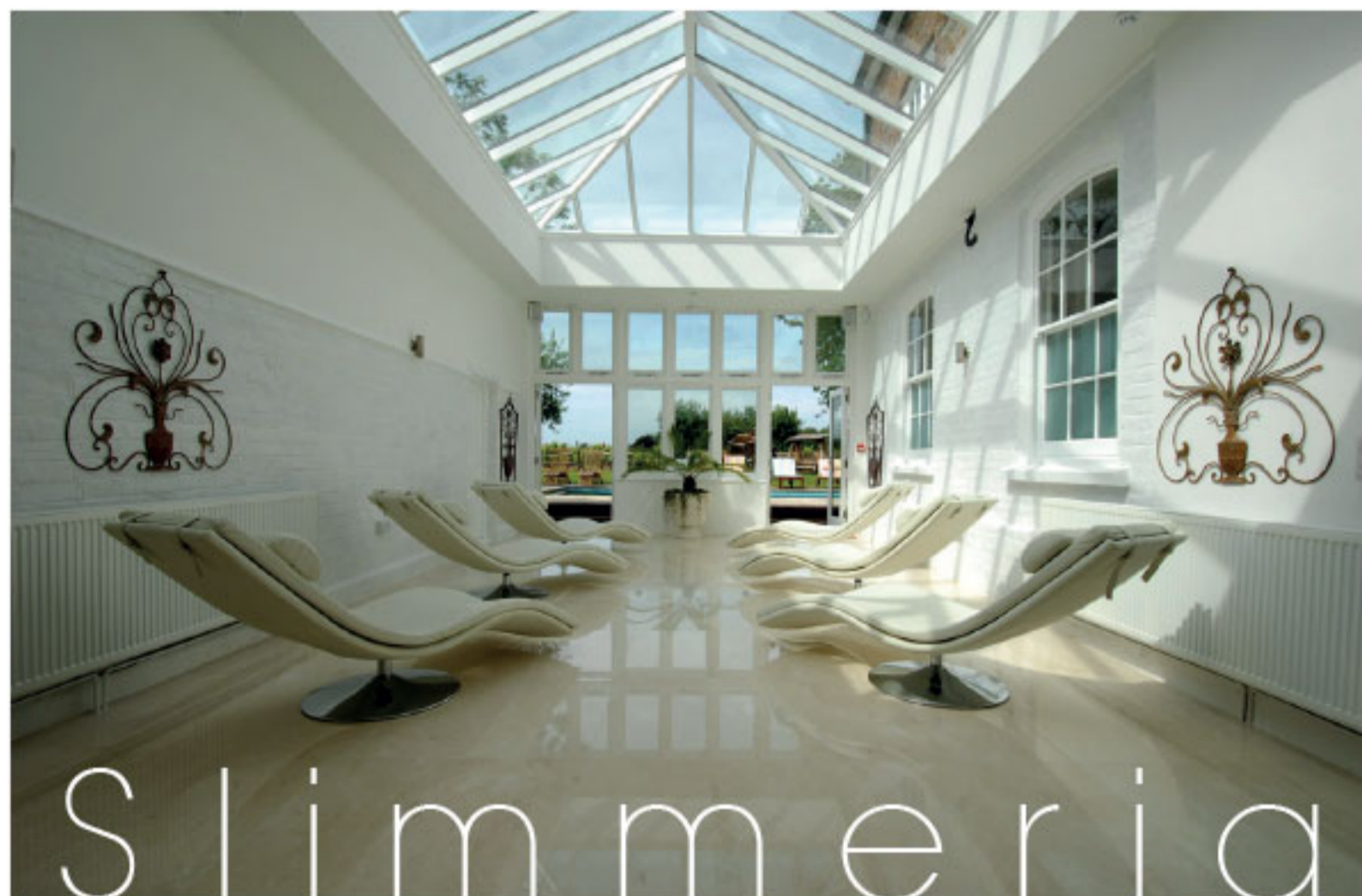


your Kensington & Chelsea



LIFESTYLE • FASHION • BEAUTY • WATCHES • MOTORING • TRAVEL • PROPERTY

SLIMMERIA



Nestled in the tranquil Sussex countryside, close to the historic town of Battle, Hastings, Slimmeria is for those super serious about weight loss.

We were invited down for a week to see if the claims of hefty weight loss were true. With apprehension and slight nervousness we willingly accepted.

The house itself is a large Georgian manor house complete with a pool, that's open during the summer months and large conservatory. The impressive driveway and pretty fountain make for a lovely entrance even if you are not sure what to expect on the inside.

Check in is on a Sunday and guests are invited to arrive between 4pm and 6pm for an individual assessment where you also get weighed and measured. Upon arrival, staff help with bags and you are escorted through the grand hallway to the zen-like white room, which you later find out is also used for relaxation and yoga classes.

It's surprising just how many people you meet that have actually been to the retreat before. Many have come back to continue their journey and others just because it worked before and old habits have crept back in. The group during our stay is mainly women, of a variety of ages and all abilities all keen to detox or lose some weight, although we are told that men often do visit too. One woman is on her fourth stay and cites the fact you can lose up to a stone in a week as her incentive.

The dreaded medieval style bell rings (loudly) everyday to signal anything from wake up at 7.15am to meal times and class start times. While this sense of militant routine - the list of stringent rules is also read out frequently - may remind you of your school years and be less than appealing, the formula does work. You quickly find yourself settling into the regime and in all honesty if

you weren't there for a reason you wouldn't be there at all so there's no point grumbling and even if you do it's certainly not welcomed.

The first meal is an almost clear broth with chunks of cauliflower and cherry tomatoes. Surprisingly there is salt on the table, as well as pepper and chilli flakes - something you will use liberally during your stay. I'm convinced the first meal is a shock tactic however, as the week went on food became more colourful and although still only raw vegetables and juices and you find yourself thoroughly appreciative at the sight of a bright green courgette sitting together with a red pepper.

The food during the stay is very routine. You have your lemon tonic (hot water and a sliver of apple) at 7.45am before the morning briefing where owner, Galia or another member of her team enthusiastically outlines the day's events. Then you embark on a five or six mile walk for two hours. Those with injuries or recurring health issues can opt for a slightly easier walk around the house's vineyards or nearby cricket ground but are warned not to pop into the 'juice bar' as Galia fondly calls it - pub to you and I - that's also close by. Although tiring, the walks do get easier if you are not the fittest and are actually incredibly beautiful. One day you will be trekking through the countryside admiring the rolling hills and cattle and the next, knee deep in mud collecting wild garlic shoots in the forest along the historic 1066 route. Thanks to the close proximity of the sea, a coastal walk is also on the agenda for the week. One thing to be sure of is that you pack sturdy walking boots, there is nothing worse than being caked in mud and guests are warned in a forcefully worded welcome letter that if you don't have the correct footwear you will be dismissed from the walk.

Upon your return to the house, breakfast is served, a juice often in the form of carrot and ginger or grapefruit and orange, before

TRAVEL



you are plunged back into an exercise class which again varies everyday and can be anything from boxersize to circuit training; and then relaxing yoga. All of the classes are very good and the change is useful to keep those less motivated on the right track.

For those having a slump, you are offered what's known as a 'magic raisin'. Just the one though, and even though it's no more than just a normal raisin, you'll be surprised the boost it gives you.

The afternoons are slightly more leisurely and are used for spa time and relaxation, those who are keener may go out for a second run or walk on the grounds. Between 3pm and 4pm (and the only meal without the signal of the bell) is afternoon tea. However, you can forget any thoughts of large cream teas and sandwiches, after all you are at a slimming retreat, and are instead served slivers of fruit such as orange and half a strawberry with warm water - perhaps even with some mint leaves if you are lucky.

The spa can only be described as 'rustic' and is located in the basement of the house in one single room separated by hospital-like screens sparsely decorated with candles. Not what you were expecting? Perhaps. However you have to remember that this isn't a spa location, the treatments are merely an added bonus and in all honesty after all that exercise you'll be pleased just to be having the treatments as you can be sure to have aching limbs. While the surroundings may not be the best, the therapists are very good and thorough. During your stay you must have a deep tissue or relaxation massage, for those more adventurous the twig bashing or cellulite busting honey slapping may be more unique for your stay.

For those looking for something a little more tailored to their individual detox journey, you can also venture off site to a one-to-one treatment such as personal training, colonic hydrotherapy or

an individual nutritionist appointment. These will also be arranged in the afternoon during the week.

After all that hard work, dinner is served by the gong of the bell at 6.30pm every evening. Usually warm, it's another vegetarian meal followed by a herbal tea, before another fitness class such as Zumba, Belly Dancing or a motivational talk - which is particularly useful for those looking to make a real life change.

Bedtime is at 9pm and all the house lights are turned off at this point. Extreme? Again, perhaps. But again that's what you are here for, to relax, lose weight and rejuvenate the mind, body and soul. The first couple of nights are restless but soon you find yourself so physically tired that you naturally want to go to sleep anyway just to recover! If not there is WiFi, although bear in mind it isn't the strongest being in a remote area, and phones are allowed in private areas so you can always catch up on that if you feel you must. Afternoon napping is not encouraged at all and any sign that you are finding the activity too easy, Galia will up the pace and push you harder.

Each room varies considerably and has been furnished by Galia herself. The fusion of the English country house features such as heavy wooden floors, wardrobes and suits of armour with more modern bright colours is appealing.

Final weigh in can seem daunting, but with new bonds formed it's almost like a show with everyone encouraging and being supportive of each person's inevitable loss which can be anything from 4lbs to an incredible 11lbs. I lost 9 and a half lbs, and certainly did feel lighter although I think you have to be reasonably realistic when you get home and try to implement healthy eating to maintain the loss, after all it's a detox and a kick start - not a way of life.