



If you want to lose a few pounds, get glowing skin and pump up your energy levels, why not make your next holiday a detox? Our writers tried the retreats that promise results

The beauty blitz

MARIE FARQUHARSON
HEADED TO CROATIA FOR
A PAMPERING DETOX

Stressful city living has left me in need of a boost – my skin looks dull and I feel robbed of energy. So the chance to schedule in some seriously healthy eating, exercise and spa treatments at the five-star Sun Gardens resort in Dubrovnik, seems heaven sent.

The two-hour 40-minute, hop-and-a-skip of a flight from London to Dubrovnik, and 40-minute transfer along the stunning Adriatic coastline, means it's very easy to consider a short break here. And Sun Gardens doesn't disappoint – the resort's spectacular location means you're never far from a glorious sea view. Despite its size (three pools, umpteen restaurants, a sports centre and award-winning spa) it never feels crowded. After a lunch of grilled chicken and pumpkin purée, with crusty bread to dip in the local peppery olive oil, my first port of call is the spa. ➡



Clockwise from top left: Marie kick-starts her day with an oceanfront tai chi lesson; stone loungers in the spa's tepidarium; the resort's Radisson Blu hotel has a wide range of luxurious rooms and suites

I start with Ionithermie – a detox and inch-loss treatment said to reduce the appearance of cellulite and tone the body. From tummy to knee, I’m smothered in warm blue clay and hooked up to two types of electrodes: to promote muscle and skin tone and extract toxins. My therapist sets the current on low, and I feel a tingling sensation, like super-sharp pins and needles. The power is gradually upped to a point which makes my muscles contract so intensely, my thighs lift off the treatment couch. After an hour, my legs feel lighter and my skin smoother. Next up, an 80-minute full-body massage; my body sings in anticipation. Years of accumulated tension in my back manifest as knots the size of conkers which the therapist targets with her forearms, elbows and hands – sublimely painful, but so needed.

The detox menu, created by the resort’s executive chef, is delicious. Breakfast is a morning detox smoothie. Main meals centre on locally sourced produce and fish and seafood, which Croatia is famous for, play a big part: oyster and cucumber vichyssoise, baked tuna fillet with steamed veg and teriyaki sauce, satay prawns with wild and white rice pilaf. This may be a detox break, but dessert is still on the menu (thank you chef), and a soy milk rice pudding with honey and ginger hits the spot.

Part of my programme is an introduction to Nordic walking. Put simply, it’s walking with ski-type poles to push you along and provide support. The benefits: it works the upper body as well as the legs. I’m hooked. I also do tai chi, circuits and tennis – as with spa treatments, my exercise plan is a tailored one, created by the personal trainer.

A quick lunch, then it’s back to the spa for another massage – this time hot shell, the next generation on from hot stone – a gorgeous hydrating facial (where my therapist suggests I switch my face scrub for an enzyme-based exfoliator, as it would be better for my skin), and a glossy shellac manicure to wind up.

My last night is spent exploring Dubrovnik. It’s a magical place, and as I cross what would have been the moat to enter the old city gates I’m spirited back to medieval times, but the scars of shell marks on many of the walls and roads are a sad reminder of its more recent troubled history. My guide neatly ends the tour at Restaurant Rozario, tucked away in a pretty side street, where I’m booked to eat that night and, where, I have to admit– I go off piste: I order tender rib-eye steak, delicately flavoured orange cake and a fabulous Croatian sauvignon blanc. Oops...

Travel details *A seven-day detox costs £1622. Visit www.dubrovniksungardens.com.*



Clockwise from top: The converted eighteenth century farmhouse now home to Ti Sana; old-world charm meets Italian style in the spacious bedroom; the futuristic spa



The vegan cleanse

CHARLOTTE HAIGH MACNEIL
TRIED A DETOX BASED ON
DIET, TREATMENTS
AND EXERCISE IN ITALY

My heart is breaking a tiny bit as I check in to the beautiful Ti Sana Detox Retreat and Spa in northern Italy. I’m in the land of pizza, pasta and gelato, yet I know I won’t be eating a single delicious morsel for the next few days. The regime here is not for the faint-hearted. I’m given a schedule packed with exercise sessions and health-boosting treatments – including, I’m alarmed to see, colonic irrigation. I’ll be eating three meals a day, plus snacks, but judging by my first lunch here – a giant salad of vegetables so crunchy I’m left with an aching jaw – fettuccine will not be on the menu.

Ti Sana is nestled in beautiful hills far from the nearest big town, so I immediately feel relaxed. I ease into things with an afternoon in the state-of-the-art spa, which I have to myself for an hour, and I have one of the best full-body massages I’ve ever had. I saunter out, feeling loose-limbed and relaxed. Next is tai chi with fitness trainer Mario. I’ve never done it before, and it’s a revelation: the slow, flowing movements put me into a meditative state.

In the dining room, fellow guests warn me not to get too excited about dinner. The meal



will be protein-based but because Ti Sana’s diet plan is vegan and follows alkaline diet principles (so acid-forming foods, such as meat, are out), I know not to expect a juicy steak. I’m served celery soup and a small pile of lightly cooked soya beans. I go to bed with a hollow feeling in my stomach.

The next morning, it’s straight to the fitness room for some intensive training, which leaves me more than ready for breakfast: freshly pressed fruit juice and chia pudding. Then we trek out into the countryside for a walk. This is the day I’m scheduled for colonic irrigation. Erica, Ti Sana’s founder, explains that it cleanses the colon of all waste and toxins, leaving it better able to do its job, but I shy away from it; I know some people swear by colonics, but it’s not for me.

Presentations to explain the rationale behind Ti Sana’s regime are key here; Erica believes it’s important guests understand the reasons for the diet and treatments. Mario takes me through a scientific explanation of how a vegan, alkaline diet can transform the

body at cellular level and lower risk of disease. The next night, Erica’s father (Ti Sana is family-run) takes us through his journey from wine-drinking, stressed-out executive to super-fit marathon runner via a detoxifying lifestyle.

My last day is definitely the toughest. This is juice day, which means no solid food all day. It’s also the day we take a trip into the nearby city of Bergamo. We explore magnificent churches, pretty cobbled streets and sun-dappled piazzas lined with restaurants and cafes. I torment myself by poring over the menus displayed outside, almost faint with hunger. In a further act of masochism, I duck into a delicatessen to buy foodie gifts for my family – bags of hazelnut biscotti and amaretti. I have to confess that later, after an afternoon ‘snack’ of vegetable juice, I cave in and open the amaretti. I eat two. Utter bliss.

I lost 4lb in three days, despite the cheeky amaretti, and left having vanquished my coffee habit – I’ve only had one in the month since I returned. Realistically, though, I doubt I’ll be following all the dietary advice I received. I can’t deny that Erica and her family are zinging with vitality and have no doubt that’s related to their healthy lifestyle, but for me it’s just a little too hardcore. However, if you’re looking to deep cleanse your system and shift stubborn pounds, Ti Sana is a luxurious and friendly place to do it.

Travel details *A 10-day Healthetarian plan costs £3200. Visit www.tisanadetoxretreat.com.*

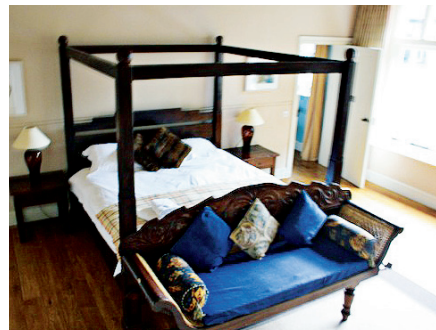
The juice boost

MONICA CAFFERKY WENT ON
A JUICING RETREAT TO BEAT
A SUGAR ADDICTION

It’s 8am on a Sunday morning and I’m bouncing on a trampoline in a converted barn in Herefordshire. For some time, I’d been wanting to give myself a drastic overhaul. In the previous 18 months I’d gone from a size 8 to a 12, not my happy weight. I felt sluggish and unhealthy. I’d tried cutting out the sweet stuff, but my willpower had vanished and eating cake had become a worryingly daily habit.

I decided the only way to beat my addiction was to go cold turkey, which is how I’ve ended up here on the six-day Breakfree Detox Retreat. I’ll be drinking fresh juices and taking various probiotic and fish oil supplements, but having no solid food. Health and weight loss expert Deborah Morgan, author of *Cut The Crap And Find Your Perfect Weight* (Bookshaker, £12), who runs the retreat, tells me previous participants have lost up to 12lb over the course of the week, so I’m hopeful.

Every morning starts with hot lemon and water. ‘This sets your body up for calorie burning,’ says Deborah. ‘Lemon is alkaline and reduces the body’s overall acidity.’ Then it’s onto exercise, which Deborah believes should be done on an empty stomach first thing in the morning. ‘This helps to burn the stored fat,’ she says. So, with a rumbling stomach, I embark on 40 minutes of circuit training (hence the mini trampoline) before



Clockwise from top: The luxurious bedroom promises a good night’s sleep; the comfortable living room is a great space to relax; the retreat is based in a Victorian country house



my breakfast juice. At 11am I head off on a four-mile walk and in the afternoon I have a yoga class.

It’s tough being active with only juice in your body and on day three I’m shaky and tired. But the afternoon juice arrives just in time and the crisis passes. Slowly, I begin to feel better – by day four my clothing feels looser and my face less puffy.

I have daily mentoring sessions with Deborah and on day five, she tells me the big rule I need to follow: not to have any sugar in my home from now on. I leave with a personalised diet plan to follow. I will be eating according to alkaline diet principles: a high-protein breakfast of salmon, eggs and greens; a lunch of protein with lots of greens and salad (which will be my main meal); and soup and salad for dinner, which must be eaten no later than 8pm as digestion switches off at this time. I don’t feel too intimidated, though, because Deborah points out that I’m allowed occasional treats. ‘Try to follow the alkaline diet 70 per cent of the time, but if you go out have a bit of bread or a glass of wine; we all live in the real world.’

At the end of the week I’ve lost an amazing 8lb and five and three-quarter inches. My skin is clearer, I’m full of energy and my sugar cravings have gone. Back home I rustle up a homemade vegetarian chilli with a green salad. After another month of following my personalised diet plan, I’ve lost a stone in total – I’m back to a size 8 and feel fantastic.

Travel details *A seven-day detox retreat in Herefordshire costs from £495. For information on retreats and personal coaching, visit www.breakfreeretreats.com.*