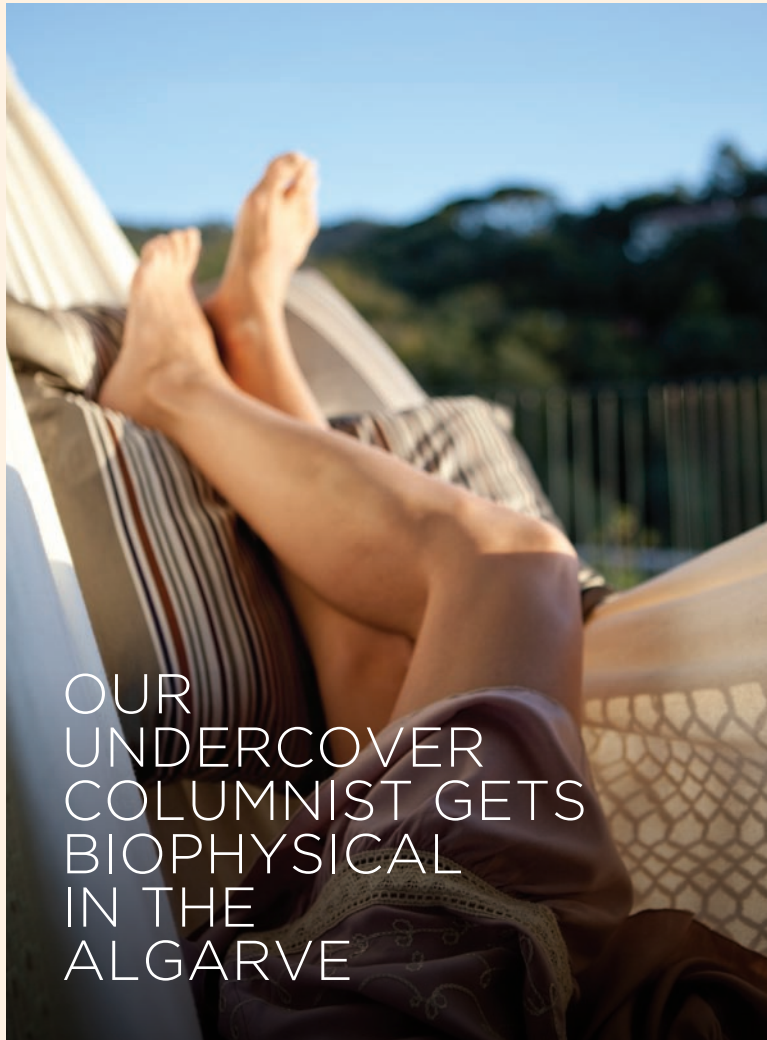


how to spend it

CHRONICLES OF A SPA JUNKIE - 2012

SPA
JUNKIE AT...
LONGEVITY
WELLNESS
RESORT





OUR
UNDERCOVER
COLUMNIST GETS
BIOPHYSICAL
IN THE
ALGARVE

Sometimes I need a holiday to recover from a holiday. With summer's St Tropez hedonism and Ibiza late nights packed away with my bikinis, I am back in London and suffering from something of a *crise de foie*, as my French friend Yann would say with a nonchalant Gallic shrug. I should be relaxed, but instead I am over-tired and over-indulged, and I'm snapping at everyone from my assistant (who is now campaigning to work from home) to a perfectly harmless Taxi driver (albeit one with a questionable sense of direction). It's time to check in for a holistic reboot before everyone around me checks out of my life.

Longevity Wellness Resort is a five-star medical spa and eco-hotel in the mountains of Monchique (a village in the Algarve celebrated for its thermal springs). It is partnered with La Clinique de Paris, the practice of Dr Claude Chauchard, a leading expert in preventive medicine and ageing management. Longevity's programmes and spa menu cover three key areas: wellness and relaxation, health and longevity, and beauty and rejuvenation.

Many of my friends have raved about its Essential Beauty Sense, a four-night detox and anti-ageing programme created by clinical director Dr Manuela Figini, so I decide to book a trip. If what they say is to be believed, the course of treatments (from ozone therapy to Botox, depending on what's deemed necessary after both a biophysical and aesthetic consultation) combined with a bespoke workout regime and the medically devised Vitality Nutrition menu, will be just what I need.

DAY 1, 6:30PM

I land at Faro in a distinctly sour mood; Gatwick was hell, my flight was delayed, and the after-effects of my recent overindulgence are really taking their toll. I spend the 45-minute drive to the Longevity Wellness Resort angrily tapping into my BlackBerry, oblivious of the picturesque scenery en route.

I arrive and feel immediate disappointment: despite its reputation, it seems unremarkable and the term “eco-luxury” would be the last thing to spring to mind. The building, if anything, is stark and clinical.

My room, however, is large, airy and comfortable, with a kitchen and dining area, a vast living room and a small terrace complete with hammock. It feels very Scandinavian; clean and functional in muted greens, beiges and slate.

Teresa Malheiro, the medical spa manager, welcomes me to Longevity, bringing with her a bunch of wild lavender (which grows abundance here) and some aromatic oils to burn in my room. I instantly feel as if I am a slightly more peaceful soul than the stressed-out insomniac I arrived as. I order a light supper of wild dorado poached in lime juice and garlic, served with beetroot and quinoa, and get an early night.





IT'S INTO THE
PNEUMATIC
COMPRESSION SUIT
- AND OUT WITH
THE TOXINS -
FOR OUR
REPORTER

DAY 2, 10AM

My body is still in holiday mode, where I am used to eating late and staying up until 3am, so my sleep is broken and I wake up feeling drained. The bright sunshine (the Algarve claims to have over 300 days of sun per year) goes only some way to cheering me up and I drag myself down to breakfast. I start with a zingy detox shake of apple, ginger, celery and parsley, followed by an egg-white omelette with organic local tomatoes.

I am whisked away for a consultation, the first step in my biophysical analysis, with nutritionist Ana Rita and personal trainer Sofia Gouveia. Ana Rita, a funny, chirpy and beautiful Portuguese woman, explains that Longevity's nutritional approach is based on "functional foods", in others words, using ingredients that contain biologically active compounds with known health benefits.

I am weighed and measured, then asked to lie down while sensors are connected to my arms, chest and legs so that my physical woes can be transmitted into a bioimpedance machine for analysis. "This computer measures body fat, muscle mass, water levels and metabolic rate using electrical currents," explains Ana Rita. "We need to understand what sort of state you're in before we can get started with a recovery programme."

The results make me gasp. Four weeks away from the gym and yoga studio have resulted in a much higher fat-to-muscle ratio than normal: I'm on the edge of high fat and am also bordering low muscle levels. Ana Rita recommends

that I follow the structured nutritional programme adopted by all guests at Longevity. I must eat five times a day, so that I never let myself feel hungry. I should have at least two pieces of fruit per day, increase my consumption of vegetables and try to eat more soups, as they are easy to digest. I must also drink 1.5l of water per day, so my cells are kept hydrated. She adds that the vegetable- and protein-based meals served at Longevity (such as a tasty sounding ginger-marinated grilled tuna with sautéed leek and puréed sweet potato), are low GI, low sodium, gluten free, anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant.

Next the super-toned Sofia lays down the exercise plan of action for me: “High-impact cardio and interval training will burn through the fat that you have recently gained. A toning programme will help to restore your energy by removing toxins.”

10.30AM

Buoyed by the promise of the return of my abs, I am happily led by Ana Rita for an anti-ageing consultation with Dr Dra Bianka. Like the other consultants here, Dr Bianca radiates energy and enthusiasm. I instantly like her and feel comfortable enough to confess my recent bad lifestyle choices. She takes my blood pressure, checks my pulse, examines my tongue and goes through my family medical history. She explains that after identifying any biophysical, biochemical, biomechanical and psychological imbalances I might have and checking for any food intolerances, the team will create a personalised meal plan for me to follow at home, which, coupled with a bespoke selection

of supplements, will set me on a long-term “journey towards wellness and a healthier lifestyle”.

In the meantime, Dr Bianka suggests an immediate two-day liquid detox to kick-start my sluggish system, Pressotherapy (or pneumatic compression therapy) to help with water retention, ozone therapy to boost my immune system, a few invigorating sessions in the gym and some Craniosacral therapy with the osteopath to help with stress. This should help set me straight for a return to the boardroom this autumn.

I am taken to the Pressotherapy machine for what I’m promised is a painless, non-invasive detoxifying treatment. I put on a disposable inner suit and clamber into an inflatable outer garment that wraps around my legs, stomach and arms. Andreia, the therapist, takes my blood pressure and inputs the data into the machine, which selects the most appropriate programme for me. She lays me on a very comfortable bed and the machine jumps into action. The bodysuit inflates and deflates in sections; each compartment has an individual tube that fills it with air, and the resulting rhythmical pressure squeezes the blood from my extremities towards my heart and lungs. All I can hear is the soothing, soporific hiss of air flowing in and out, and I drift off to sleep. I wake when the machine has stopped and Andreia explains how the session will aid the lymphatic drainage process: cells will now release trapped toxins and fatty deposits into the circulatory system, from where they can be naturally expelled.

I can instantly see a genuine difference: I don’t feel so bloated, there’s less water retention, not just on my bulbous ankles but also on my arms and stomach.

I skip down the corridor for something to eat. A liquid lunch awaits that's a far cry from my usual variety – a surprisingly good soup of locally-grown vegetables. Every two hours thenceforth, I am served a bowl of broth. I feel light, refreshed and hunger-pang-free.

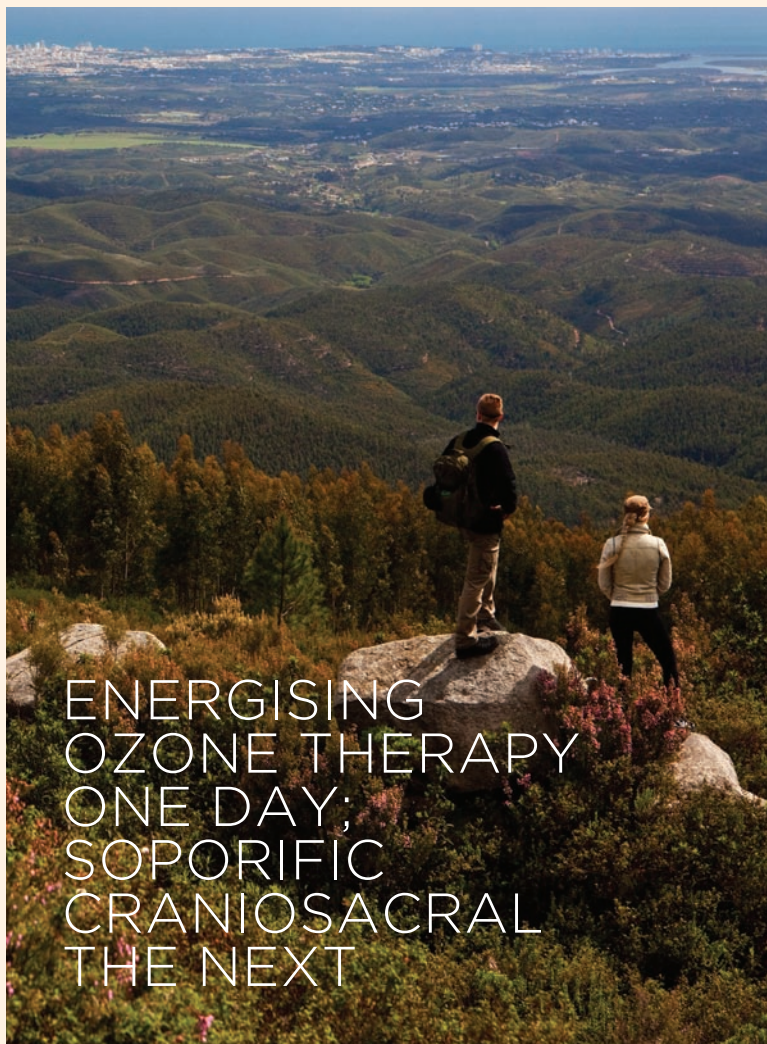
2PM

I sunbathe all afternoon and begin to feel relaxed. Ana Rita regularly pops by, making sure that I am drinking lots of the resort's own natural thermal Monchique water, known for its high alkaline PH. She says it's ideal for rebalancing cells and detoxing.

Paula, the massage and beauty therapist, calls me inside for the resort's signature treatment, the Essence of Beauty Ritual. She starts with a deep-skin exfoliation that uses mineral-rich sea salt, moves on to a dreamily relaxing citrus-oil massage that works up from my feet, and finishes with a head massage. I drift off to sleep during the two-hour treatment and wake up feeling calm. I also notice with glee that the water retention in my legs and ankles has reduced even further.

I have more puréed soup for dinner and feel ready to go to bed. My bedroom is filled with the scent of lavender and I am asleep within 30 minutes. I wake once or twice during the night, but fall back to sleep with ease.





DAY 3, 7AM

I wake and have a shake for breakfast – a mixture of carrot, apple and rocket with protein powder and oats. Teresa introduces me to Elier, a gorgeous Cuban who is to take me on a gentle nature hike in a group of six guests. We are handed bottles of thermal water before we set off to walk through the rolling hills and green fields, the cobalt-blue Atlantic sea shimmering in the distance. Elier knows so much about the local terrain that our hike almost doubles as a geography lesson. Our route takes us through the village of Monchique – the source of Longevity’s water. After two hours, we return to the resort, where Ana Rita is waiting for me with a broccoli, apple and pineapple juice. I am definitely feeling revived.

11AM

I bid farewell to Elier and am taken for my ozone therapy session, an energy-reviving treatment I first discovered at the Viva Mayr clinic, which Dr Bianka has recommended for me. The procedure involves taking 2cc of my blood, combining it with 100cc-150cc of ozone gas, and then reintroducing this mix into my bloodstream via an intravenous drip. As she performs the treatment, Dr Bianka exhorts its many benefits and explains that ozone gas is obtained by passing medical-grade oxygen through a specialised chamber that breaks the O₂ molecules down into single molecules that can then create O₃ – ozone. When introduced into the bloodstream, ozone acts as an antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal agent, penetrating cells to destroy unhealthy

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A website of wordly pleasures from the
FINANCIAL TIMES

DAY 3

fatty deposits and toxins, and helping the liver to detox and red blood cells to regenerate. It therefore improves circulation as well as cellular metabolism, and helps combat internal inflammation. “This will make your immune system more robust,” says Dr Bianka. “I recommend that you have this treatment three or four times a year; many guests feel that it’s great at protecting against winter colds.” I lie back while the ozone is pumped into my blood. It’s not exactly relaxing, but it is painless.

1PM

Hopeful that the ozone hit will restore my liver, I head to the pool for another shake (these are getting seriously addictive), this time of pineapple, melon and coriander.

I relax by the pool for a couple of hours before heading to the gym for a personal training session with Elier. We start with some stretching exercises, follow them with a 15-minute sprint on the running machine, and finish with 30 minutes of high-impact Pilates on the lawn overlooking the pool. He painstakingly ensures that I hold every position precisely and my breathing is correct. I may have done Pilates for years, but as Elier stresses, “If the body is not properly aligned, then all you’ll create is a pot belly.” So maybe that is where I’ve been going wrong...





DAY 4, 7AM

My night's sleep is even better than the last. My two-day cleansing liquid diet is over and I am hungry for some solid food. I start the day with an egg-white and mushroom omelette, which tastes fantastic. It is my first meal on the structured nutritional medical programme outlined by Ana Rita, where guests must eat five times a day (three main meals, plus morning and afternoon snacks).

10AM

Back in the gym, Elier guides me through a cardio session combined with Pilates. The shoulder bridge with one leg stretched out is a new move on me, and very hard work on the stomach. Next he makes me do a plank on the Swiss ball while pulling one knee at a time towards my chest. I can feel my core muscles burn. We move on to weight training. I am given 6kg to hold in each hand and told to do 20 reps on each arm while doing squats. It is excruciating. We finish with 15 minutes on the Powerplate.

Possibly due to yesterday's ozone therapy, I have huge amounts of energy and although the training is tough, I feel like I could have gone on for longer. Thrilled by my change in spirits, I head for a delicious lunch of smoked tofu served with a beetroot, artichoke and watercress salad, raspberry-lime vinaigrette and quinoa.

2PM

Osteopath Ricardo Rosa is next on my schedule. But calling him an osteopath only tells half his story, for he is also a practitioner of Craniosacral therapy, which involves tuning in to the body's biodynamic rhythms to heal it.

I strip down to my underwear and he asks me to do a few stretches so he can look at my alignment. I lie on the bed and as he gently rocks my head in his hands, he asks me about past ailments and small incidents that have impacted my body, from childhood scrapes to a liver virus I had eight months ago. He gently massages my forehead in circular movements and vigorously massages my skull. He manipulates my toes and my hands, and presses heavily on my eyelids. He promises that I will sleep like a baby tonight, and I don't doubt him - I leave feeling wonderfully calm. This two-hour session alone is almost worth the trip.

I have supper in my room - spinach soup followed by roasted cod loin served with sautéed courgette, cherry tomatoes, olives and onions. I can hardly keep my eyes open. I stumble to bed and have the best night's sleep in years.





OUR REPORTER
GETS A VITAMIN
BOOST, BUT
HAS THE DETOX
DELIVERED?

DAY 5, 8AM

It is my last day at Longevity and I am bursting with energy. My eyes look bright and my skin is clear – the spots on my chin have all disappeared, the pores are less visible and, having caught the sun, I also have a healthy glow.

Breakfast is a shake of beetroot, orange and lemon juice mixed with protein powder. I have another gym session with Elier, followed by Pilates that ends with 20 minutes of intense stretching exercises. I am noticeably more flexible than I was at our first session, as I can now touch my toes with ease.

I meet with Dr Bianka, who has prescribed a cocktail of vitamins and minerals to be intravenously introduced into my bloodstream. I have had a “Drip’n’Chill” vitamin treatment before, so this is not a new procedure to me. Dr Bianka puts the needle into my vein, explaining that the 30-minute session will redress the balance of essential vitamins, minerals and trace elements in my body. Once these are back to normal, my immune system will be in tiptop condition and my body will be ripe for improved healthy cell development – not to mention the positive impact it will have on brain function, deep sleep, my energy levels and nervous system, antioxidant activity and detoxification. “The key to our prevention and anti-ageing medicine strategy is regular monitoring of the vital organs combined with ozone therapy sessions,” she concludes.

1PM

Over a final lunch of sautéed free-range chicken breast with lemongrass, peppers and herbs, Dr Bianka hands me a personalised meal plan to follow at home that comprises healthy shakes of apple, ginger, celery and parsley; salads such as chicken with avocado, cherry tomatoes and quinoa; and soups of carrots, onions, cabbage, celery and garlic. They all seem easy to make. Between meals I should have two protein snacks of nuts or turkey pieces.

I'm also given an exercise regime that involves three interval training sessions per week, plus exercises and stretches that I can even do in front of the TV. It sounds manageable and I promise I will try to stick to it. There's also a selection of natural supplements to take home – an aloe vera colon cleanser that I should mix with water and sip, probiotics to boost my immune system and detoxifying supplements.

I have one final biophysical evaluation (the same as on day two) and am delighted to discover that even though I was not on the weight-loss programme, I have lost 2.9kg and have gained some muscle mass. My level of intracellular and extracellular hydration has increased, and my metabolic age has reduced by three years.

I pack my bags and Teresa shows me out, handing me a food parcel for my journey filled with healthy treats – smoked mackerel on a rye cracker, grapes and seeds and, of course, a bottle of Monchique water.

I promise to return, only next time I vow to be in a better mood to start with.



how to spend it

A website of wordly pleasures from the
FINANCIAL TIMES



THE
BOTTOM
LINE

Longevity was an unexpectedly wonderful discovery – not only is it relatively close to home (many medispas involve me in long-haul flights), but I didn't have to part with a small fortune.

I arrived tired, stressed and bloated, and left feeling lithe and 3kg lighter, with a clear head and a boosted immune system – plus some good wellbeing advice to take with me into winter. The team were friendly, attentive and helpful, and the treatments effective.

The highlight for me was definitely my Craniosacral session with Ricardo Rosa, who is extraordinarily gifted. Anyone looking to come to Longevity should book him in advance.

Longevity certainly delivered on its promise of rejuvenation. I'll definitely make a return trip.

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*Spa Junkie pays for all her own travel, treatments and accommodation.
Longevity Wellness Resort, Lugar do Montinho 8550-232 Monchique,
Algarve, Portugal (+351-2822 40100; www.longevitywellnessresort.com);
Spa Junkie paid £1,890 for the four-night Essential Beauty Sense detox,
including all treatments, meals, and transfers to and from Faro airport.*

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WELLNESS RESORT
MONCHIQUE | ALGARVE

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