



OM's Sara Stant visits the Slimmeria retreat in East Sussex for a spot of yoga chilling and some good old fashioned hikes in the country

Slimmeria is a very successful residential retreat and spa in East Sussex specialising in detoxing, fasting, weight-loss and all things fitness. What I found there after a short weekend getaway recently was some blissful restorative yoga, bracing country walks, and some of the freshest and best food I'd ever eaten.

Slimmeria opened in 2010 and now boasts a loyal customer following with guests (including lots of celebs) returning to keep themselves on track or simply to get away and de-stress. And it's the perfect place to do just that.

When I left, I felt chilled and inspired to continue my healthy living journey after following a schedule that included daily yoga, plenty of other exercise and lots of pure, clean living raw foods.

It's all based in a beautiful Georgian building with its own vineyard, called Hye House, tucked away in the stunning Sussex countryside. Ironically, years ago, it used to be known as a sex, drugs and rock and roll house. Now it's the perfect venue to get yourself back together and find some peace.

Healing hands

Much of the inspiration behind Slimmeria comes from its straight talking founder, Galia Grainger, a health fanatic who will greet you at the door when you arrive and be on hand to make sure you're getting the most from your stay. Brought up in Russia for the first part of her life, she's passionate about natural foods, detoxing and complementary medicine – all the things that make the retreat tick.

In fact, she's on a bit of a mission to get these messages across to a wider audience, getting more people back to basics with healthy natural foods and fresh air for a better mind, body, soul balance.

She's unapologetically undiplomatic but funny and charming with it, and her belief in what she's doing really shines through.

One of these beliefs relates to the healing powers of food, something that's reflected in everything that comes out of the kitchen. Slimmeria's food recipes are in demand way beyond the actual retreat centre itself as are their cookery demonstrations.

Effectively, Slimmeria is about re-educating

Yoga, hiking and country living



people, sometimes using reverse psychology to shock and facilitate the best results and stretch guests out of their comfort zone.

Natural detox

It's true, weight loss is big on the agenda here, and if that's what you're looking for you're probably in good hands. The place has had amazing results for over 5,000 'graduates' of the weekly programme with an average weight loss of around 12 pounds for a 7-day stay.

There's a good reason behind it though. After coming to England 25 years ago, and being shocked at the processed food, chemicals, preservatives, additives and sugars being eaten, Grainger quickly gained weight herself. After researching diets and lifestyles she reverted back to her Russian grandmother's wisdom creating a programme based on raw foods, diet, exercise and wholesome living that forms the basis of Slimmeria's philosophy today.

But that's certainly not the only reason people come here. As well as detoxing, getting fit and losing weight, many guests come to lick their wounds after an emotional upheaval. For me, I wanted to explore some of the alternative health and fitness options on offer, including yoga and Pilates, but most of all just to relax and get away from it all for a few days.

Yoga... and boxing

Daily exercise of all sorts is a part of all routines here, but I particularly enjoyed the hour-long yoga classes in the afternoons. The gentle restorative sessions were just what I needed and became like an anchor for me during my stay in between all the other activities.

The yoga itself takes place in the White Room, a beautiful clean space and refreshing for the gentle restorative practice that we did. The Pilates gave us good variety as well.

Of course, if you want more of a contrast then there are plenty of high octane activities going on, or hit the gym for some boxing, cardio or circuit training.

Expect a few surprises too. Slimmeria loves to get you exploring new things so don't be surprised if you get invited to a belly dancing class, or some burlesque or Bokwa.

One of the highlights for me was the regular walks outside, come rain or shine, in the Sussex countryside. If there's rain, that probably means getting muddy, but luckily the weather was just perfect during our stay. One of the walks we did was a two hour hike to Battle, stopping off along the way for a very small picnic – one slice of apple and two raisins (I can honestly say that a raisin has never tasted so good in my life!).

When you get back, enjoy an unusual

beverage such as dragon tea with garlic, if you're feeling thirsty.

Spa heaven

Then there are the incredible spa treatments offered to guests (honey massages, cupping massages and much more), that complement the other activities. My favourite was Venik birching, a sauna followed by being whipped naked with hot branches and then the most intense body and head massage ever. Trust me, it's way better than it sounds.

You'll certainly be well fed too as that's one of the main goals of any time spent at Slimmeria.

Dinners included stuffed pepper with grated veg and raw courgettes, peppers and tomatoes. The emphasis is on raw food though not exclusively. Whatever is served in front of you, your body will love you for it.

I took so many great memories away with me (even though now there's less of me – I also lost some weight and a few centimetres off the waist during the stay).

Grainger, the owner, was amazing and made things fun for the whole group. We all gained so much more than trim tums, with a decluttered mind, plus the knowledge that we can survive on way less food than we currently eat thanks to some useful nutritional talks.

While the centre may not be so well known among the yoga community, it will certainly put a spring in your step. For world-weary souls that's a welcome invitation.

"Too many people are burning candles at both ends in terms of their social life, personal life, parental duties and demanding work schedules trying to reach targets and deadlines and actually lose themselves in this chaos," says Grainger.

"We are not just a weight-loss, detox and fitness retreat: we are offering guests a life-changing experience if they are ready for it." ॐ

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