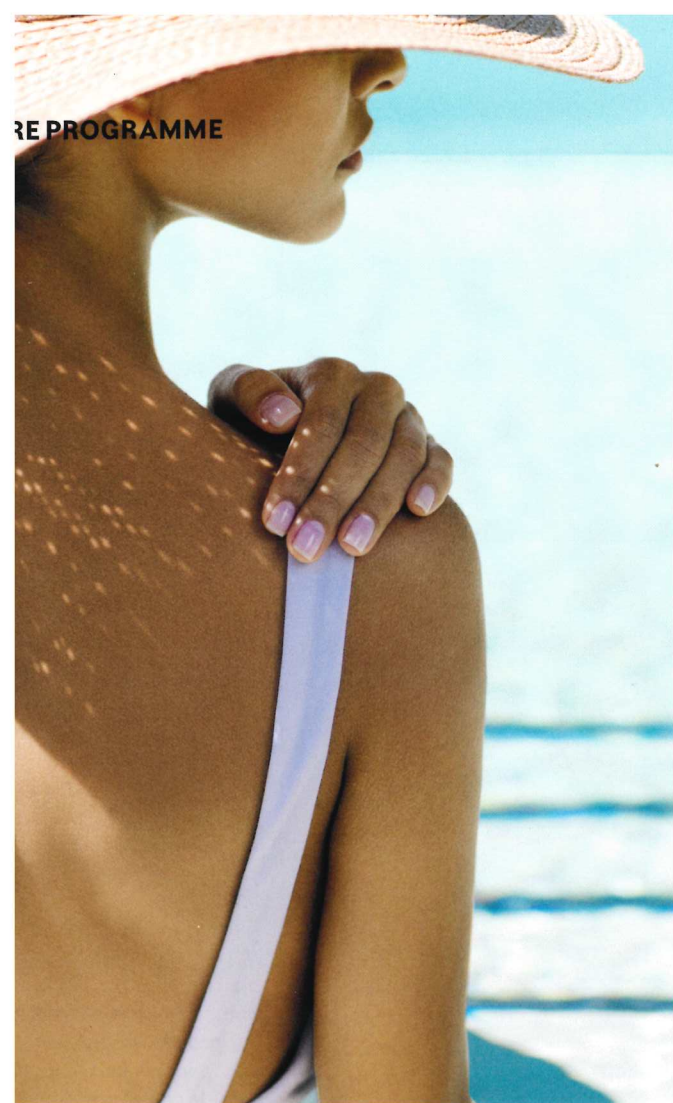
TRAVELLER

SPA & WELLNESS

COLLECTION

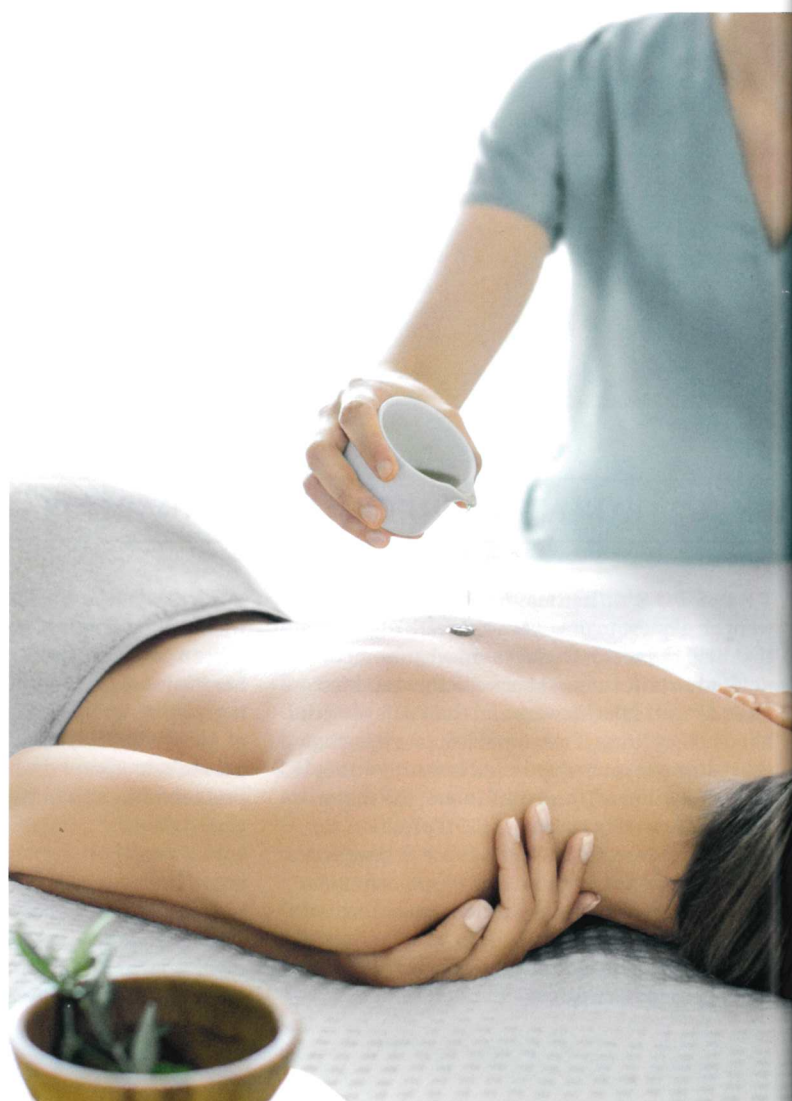


2018 EDITION



TAKE A STAND

Learning proper posture at Lefay Resort, overlooking Lake Garda, is about more than standing up straight — it's a holistic approach to mind, body and spirit. Words: Stephanie Cavagnaro



"What kind of taste do you prefer — sweet, sour, salty?" I'm asked. "Salty," I decide, after a moment. "Do you have a problem with your parents?" "What about premenstrual symptoms?" This isn't desperate conversation on a failing first date, but a consultation with Dr. Barbieri at Lefay Resort & Spa, where I've booked a Sports/Postural programme. The questions have taken me by surprise — I expected to be quizzed on back pain or how long I sit at a desk each day. But this retreat isn't just about learning how to stand; it approaches all of its wellness programmes (also including detox, weight management, beauty and sleep) holistically by combining western scientific research and classical Chinese medicine.

After asking about everything from my digestion to my sleep and mood, Dr. Barbieri feels my pulse and looks at my tongue. "Your tongue has uncontrolled movement... and the movement is like wind inside, so you can't be calm." I watch my tongue in the mirror as it frantically dances. "You need to relax," Dr. Barbieri advises. "From a Chinese point of view, you have too much yang inside — you try to control too much."

He writes down which of my meridian points need care during *moxibustion* — a soothing treatment using a heated carbon stick that has me fighting against sleep — and prescribes a special tea of *astragalus*, mandarin and true cinnamon to enhance my spleen (an energetic organ of digestion, which is home to thought).

I take my personalised treatment plan and explore the eco-resort, a five-star pad high above Italy's Lake Garda and surrounded by pleasant

woods, olive groves and lemon trees. My suite is splashed with Italian marble; the restaurant features locally grown ingredients; and the spa is vast with infinity, salt-water and thalassotherapy pools, plus six saunas and five relaxation areas.

Most days are spent toning atonic muscles with a personal trainer; treating pain due to improper posture with an osteopath; and relaxing in massage and foot reflexology sessions that use the hotel's organic body olive oil. One morning, I head out on a two-mile guided walk with one of the spa therapists, Teddy, in the energy and therapeutic garden. Its five stations each represent seasons, colours and emotions — and take us from a soaring view of the lake below (summer) to a quiet valley soothed by a stream (winter).

As we walk towards the Green Dragon (spring) — a wooded area bursting with emerald — Teddy explains the principles of Chinese medicine. He places his thumbs and index fingers together to create a triangle, which represents the mind, body and spirit. "Everything is connected," he says, adding that posture reflects our state of mind. And it's precisely this holistic approach at Lefay that's completely changed my attitude about posture — and general wellbeing. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must drink my spleen-strengthening tea and relax: doctor's orders. lefoyresorts.com

HOW TO DO IT: The Healthy Holiday Company offers a five-night Sports/Postural programme at Lefay Resort from £2,820 per person, full board with flights and transfers. thehealthyholidaycompany.co.uk 

SIX TO TRY: POSTURE TIPS

ALIGN YOUR SHOULDERS

Keep your shoulders back and relaxed, and in line with your hips. Imagine a string attached to the top of your head pulling you upward.

STRENGTHEN YOUR CORE

Your abdominal and lower back muscles support your spine and stabilise your pelvis. Hold a plank for 5-10 seconds with eight reps.

DON'T CROSS YOUR LEGS

When you sit with crossed legs, your pelvis rolls forwards, which puts pressure on your lower back.

STAND ON BOTH FEET

Leaning on one leg puts strain on one side of your lower back and hip, leading to muscle imbalances.

MANAGE STRESS

Worry can manifest itself as muscle tension. Try meditation or activities like painting or gardening.

EAT HEALTHILY

A balanced diet (with vitamin D and calcium for bone health) helps to avoid weight gain, which places stress on bones, muscles and joints.