

The Riverside Journals

Chelsea & Kensington edition



Treat your body to a detox and you won't regret it

Written by Yasemen Kaner-White

Slimmeria came along just at the right time for me, following two full-on foodie trips, one after the other. First there was a tasty tour of Auvergne, home to the HQ of Michelin and then mounds of marzipan in the famed location for it – Lübeck in Germany. I was relieved knowing after my indulgences I would be able to cleanse away the pounds and guilt at my first ever detox retreat.

In preparation I was guided by a lengthy informative email, written in such a colloquial manner it felt as though a friend in the know was giving me insider knowledge. I was advised to cut out caffeine (this was the hardest) and to cut down on dairy, wheat, gluten, sugar and red meats as well as alcohol and junk food and to drink plenty of water – a week leading up to checking in.

In military style, I was also provided with an essential packing list, of which I was later very appreciative – particularly the waterproof boots! I would have hated to have missed out on those long wild walks amidst the beautiful, albeit muddy, Sussex countryside. It's certainly a Wordsworth style of walking and you can't help but to feel at peace gazing out to sea or through the thick foliage of the trees.

I got the train up. The train inspector who sold me the ticket was uber excited; it was the first ever train ticket he had sold to Crowhurst – home to his grandmother and a medieval pub called the Elephant's Head. I assured him I would be abstaining, so he quickly changed tack and excitedly described the beautiful rolling countryside; things were looking positive!

On the train I put a note on my Facebook: 'On detox! Only work will be addressed after 9.30pm'. For Slimmeria isn't just a detox from weight packing foods and alcohol, no, it is also a retreat from the modern day world of being stuck to your technical devices. This was a concern for me, but something I was determined to embrace, albeit until 9.30pm each day after which we were meant to be in our rooms anyway.

A short taxi ride from the station to Slimmeria (although it is walkable) and I was there. The walk up to the imposing Georgian house felt very grand and I was met by Alison, the host for the day, with a beaming smile. She led me into a stunning antique treasure trove front room. As I sat on a pretty inlaid pearl chair, already feeling cosy, settled and at home, we discussed my goals ahead for the detox. I was to measure myself and report back to be weighed. In all honesty, as someone who never weighs herself, I go by clothes – if snug I cut down, if loose I may just have a little more. I was not ecstatic with the weigh-in result and even more ready for the challenge ahead.

My room, with a stunning four-poster bed as a centerpiece and the contrasting modern bathroom, was spotless and made me feel at ease. After a good night's sleep, at 7.30am a church-like bell chime bounced off the walls. Time to get up. At 8am 'breakfast one' was served – a mug of warm lemon water, not unlike what I have at home first thing, followed by porridge, honey, nuts... you get the picture. Alas, this lemon water plus a see-through slither of apple (amazing how grateful you are when there's not much) was all there was to see us through a 10km walk, at our own pace. This is when the bonding with my fellow housemates began.

Our friendships started to cement with every step, some weary, some sprightly, we were in it together, myself and seven other ladies. Post walk, we clambered home to find eight glasses of freshly squeezed juice – 'breakfast two' to sustain a body conditioning class. Amazingly, I had bags of energy, so far so good.

Next up was a relaxing, stretchy yoga class with a softly spoken teacher; I confess I was so serene I slept for the last 10 minutes or so, pure bliss. Woken by the bell, it was lunch time, think coleslaw without the mayo AND without anything else. I giggled nervously and for the first time realised this was it, I am in a remote location with nothing but cabbage and chilli. I have to mention we all pounced on the chilli flakes sitting alongside the only other condiments on our table – salt and pepper. Suddenly life didn't seem so bad and I was even more determined. After all, I knew it wouldn't be a breeze and I wanted that loose not snug feeling in my trousers again. Determined to be like Gail Porter, who has been seven times, and not Gemma Collins who escaped after six hours, I crunched on that anti-oxidizing cabbage like there was no tomorrow. It became tiring and I wasn't hungry after a while, just relieved I didn't have to chew anymore when I finished it. Some ladies indeed couldn't finish their food, but I would advise to eat all that is given as Galia, the founder of the Slimmeria, has planned a balanced diet and frankly the more food, the more energy and the more energy the more welly you can give to your classes – making you fitter!

In the forefront of my mind was the first of my spa treatments. There is a menu, and you





can book in advance (savings can be made that way), or book in situ. A honey massage, which Winnie the Pooh would die for, soothed my body beautifully, surrounded by candles in what was originally the cellar. The spa is a much needed sanctuary. When I emerged it was afternoon tea, yes I know, the very phrase conjures up Claridges – clotted cream, exquisite pastries and finger sandwiches. This cruel mirage was bluntly broken when I saw what Olga, the faithful cook, had laid out for us – a quarter of a pear, two wafer slices of papaya and half a strawberry – I demolished them in a nano-second, whereas I saw others savour every titbit. Each to their own.

We concurred our favourite afternoon tea was the passion fruit; that zesty kick literally kicked us all into action later on in the week, just as we needed it. Talking of misleading names, the longest walk meant we were entitled to a picnic – two raisins and an apple slice slightly thicker than breakfast's. One lady dropped a raisin. Apart from a truffle pig, I've never seen anything move so quickly to hunt down a treasured treat. She found it. Free time and then dinner – a tasty medley of cooked veg, something I'd have at home, this time sans the salmon. I was ready for bed. Everyone slumped off but I had work to do. I would recommend, however, not to have visitors when you have work commitments because the less you eat, logically the less alert you will feel. So stick to their advice and detox from technology – if I could have, I would have. It's the perfect time to treat yourself to that long awaited novel. Time to read is a luxury and, after all, after all this hard work you would deserve it.

The remaining six days largely followed suit. Walks wavered between seaside and hilly vistas accompanied by motivational staff to push you to keep going, though in all honesty everyone likes the walks and some, myself included, even walked the vine rows (an extra 2 miles). When we returned our ability to push ourselves was amazing, we were in control and felt empowered and inspired.

Stand out classes were the dance classes for me, which included belly dance, zumba, and the highlight – learning the dance routine to 'Black Velvet'. It just felt like having a laugh with your chums, strategically placed on 'weary Wednesday' – for me the toughest day of them all.

I formed a love for Boxercise class – rounds of sparring on an empty tum that made me feel fantastically fit and proud.

The food remained of a similar ilk, with Saturday night soup shining out as the best – our predecessors during crossover days warned us it was delicious. Another Saturday treat, the night before departing, was DVD night, again, another excuse to enjoy the company of my new friends. If it wasn't for a lack of popcorn it might have felt completely normal. As long as you're not tempted to lick off the strawberry real fruit facial out of hunger, I'd recommend it highly but I mustn't forget the talks; an informative nutritional talk that made us analyse our eating habits in a positive manner. I took the chance to book a one-to-one with Anne, the EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) lady, inspired by her inspirational address to us.

Whilst at times reminding me of the routine and rules of boarding school, the fact is I'm not a child any more. I went in there by choice and with goals, of which I achieved a loss of eight pounds and a gain of friends, with the added bonus of a loose waistband. I'm glad I did it, and if you do too, you won't regret it.

www.slimmeria.co.uk

Meet founder and owner of Slimmeria – Galia Grainger

Have you always had a healthy disposition?

I think I was aware that I didn't follow a healthy lifestyle 100%, I had an open minded disposition, but was overweight. I wasn't following good rules, was going out, was getting upset and then stopped going out because I was big. I was tired, it just happened like a snowball. I was a size 18 but didn't want to admit it. I didn't want to buy size 18 clothes, I wanted to get size 10. I was the one that was wrong and the only one who could address it.

Before Slimmeria, what were you doing?

I was doing property development and working from home. I could afford early retirement but that wouldn't have been good, as I was just eating more.

When was Slimmeria born?

In 2006 I bought the premises.

How did you devise your recipes? Based on inspiration from where?

The recipes are my grandma's and mother's recipes. My Russian orthodox grandmother, who lived until she was 96, fasted for religious purposes. Because of her ways, I researched fasting and how she ate in-between her fasts – raw, vegetarian and no dairy. I realised most religions included dieting.

Is Slimmeria organic and how many calories is the diet per day?

Mostly organic and locally sourced. There are 400 to 500 calories per day but the focus is on the food more than the calories.

Some ladies were there for three weeks. I noticed after week 1 they received a protein choice. How long could someone do this diet for?

One week to 10 days if they are overweight, 5-7 days if they are petite. It is safe for 10 days. Weight loss slows down after 10 days so it is better to introduce lean protein such as eggs, tuna or cottage cheese after 10 days to boost the weight loss even further. After that carbs are introduced, including buckwheat.

When did you first have the idea to create Slimmeria?

I tried different programmes but couldn't find one to help; they were all boot camps with smoothies and colonic leaving me with no energy. I knew the right way, to eat a little veg and to exercise – an overall detox whilst getting fit and losing weight. If you get weak you stop functioning.

I loved the range of classes. Did you always have classes from day one – belly dance etc – or was it in reaction to feedback?

I wanted fun. Belly dance was one of the first classes, from day one, some classes were modified. We didn't straight away have zumba as it wasn't around yet. There are more dance classes now than we had then, back then it was more spa, you would have 2½ hours of spa. There were smaller groups and less talks. I saw a need for talks and dance classes, now we are doing a second walk too. It is amazing what you can squeeze out of people if you push them enough. There used to be porridge every day as a choice but now, only on Sunday.

What's your advice for people when they're finding it really tough?

What nugget of motivation do you give?

You need to practise mind over matter, understand why you joined us. The benefits of raw and fasting is easy to find nowadays. You will eat again, it's only a few days of your life – work as a team. What doesn't kill you, makes you thinner.

How would you say Slimmeria differs from other detox retreats?

We exercise a lot, at other retreats exercise is negligible. We offer full-on fitness, high impact walks, motivation, mind over matter, conscious eating.

What future plans do you have?

Expansion! A place for people who have already achieved their fitness goals and weight loss, so sustaining weight loss. It will involve cooking demonstrations. A sustainable retreat focusing on preventative measures, it won't be called detox.