

I've always wanted to go to a slimming/detox retreat. Not because I need to lose weight; my diet is pretty much on point but if you cut me, I bleed vodka! So I took myself away to the Slimmeria Retreat in Ilfracombe, north Devon, for a much-needed five day detox.



SLIMMERIA RETREAT

Merlin Court is an impressive and imposing building resting on top of a hill with fabulous views overlooking the town of Ilfracombe. The building has been beautifully restored and renovated and comprises of boutique style en-suite rooms (some with baths). Imagine stripped wood floors, white walls and chandeliers. As this is a detox retreat, there are no TVs and no kettles or trays with teas, coffees and home-made shortbread biscuits! Or vodka.



Our host

Galia Grainger set up her first Slimmeria retreat in Sussex. She lost more than four stone herself by following her Russian grandmother's rules, a mix of Russian orthodox fasting, folk medicine and stern Soviet willpower. She is firm but fair (with a bit more emphasis on the firm!)

I arrived on the Sunday along with my fellow guests and our host was there to greet us. More on Galia later. We were a mixed bunch. Two other women, one in her thirties and the other in her forties - a gentleman in his sixties and little, old me. We were all there to shed some pounds and tighten up our flabby bits. Some were fitter than others but, as we found out during the five days, it was very much a team effort.

How each day unfolded...

Each day began with the ringing of a bell at 7.30am. We had to be in the dining room for 8am. We began the day with a slice of apple and some lemon water before setting off for one of our many and varied two-hour walks.

Now, if you don't know Ilfracombe, then let me tell you it's a hilly place so the walks all involved hills of some sort or another. The first day our host was kind to us and took us on a walk through the town via the harbour; a proper fishing harbour with working boats. Here, we had a minute to stop and admire the famous Damien Hirst sculpture - Verity - a defiant, naked, pregnant woman holding up a sword as she oversees the comings and goings of the harbour. Love her or hate her, she's definitely the talk of the town. I was unaware that Damien was a local.

"Our host Galia is firm but fair (with a bit more emphasis on the firm!)"





Other walks included the harbour and Hillsborough Torrs Path (south west coast path) and the historic Tarka Trail which follows the journey of Tarka the Otter, from the classic tale by Henry Williamson.

As I mentioned earlier, the group was of mixed walking ability, our host set us fitter ones on our way whilst she walked with the less fit. On our return to Merlin Court, we enjoyed breakfast - a glass of juice.

Each day was a variation of different revitalising ingredients. Then followed an hour long fitness class (which even I found quite tough), and then an hour of yoga (which I'm going to take up on my return).

Did we eat real food?

Then lunch. Our meals were all plant-based and included ingredients such as carrots, shredded cabbage, beetroots, broccoli, some nuts and buckwheat/ quinoa with a drizzle of a light oil dressing.

At 3pm we had some fruit and a herbal tea. Dinner was at 6pm. This consisted of another salad, broth or soup.

We were encouraged to go for another unaccompanied walk (without taking money!) after our fruit, and before dinner, to keep the activity levels up and to lose more weight. I must admit I wasn't even tempted by the fish and chips, pasties, fudge or afternoon teas. I was on a mission

After dinner, there was another activity of either self-defence, dance, belly dancing, pad work in the gym and muscle stretching and meditation classes. The package came with one treatment, but I also opted to have a few more which included lymphatic drainage, a back massage and reflexology during my stay. Lights out was at 9pm.



It was all going well until...

Everything was going swimmingly (I did that too at a local leisure centre) until Wednesday. Apparently, the lack of caffeine and carbs sometimes catches up with people, and it did me. I felt nauseous, weak, shaky and had a nasty headache. I was given a couple of raisins (a fast sugar hit) and, quite surprisingly, this sorted me out. It freaked me out though as I thought I was beyond that reaction given my caffeine and sugar free diet.

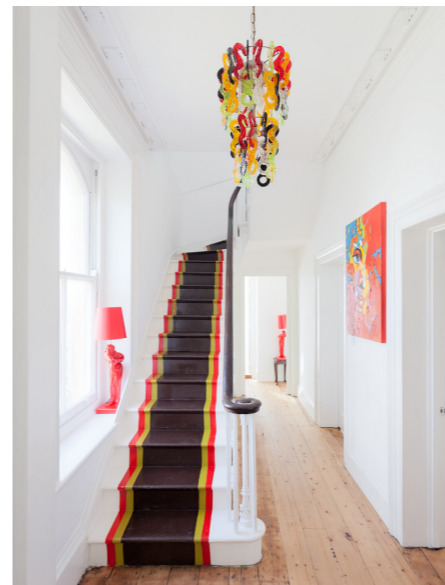
And the verdict?

So, did I lose weight? Yes. I lost 5lb (one pound a day) and an inch off my bust, an inch and a half off my waist, and an inch off my hips. The others in the group lost more but, in fairness, I didn't have that much to lose in the first place. Previous guests have lost between 7-14lbs per week.

Would I go again?

Definitely. We all know the answer to losing weight is to eat less and move around more but it's hard when you have to motivate yourself and contend with the working week, the house and the kids. But if you have a few days to spare and you want to kick start your diet, metabolism and tone up in the process, then a trip to Slimmeria could be just the thing to get you into that LBD for Christmas, look and feel great for an upcoming holiday or the start of how you mean to go on.

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