

Client: Borgo Egnazia
Source: Marylebone & Fitzrovia
Date: January 2017

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Shine on

Vintage sunglasses from
Cutler and Gross to put
other frames in the shade

Wide blue yonder

Inspirational bird's-eye views of
the wilderness and high seas

Great ESCAPES

Remembering the golden
age of travel and the legacy
of the Orient Express

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PUGLIAN paradise

Rather than jumping on the detoxing bandwagon with a high-octane fitness regime, **Jennifer Mason** eases into the new year and refreshes body and mind with a visit to Puglia's Borgo Egnazia



On the outskirts of the small town of Fasano in Puglia is a luxury hotel that has been designed specifically to blend in with the surrounding countryside.

Built as a traditional village or borgo, you'll find rooms, two-storey suites and larger villas hidden within the whitewashed enclave. A cross between a charming Puglian hamlet and a Hollywood movie set, Borgo Egnazia is full of surprises at every turn.

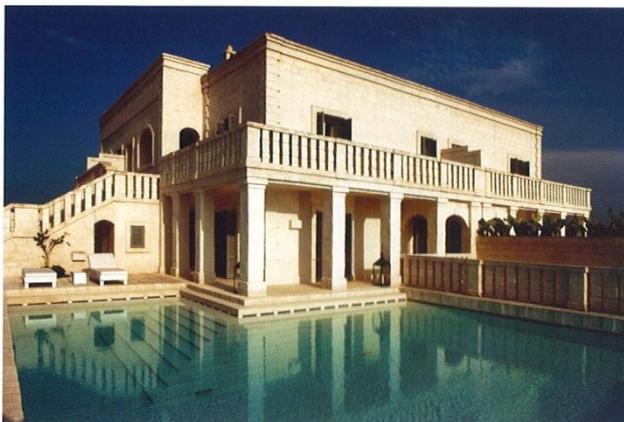
Arriving after dark is a truly magical experience. Strolling through the corridors whose alcoves are dimly lit by hundreds of candles, we eventually find our way out of the hotel building (where there's a selection of rooms that offer more traditional accommodation) and wander through the stone arch, which marks the entrance to the borgo. Paved streets and narrow alleyways

flanked by whitewashed stone buildings in the traditional Puglian style lead out onto a truly mesmerising sight: the village square, lit by hundreds of flickering lanterns. It's not hard to see why Justin Timberlake and Jessica Biel chose this as the place to host their wedding.

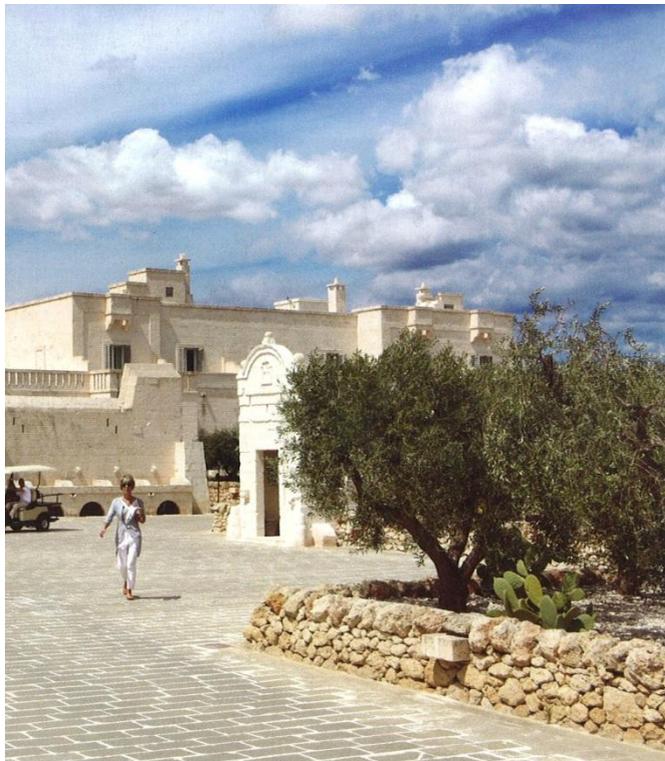
Still mentally planning my own nuptials (hey, a girl can dream), I receive the key to my very own townhouse. Decorated inside and out with the accoutrements of a sustainable, eco-conscious neighbourhood (think wheat sheaves and wellies) I pause in my exploration on my Juliet balcony. When the sun rises, I'm certainly not disappointed by the terrace garden, or the panoramic views from the private roof terrace.

I've come to Borgo Egnazia to experience its famous Vair Spa, but the rest of the hotel deserves a mention too. In the daytime, the walls sparkle bright white in the sunshine. Delicious aromas linger in the air; the food will have you happily returning for seconds (and thirds), and while it's easy to get lost in the twisting corridors, you won't mind a bit. In fact, the hotel's architect, Pino Brescia, designed it deliberately to combat the modern preoccupation with shuttling from one destination to another without appreciating the journey. The longer I spend here, the more I yearn to lie down and let life wash over me for a while. Thankfully, quiet nooks and crannies in which to curl up and read, or simply relax, are in plentiful supply.

If it's complete 'can't move a muscle' relaxation you're searching for, though, then a visit to the



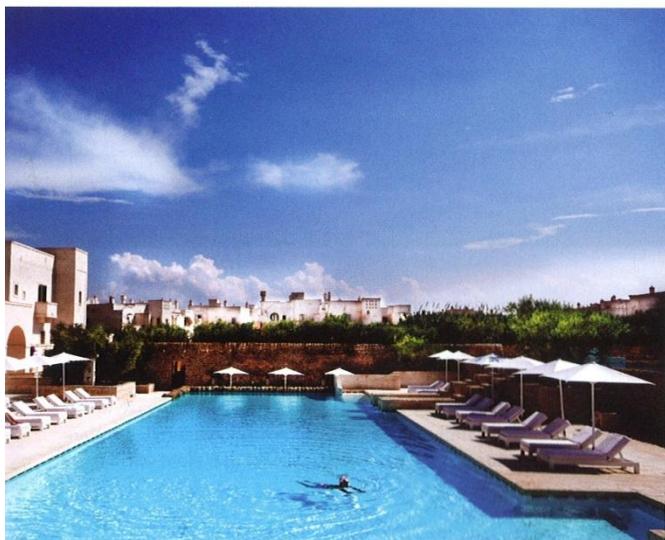
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Vair Spa is a must. Forget your typical spa menu of massages and facials; at Vair the experience is tailored to suit both your physical and psychological needs.

I've been recommended the spa's three-day Tarant Programme. Described as a 'vital revolution to retrieve instinct and truthfulness', this women-only treatment includes experiences such as the psycho-aroma therapy (which uses your sense of smell to reveal your body's subconscious cries for help).

Following a conversation with spa director Patrizia Bortolin, I experience a variety of



TRAVEL

treatments (including the Abbel Bel facial that has me in a blissful state almost immediately). But if there's one particular experience that has me both intrigued and slightly apprehensive, it's the avemmari session with the spa's resident shaman, Stefano Battaglia. Through his deep intuition and knowledge of ancient techniques, Stefano begins the session by quizzing me on my lifestyle and what I want to change or rediscover about myself.

After our initial conversation, Stefano uses various techniques to connect physically with my inner psyche. Through a series of pressure points and holds I feel key points of tension being unlocked (from areas such as my stomach, where I didn't even realise I was holding my stress) and even find myself in a trance-like state when Stefano moves to support and realign my neck.

The longer I spend here, the more I yearn to lie down and let life wash over me for a while

Once I'm back in the land of the conscious (just about), we discuss how I feel and Stefano offers some valuable advice on how I can recapture this feeling every day. Thankfully, his tips include a large glass of wine (Italian, of course!) so I know it's advice I can happily follow.

After three days of pure escapism, it's time to return to the real world. I don't think I've ever been more reluctant to leave a place – and it's not just because of the beauty of the surroundings, or the plushness of the spa. There's a deep sense of peace here that has made it remarkably easy to embrace the wellness teachings. Back in London, it's a feeling I hold on to: the sensation of sun on my face, the scent of lemon groves, which I use as a mental talisman to ward off the overwhelming chaos of life in the big city. ■

NEED TO KNOW

Borgo Egnazia has rooms from €220 a night, based on two adults sharing on a B&B basis. The Tarant Programme at the Vair Spa costs €1,250, excluding accommodation. For further information and bookings, visit borgoegnazia.com