

TRAVEL

WINING AND dining, late nights, no exercise. What did I expect? Certainly

not a whipping in a dungeon. But this is what I got when I took my half-hearted battle of the bulge to Hastings and checked into an old country house.

I knew I'd have to go from a feast to famine (a poultry 400 calories a day) from wine to water, couch potato to four hours daily exercise and from late night to lights out at 9pm. And no coffee. Gulp!

All it took was one look at my silhouette and before I knew it I was navigating the winding lanes of East Sussex to the small village of Crawford and the home of Slimmeria Retreat.

It was Sunday night. As soon as I walked in I was weighed and measured, handed a bottle of water and told to drink four a day. It felt stern but then I was shown to a rather elegant room with a huge en-suite bathroom and doors that open to the garden and a vineyard beyond.

The detox started at dinner when 14 of us sat down to a bowl of watery tomato and cauliflower soup followed by a herbal tea and a pep talk.

I say pep talk, it was more a warning. "Over the next few days you will

eat only what you are given" barked founder Galla Grainger in her thick Russian accent.

"And you will eat all of it. This is an organic raw vegetable fasting diet. The Russian cook who runs the kitchen does not speak English, so she won't understand you if you ask for snacks. She will throw you out.

"If you have any snacks hidden in your suitcase, pockets or even in your car, hand them to me now. Follow this plan and you will lose weight, if you don't you will lose out."

She then explained that each segment of our itinerary would be announced by a bell. It was at this point I got the feeling of being in the Big Brother house.

The 7am wake-up bell rang. And again at 7.45am to summon us to the dining room for a hot lemon drink and a slither of apple. Then on with our boots and out for a two-hour walk.

This was no stroll in the park. It had rained hard and the ground all the way to the village of Battle, was extremely muddy. This is 1066 country.

It was on this verdant, hilly landscape that the Normans and Saxons fought for king and country.

And there I was fighting so hard just to stay upright that I hardly noticed what on another days would have been pretty countryside trails.

"Mud is your friend," I was told. "It is strengthening your core."

The hit squad



Boxing on the lawns, a whipping in the dungeon — Sharron Livingston tried punching her own weight — and losing some of it in the process

No pain, no gain: candidates work out on the lawns of this country house under the watchful eye of the Russian dominatrix Galla Grainger. She has a whip and is prepared to use it

An eternity later — two hours on my watch — it was breakfast. A fruit juice. When the bell rang, it was into the gym for a workout, circuit training or boxercise class. Another bell rang it was yoga in the White Room. The next bell

was — at long last — lunch. The mound of orange and white made up of cabbage and carrot strips and topped with cherry tomatoes, looked and tasted lovely, but I wondered how long it would sustain me.

The afternoon ahead felt long. "Go for another walk" I was told. "But whatever you do, do not have an afternoon nap. If you want a rest, read in the White Room." There was no TV in the bedroom, the

Wi Fi was sporadic and I really needed a distraction. I found it in the dungeon. This is where I endured the whipping with birch twigs "to get rid of toxins". The preparatory 20-minutes in the stream box was great but boy the whip-

ping hurt. On the bright side, I stopped thinking about being hungry. After the mud-walking escapade it was a huge relief to find that two of the next three walks were along different paths on the Hastings seafront. Never

had a promenade felt so good beneath my feet. The problem was I was often hungry, and so each afternoon it was back to the dungeon for a facial, a massage or reflexology to tide me over to teatime.

Teatime was between 3pm and 4pm and the bell never rang for this. Somehow though, all 14 of the inmates made it for a segment or two of fruit. I could not believe how wonderful four small triangles of pineapple or a quarter of a pear tasted. Since there was nothing else being served, I savoured these mouthfuls for ages.

The dinner bell rang at 6.30pm each night — a plate of something warm such as lightly roasted vegetables or a soup with a mug of herbal tea for desert. The last call was for a dancercise class. Then, it was lights out and bed.

It is a gruelling schedule and by "weary Wednesday" I was tired and could have done with a nibble of something sweet. "Would you like a couple of raisins?" It was a serious question. "No I said, best not binge."

By Thursday, the world seemed different. I seemed brighter, happier. Perhaps it was because I was going home, or perhaps because I had lost 7lbs and an inch in all the right places.

I announced this at lunchtime and received an ovation. Then as I said goodbye, it was hugs, kisses and see you on the outside. I half expected to see Emma Willis ask about my time in the house. I quietly climbed into my car to drive home through the gorgeous countryside lanes. I felt as if I'd won. www.slimmeria.com

EDITED BY
SHARRON LIVINGSTON
slivingston@thejc.com

