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# SLIMFIT

We've all heard how detox spas can provide fast slimming results and are beloved of celebrities for that reason, but what really goes on at these mysterious places? **Charlie Bond** heads to **Slimmeria** in East Sussex to get the skinny...

'**START YOUR PREPARATION** a week before your retreat by cutting out caffeine slowly (coffee, tea, including fruit teas, fizzy drinks). Try to cut down on dairy, wheat, gluten, sugar and red meats as well as alcohol and junk food. Drink plenty of water.'

This sentence on the Slimmeria welcome letter alone is enough to make me question my sanity. Not only am I agreeing to give up all of my favourite sins for a week, I'm also booked in for a weekend detox spa retreat, where I've heard there'll be a lot of exercising and not very much food. I think I need a glass of wine to steady my nerves, except fresh air will have to do...

Slimmeria, a 'detox spa' in Crowhurst, near Hastings was started in 2010 by Russian-born Galia Grainger, who, after being overweight and slimming down herself, decided to start a programme where others could follow in her footsteps. Since then, she's seen a steady stream of would-be slimmers come through the doors, including celebrities such as Gail Porter and the cast of *Made in Chelsea*. Offered everything from weekend detox packages to month-long

stints, the guests who book in are after one thing: results. While I'm doubtful that I'll shed a stone in a weekend, I'm hoping a couple of days of fitness training and healthy food will encourage me to stop convincing myself that wine is one of my five a day.

Detoxing at home is much harder than I anticipate. I want to cry into my asparagus when my partner indulges in pizza and beer right in front of my eyes, but I try to pretend my daily cup of Ultracleanse Matcha (Bloom Tea, £16.99) is a match for his lager. However, the special tea and calorie deficit must be working, because when I weigh myself before heading off to Slimmeria, I've lost a couple of pounds. And I only cheated once. Or maybe twice.

As I pull into the sweeping driveway and lug my bags up to the shiny red door of the Georgian mansion, I wonder whether I've found the right place. With a vineyard and a swimming pool to the right and woodland to the left, I feel like I've stumbled upon a lavish country spa rather than a bootcamp. I knock on the door and am led into a hallway, complete with a suit of armour, while I wait

for someone to come and meet me.

Slimmeria team member Ann comes to greet me and shows me up to my room; the 'green room' overlooking the vineyard. Although some rooms are shared and have communal bathrooms, I'm fortunate enough to have a room to myself and an en suite bathroom. So far, so swish hotel.

Unlike a swish hotel, however, rather than being left to collapse on my bed and read a book, I'm herded back downstairs to fill out some forms about my medical background and to be weighed. Ann records my entry weight in stone and kilograms and tells me I'll be weighed again when I leave on Sunday. Then she goes through some of the 'house rules' with me (lights out at 9pm, no mobile phones outside of the bedroom) and shows me the board where each day's itinerary is written up. While I'm usually on my first glass of Merlot by 7pm on a Friday, I note that this evening I'll be taking part in a belly dancing class instead.

Next, I'm led into the white room – a sunny space with white leather sofas and loungers where guests go to chill out. Five or six fellow slimmers are chatting and Ann leaves me in their company.

"You've only just got here, sorry for our moaning," one girl says to me apologetically as I listen to the group discussing their experiences. "It's just that we've been here all week so we're ready to go home now!"

At 6.30pm sharp a loud bell tolls from the hallway, signifying that it's time for dinner.



I find a place at one of the dining tables and begin to tuck into the meal in front of me, which is a base of chopped courgettes with a tomato, pepper and coriander topping. While I quite enjoy the meal, others are struggling to eat it.

"Everything tastes the same to me now," explains someone who's already been here a few days, pushing their plate away.

After dinner, a mug of lemon water and a hilarious hour belly dancing in the gym, we sit chatting in the white room before heading up to bed at 9pm. It's barely dark outside but most of the group are pretty weary and after a busy week at work, I'm ready for an early night too.

Before the bell has even rung on Saturday morning I'm awoken by a crashing headache. I have been warned that this may happen as a side effect of having kicked caffeine, but as I haven't had a cup of tea in over a week I'm surprised by this unwelcome pain. At 7.15am the bell sounds, alerting us to the fact that we need to be downstairs and ready for our morning walk by 7.45am.

For many of the guests, this is their last morning, which means one thing – weigh-in day. There are mixed emotions as each person returns from the scales. Some have lost a stone but feel disappointed, while others are satisfied with a 7lb loss. Slimmeria claims the average weight loss for a seven-day stay is 12lbs, but this can vary depending on how much the guest needs to lose when they arrive.

Our first activity of the day is an eight-mile walk through the Sussex countryside to the nearby town of Battle. To prepare us, we're



The green room where Charlie stayed

each given a slice of apple for energy and told that if our blood sugar crashes while we're out we can ask for two 'magic raisins', which will give us a boost.

The three-hour walk takes us through fields and woodland. Although the steep inclines are quite tough, it's not as hard-going as I anticipated. We walk at a steady, but fairly leisurely pace, which gives me the chance to chat to other guests about their reasons for staying at Slimmeria.

"This is my second time – I started a new job and put on some weight so I came here because it was cheaper than a week in Marrakech," one woman tells me.



The vineyard view from Charlie's room

Another guest, who is already very slim, also reveals it's her second visit. "I've put on about 8lb recently," she says. "This is the quickest way to lose it."

As we walk, our conversations turn to food. The guests who are leaving today are already planning what they'll eat when they get home and those of us who are staying listen in envy as our stomachs rumble. I find once I've started thinking about food, I can't stop. The muddy ground starts to remind me of chocolate and I'm eagerly anticipating breakfast when we arrive back at the retreat.

Maybe I shouldn't have been quite so enthusiastic – breakfast is a glass of grapefruit juice. Straight after, the bell rings and we're back in the gym for an exercise class. I've heard rumours that it's going to be quite intense, but luckily our instructor takes pity on us and gives a stretching and breathing session instead. On weekdays, the group follow their walk and breakfast with a cardio class, then yoga, but as it's a Saturday we've done a longer walk with just one class.

Once we've stretched out our tired limbs, it's lunchtime. This is a salad of shredded







The 'dungeon' spa room

vegetables, beetroot and dill, but despite being hungry I find it a struggle to eat it. My head is still pounding and I feel sick but I know that I'm not going to be getting much else today, so I try to force down as much as I can.

The afternoons at Slimmeria are 'free' time, where guests can go for further walks, book personal training sessions or indulge in some spa treatments. Naturally, I've chosen the latter and I find myself easily whiling away two hours with a full body massage and facial, which are so relaxing I think I actually fall asleep for a while. Treatments take place in a room below the house, affectionately nicknamed the 'dungeon'. On busy days, multiple guests can be down there divided by screens, but luckily I have the room to myself so I can enjoy an uninterrupted session. Once it's over, I don't stay relaxed for long. Guilt starts to creep in, so after a snack of fruit I find myself back in my workout gear and heading for a three-mile stroll around the vineyard outside. The fresh air helps my headache to subside slightly and I feel a little less guilty for my afternoon of opulence.

With most of the group now gone, there are only four of us for tonight's dinner of vegetable soup. Discussions turn to tomorrow's weigh-in. One woman, who has



Charlie tries her hand at bellydancing

travelled from Yorkshire to come to the retreat, admits she's hoping to lose a stone and the others are looking for similar results.

We don't have to wait long to find out what we've lost. Before 8am on Sunday we're stepping on the scales to discover what we've shed. Of the two guests staying on, one loses a stone and the other 12lbs, which they're both pleased with. The guest from Yorkshire is a little disheartened by her 7lb loss, although she has lost four inches off her waist and two off her chest. "I'm disappointed because I took part in everything; all the walks and classes, even with awful blisters," she tells me. I try and reassure her by telling her that she will have built up muscle and have toned up over the week.

Then, it's my turn. As I've been at Slimmeria for less than 48 hours I'm not expecting much, but I'm surprised to

discover I've lost 1.5lbs since Friday evening – not too bad considering I spent a considerable chunk of my Saturday lying still and covered in essential oils.

After bidding my farewells and spending my drive back convincing myself I'll just have fruit when I get home, perhaps for the rest of my life, I do rebel and find myself in Nandos. Yes, I've probably just regained any weight I lost, but having endured a week of lettuce, chicken has never tasted so good.

Would I return to Slimmeria? Probably, but for a longer stint. When you're just doing a weekend visit, a lot of the detox process rests on you having willpower before you arrive. Most of the guests I met had done at least seven days at the retreat and were seeing great results, plus they benefited from nutritional talks and beach walks during their stay, so I think for maximum impact a week would be more beneficial. I can definitely see the appeal if you've got an occasion to slim for, such as a wedding, and you need to shift the weight fast. Whether this is a long-term solution or a quick fix remains to be seen, but since my visit I've definitely found I'm eating smaller portions and am being more considered in my food choices. So something has certainly shifted, even if it isn't necessarily all my extra weight...

**Weekend detox spa retreat breaks start from £595 per person.**

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