

My new routine

Elise Britten shares her diary and pictures as she gives a health retreat in Ilfracombe a go for a week...

SUNDAY 3.30pm: I'm on my way to Slimmeria Health Retreat in Ilfracombe and feeling more than a little nervous.

Now there is nothing to distract me from stressing about what I'm letting myself in for. The forecast is solid rain all week, so seaside sunbathing is out of the picture.

My head fills with images of screaming army officers and school camp bunk beds.

6pm: Walking in I see three men and two other women, ranging from 33 to 70, sitting around the table engaged in lively conversation.

I meet Galia Grainger, who owns and runs the Devon retreat and she is all smiles and encouragement. I feel myself letting go of the breath I'd been holding and my shoulders start to relax.

I've come at the right time – we are just having dinner. It's a modest amount of cooked vegetables with a dollop of rice. It's quite flavoursome and I think, 'This isn't so bad'.

Then I see my vast suite, including a huge claw-foot bath in the ensuite.

Relaxing back on the comfy bed, I begin to appreciate the true luxury of a whole week where I don't have to think about anything else but my health.

Monday 8.30am: What on earth was I thinking? We're on our first two-hour morning walk and on a single slice of apple I'm just so weak even the slightest of inclines seems impassable.

"How are you feeling," Galia asks us all.

"Ask me after 11, I'm not a morning person," I stress.

Stumbling back into the house, we have half-an-hour before our circuit training class and only a glass of carrot juice to get us through.

The taste, texture and temperature repel me. I gag and cannot help pulling faces, before collapsing into delirious giggles.

It's going to be a hell of a long week.

Tuesday 9am: The morning is almost as miserable as I am and we're out on a tough walk today. Wind howls in as we push along the clifftop path, getting hit by the waves of rain.

We do our best to focus on disjointed conversation, encouraging each other on. But we also talk a lot about the food we wish we were eating most.

2pm: After our exercise classes, a group of us decide to drive to nearby Woolacombe together, but we soon find the weather is even more evil here.

Heads bent against the wind, we struggle along the beach – our destination obscured by mist and rain.

But I came determined to swim in what we have been told is the most glorious beach in the area.

Watching the waves crashing in rapid cascades under a grey sky, I feel it doesn't quite match the postcard.

Gritting my teeth, I will myself into the waves, but it only takes a few moments to be glad I did.

The water is a beautiful temperature and in it I don't feel cold at all. Instead of a burden, the wind becomes a key ele-



Hiking was a daily activity at the Slimmeria Health Retreat in the Devon town of Ilfracombe, but there was always the stunning lounge to relax in later

FACTFILE

- » Slimmeria Devon in Ilfracombe has now closed and will reopen in April
- » The East Sussex Slimmeria is open all year round
- » Prices depend on length of stay and room choice
- » Visit slimmeria.com for details

from the water to make our 9pm curfew. But I am completely refreshed and I realise I am beginning to really enjoy my retreat.

It strikes me as I walk back past the many restaurants and takeaways in town that I feel little pull or desire. The sea air has satisfied me.

Thursday 7am: I wake feeling much better and like I might actually be losing weight. And more to the point my spirit no longer feels heavy.

8.15pm: I don't seem to be able to keep out of the water. I really hadn't planned to swim again this evening. Floating on my back, the clouds part for a moment – taking a break from hammering us with rain. I am rewarded with a sky full of stars shining down on me.

When you first come you do not believe you will get used to it. But here I am with more energy than ever.

Friday 8.30am: This morning I feel so well, I could almost believe I'm a morning person.

The rain is torrential as we set off on our morning walk, but I don't care a jot.

My feet swim in my boots as we push on and chat in depth about all manner of topics. I don't think the treats we want to eat comes up once.

Saturday 7.30am: As I lie in bed this morning, I'm surprisingly anxious about my weigh-in soon to follow.

It takes me a while to really appreciate my weight loss of 13½lb. I also lost 2½in off my waist, and 1½in from my chest and hips.

Throughout the week I had begun to hope for a miracle – but then I realise losing essentially a stone kind of is a marvel.

My typical Slimmeria day

- 7.30am** bell rung
- 8am** lemon tonic and thin slice of apple
- 8.15am** morning briefing
- 8.30am** two-hour group hike
- 10.30am** glass of carrot or grapefruit juice
- 11am** exercise class
- 12pm** yoga, pilates or stretch class
- 1pm** raw vegetable lunch
- Independent walk/swimming
- 3pm** a few slices of fruit
- Afternoon or evening class, such as dancing
- 6.30pm** cooked vegetable dinner with perhaps a little rice or quinoa
- Evening walk/ swimming
- 9pm** curfew

My weight loss: 13.5lb