

**Client:** Borgo Egnazia  
**Source:** Balance  
**Date:** April 2017



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 *Travel*

**DESTINATION:**  
PUGLIA, ITALY

# The pull of PUGLIA

*Can southern Italy's ancient land of Puglia help to restore vitality to someone who has lost their mojo? Leanne Bracey finds out*

**P**uglia, the stretch of Italy that reaches into the heel of its famous boot and runs alongside the Adriatic Sea, is mostly flat land where gnarled and rugged olive trees hold the mystery of several centuries in their roots.

I'm not only here to visit the magical Borgo Egnazia hotel, but to deal with my lazy and listless lifestyle. For years, I've been unable to commit to an

exercise regime because of my unpredictable job. But now, in the midst of a work hiatus, I can finally admit that it's not about lack of time. And so, here I am, having signed up to 'Fure', a three or six-day programme aimed at helping people like me discover vitality and fall back in love with moving their bodies.

In the glorious Puglian landscape, it's easy to find motivation and the hotel itself has an instant calming



**The Greeks first founded settlements along the Ionian coast in the 8th century BC.**

**HOW TO BOOK**



Healing Holidays (020 7843 3597; [healingholidays.co.uk](http://healingholidays.co.uk)) offer a four-night Fure programme at Borgo Egnazia from £1,159 per person, based on two people sharing ([borgoegnazia.com](http://borgoegnazia.com)). Includes flights, transfers, accommodation, breakfast and inclusions from the Fure sport and spa programme.

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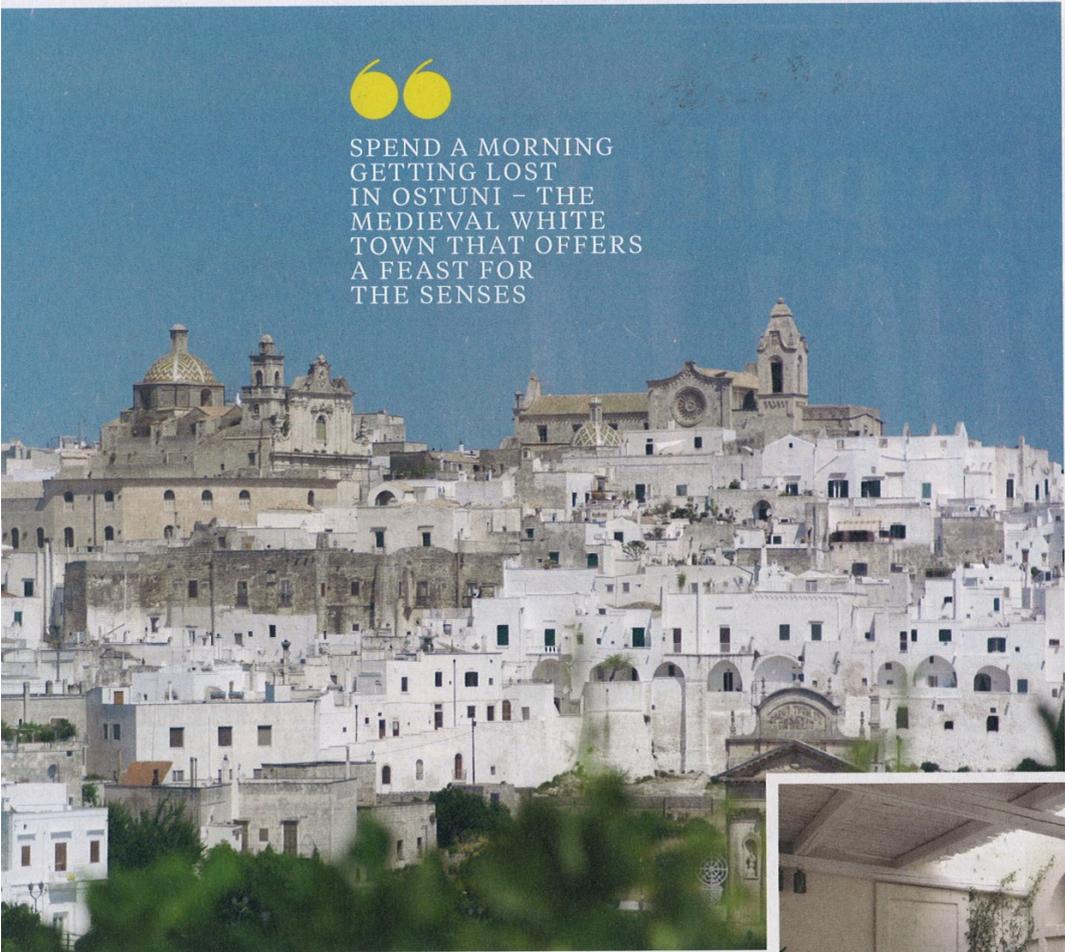
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**MED TIME**

SPEND A MORNING  
 GETTING LOST  
 IN OSTUNI – THE  
 MEDIEVAL WHITE  
 TOWN THAT OFFERS  
 A FEAST FOR  
 THE SENSES



effect – it seems a special vortex of energy is present. Everything feels like a dream – it's a place where you only want to whisper.

The hotel's Vair Spa is a space where people come to put preventative measures in place when stress is on the horizon. Or if you find it's already taken its grip, you can do some deep inner work with one of the more intense programmes.

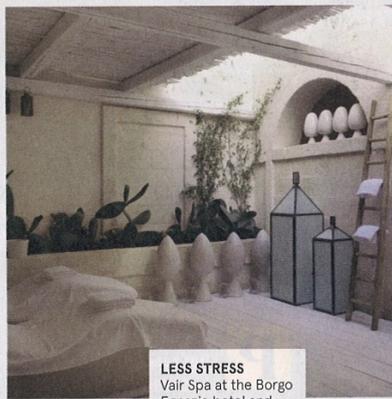
After an initial consultation, the spa's creator, Patricia Bortolin, tells me that she feels I've 'lost the ability to play and to see body movement as enjoyment, rather than a chore' – and she's right.

I want to learn how to utilise the healing effects of nature and mindfulness of movement to rediscover the love of exercise I had when I was young.

**MINDFUL ACTIVITY**

The first session is with personal trainer, Cosimo. We take a walk in the grounds. Usually I'd walk with headphones and music blaring, but Cosimo encourages me to listen to the birdsong, enjoy the peach blossom, smell the sweet rosemary and pay attention to the textures beneath my feet. I notice the slight pull in my right foot still present from an injury, the tightness of my calf muscles, the tingle in my cheeks.

Later, I learn from Stefano Battaglia, Vair's resident ortho-bionomist (the practice of using gentle movements and positioning to heal the body), that I need to stop feeding the 'noise' in my mind. The neocortex area of our brains, where we all spend too much time, fuels the stress



**LESS STRESS**  
 Vair Spa at the Borgo Egnazia hotel and, below, the hotel's castle-like frontage



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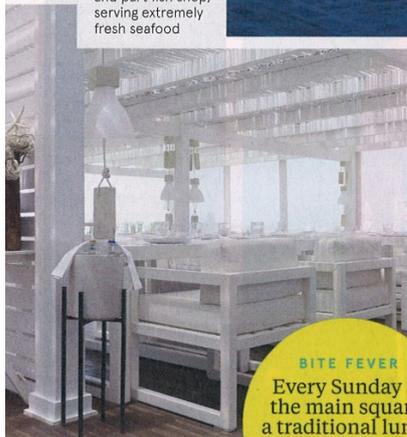
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**SUN THERAPY**  
 Clockwise: Puglia lemons; a heated outdoor pool; Cala Masciola's Pescheria Da Vito, part restaurant and part fish shop, serving extremely fresh seafood



**BITE FEVER**  
 Every Sunday in the main square, a traditional lunch is held – a nod to Italian family traditions.

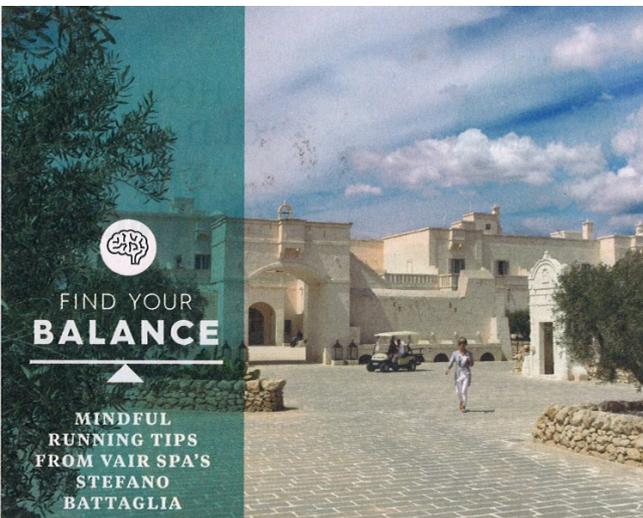
hormones – and mindful exercise is a way to counter this.

Playfulness is encouraged in the 'Fure' programme whether in the form of table tennis or juggling, but my inner child is most awakened by a dance, song and music session. It's an hour fusing movement with Pizzica, an Italian folk dance still common across Puglia. Teacher Giuseppe led me in with a tambourine beat, and soon I found myself following his moves, copying his breathing and singing my heart out.

The Iyengar yoga instructor was the most graceful teacher I've ever come across and, with his sensitive guidance, this is when I truly connected to every aspect of my body. My poor legs have spent many years supporting me with total neglect in return.

Most of the physical movement is done in the morning, leaving time for an afternoon

PHOTOGRAPHY: LEANNE BRACEY, ENRIQUE MENOSSI, GETTY IMAGES



**FIND YOUR BALANCE**

**MINDFUL RUNNING TIPS FROM VAIR SPA'S STEFANO BATTAGLIA**

Mindful running is an accessible way to meditate and blend introspection with activity. Here's how:

- 1 Start with a gentle stretch. Walk before moving to a slow jog. Connect with your internal experience.
- 2 Feel the breath at all times. Look at the threshold between your inner self and outer awareness.
- 3 Scan your body from top to bottom. Notice how it feels. When you're more in touch with your body, you're less likely to feel fatigued.
- 4 Remember it's about the moment you're in, so be aware of the sounds, smells and noises around you. Your mind can wander but aim to go back to your senses.
- 5 Feel how your feet touch the ground. Feel your body weight. Focus on specific parts of your body, like the hamstrings or the hips.
- 6 Once you reach the apex of the run, slow down and notice your heart rate and breathing. Remember, the more in touch you are with what's inside, the stronger you are.

of relaxation. The water treatment in the Roman Thermal baths is a particular treat, involving a journey through the different heat stages before a sea salt and olive oil scrub is applied. Beauty rituals, such as an emotive face massage, are influenced by the history of Apulian women with layer upon layer of angelic hand movements using natural scents of lemon and rosemary water, set against a soundscape of traditional music that is said to work in conjunction with our brainwaves.

**DEVOUR THE DAYS**

After an intensive time reconnecting with my body, I take a walk out to the Borgo with my camera to observe the play of shadow in the afternoon light, a mindful act in itself. There's so much to do here, from olive oil-making to cooking with a local. Getting out of your head and stuck into an activity is a form of meditation. A simple visit to Alberobello to witness the cone-roof houses known as 'Trulli' or a morning spent in Ostuni, the medieval 'White Town', offers a feast for the senses.

Even my hotel room is out of this world, a multi-sensory haven, with almond oil scent in the bathroom, subtle lighting, comforting throws and the sound of running water from the balcony.

At a certain point in the day from the arch of the main entrance, the sun and moon can be seen together and on the night of my departure, it's a full moon. An auspicious moment? If I can hold on to just a small part of Puglia, I'll put on my walking shoes, take to the UK seaford and leave my headphones at home. 6

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