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SLIM PICKINGS

After a winter of sloth and gluttony, Jenny Mark-Bell visited Slimmeria, a detox and weight loss retreat near Battle where guests enjoy a raw vegan diet and huge amounts of exercise. Would she survive a weekend without cheese?



ALTHOUGH my Friday evenings are rather more civilised than they once were, they usually involve a glass or two of wine and a more self-indulgent meal than usual. So it was with some apprehension that I sat down for dinner at Slimmeria, a weight loss and detox retreat in a beautiful manor house in Crowhurst, near Battle. Out it came...a single cabbage leaf, filled with shredded and lightly steamed vegetables. The other guests (who had been here five days already) went into rhapsodies. I finished it in three mouthfuls, noticing that they were talking a lot more time about it. "You won't be eating again until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning," said one, warningly.

Slimmeria is the brainchild of the charming and eccentric Galia Grainger, a Russian-born health evangelist who espouses a raw vegan diet

and Olympic levels of exercise. Noting the good health of her grandmother, who fasted regularly for religious reasons and lived to be 107, Galia says that while she believes in the efficacy of a water-only fast, hers is more sustainable. "The intention is to shock the metabolism. It's not just to do with weight loss but also to do with cleansing and achieving an alkaline diet." Hence, alcohol, caffeine and carbohydrates are forbidden – although you might get a few grains of quinoa or buckwheat some days as a special treat. Bedtime is a stringent 9pm and the wake-up call comes at 7.15. It is worth saying that, while all the guests moan about being hungry for quite a lot of the time, several are return visitors – on my visit these included a bride slimming for her wedding dress and a model preparing for London Fashion Week. As I arrived on a Friday night the



Galia Grainger

retreat was abuzz with the fact that a male guest had just left having shed 19 pounds in five days.

Rising with rumbling tummy on Saturday morning, I was welcomed downstairs with a quarter of an apple and a cup of hot water and lemon. Again, the increased rations seemed to be something of a weekend indulgence – apparently the apple is usually just a thin slice.

Soon afterwards we set off on a seven-mile return walk to Battle – rich in symbolism, as it's the final walk of the week-long retreat for most guests, taking in beautiful countryside and historical significance. Actually I found this fun and invigorating – but as Galia said, my friend and I had “fresh legs” and at least the memory of a more normal calories intake. It was a challenge for the others – some of them were weepy with hunger and exhaustion. For me, the real shocker was the circuits class that followed the glass of fresh juice that comprised breakfast. Despite the warm and encouraging teacher, I did feel my energy levels slump and at one point felt I could hardly lift a weight.

If all this sounds depressing, it wasn't. There was a lovely camaraderie between the guests that probably comes from shared privation. A long massage helped me to recover from my exertions and the four-poster bed was very comfortable; belly-dancing class on Friday evening was great fun; and the raw food is actually rather delicious – there's just not much of it. The weigh-in on Sunday was accompanied by much excited exclamations,



Lunch

everyone was happy with what they had lost (it varied from three to 12 pounds) and the repeat visitors insisted the weight would stay off.

Most of all, Galia's clear belief in what she's doing (she lost four stone on the diet herself, so she's not afraid to practise what she preaches), and her drive to share it with others, is infectious. While for some it is a regular appointment, for others an effective kick-start to a change in eating habits and a healthier way of life, I couldn't stick to such a stringent regime for long. I went home and ate a lot of mashed potato. ♦

A weekend detox spa retreat is from £535, inclusive of two and a half hours of spa treatments. A seven-day Ultimate Weight Loss, Detox & Fitness Retreat is from £935. Slimmeria, Hye House, Crowhurst 01424 830153; www.slimmeria.com