



THE GREAT ESCAPE

TIME OUT FOR THE FRAZZLED

Many people have a special place where they feel energised, inspired and truly themselves – a ‘happy place’ where they can find inner calm in an increasingly frantic world. And whether you’re a fan of the mountains or the countryside, a beach lover or wild at heart, somewhere there’s an escape to balance your mind and soothe your soul...

THE WILDERNESS

Nothing reconnects a person to who they are like the wilderness. Raw beauty and timeless landscapes bring perspective and strip bare, helping you to face not only the harsh realities of life, but of your very core.

Isolation, silence, strength, resolve – all that’s been lost waits to be rediscovered in the wildest places.

Time spent with some of the world’s iconic creatures is grounding and humbling, too. Animals like the mighty rhino, for instance, have roamed the Earth for millions of years under an eternity of stars – a reminder to embrace the time you have by loving the life you live.



WHERE TO STAY

Saruni Rhino Camp and Saruni Samburu Lodge, Kenya

'The things you own, end up owning you,' someone wise said once. Throwing down a holdall at Saruni Rhino Camp in the remote Samburu region of northern Kenya, I'm relieved to have left so much 'stuff' behind, freeing me to work on clearing the clutter crashing noisily around my head. You can't escape from yourself, no matter how far – or fast – you run.

Today, my immediate thoughts focus on how to escape a black rhino, should one decide to charge during my tracking experience in Samburu's Sera Conservancy. Here, 11 of the world's most endangered species are closely guarded by an 80-strong team of rangers, the brave men and women who form the thin green line between Africa's wildlife and the poachers that feed Asia's insatiable lust for ivory and horns.

A stay at the camp and the rhino-tracking fees help to fund the conservancy, providing revenue and jobs for the local community and vital protection for the rhinos.

Lying lazily on the sun-drenched banks of a dry river bed, shaded by towering doum palms, secluded Saruni Rhino has just two guest bandas (traditional African stone and thatched cottages), each with three walls, leaving one side open by day or cloaked by billowy drapes by night, as guests fall asleep to a symphony of sounds from the bush.

A few steps away is a simple bathroom with hot water and a friendly lizard or two, and outside are dreamy day beds and a water hole where elephants join us for sundowner drinks.

A few hours away, the spacious suites of sister Saruni Samburu Lodge spread out along a vertiginous ridge. The African heat is tempered with a dip in one of the lodge's two pools and a simple spa offers breathtaking views across the plains and traditionally inspired treatments to soothe trek-tired muscles.

When I finally find myself on foot, face-to-face with a magnificent, one-tonne black rhino, it doesn't charge. Instead, it watches me for a moment before disappearing behind a tangled acacia, as its species has done for millennia. Something within me follows: the crashing stops and all is calm.

Saruni offers a five-day all-inclusive stay at Saruni Rhino Camp and Saruni Samburu Lodge from £2,415 per person sharing, including conservation and rhino-tracking fees, plus a neck and back massage. saruni.com



PHOTOS: (BOTTOM AND CENTRE) STEVIE MANN

THE MOUNTAINS

There's a lot to be said for living closer to heaven with your head in the clouds. With generally fresher and cleaner air, life at altitude is good for the body, while being surrounded by nature nourishes the soul.

WHERE TO STAY

Park Igls, Austria

Just 90 minutes from Salzburg, close to the mountain town of Innsbruck, lies a sanctuary of calm and wellbeing, offering the opportunity to truly focus on restoring balance to both body and mind.

More of a clinic than a hotel, Park Igls follows the philosophy of Austrian doctor and scientist, Franz Xaver Mayr, and advocates that the journey towards true health begins with the gut. Second only to the brain in terms of nerve endings, the gut is affected by imbalances of the emotional as well as the physical kind. It turns out those 'butterflies in the stomach' you feel when you're anxious or scared are happening for a reason.

I surrender myself to Mayr for a three-day programme that offers a taster of the clinic's longer retreats, and after a 30-minute health consultation and examination from medical director Dr Peter Gartner, receive a personalised plan that covers diet, exercise and treatments.

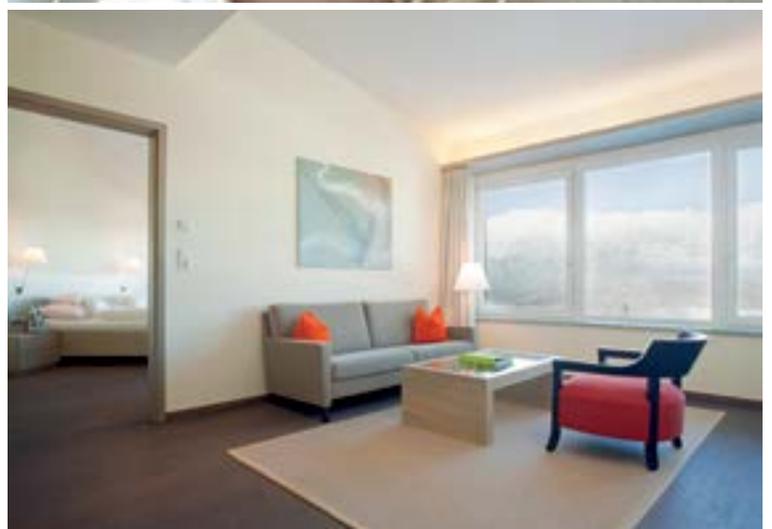
While some are here to chill and recharge, others are seeking help with chronic complaints such as diabetes, allergies and high cholesterol, or in recovery from serious conditions such as cancer. Teaming up with Innsbruck University Hospital, Park Igls offers a range of diagnostic medical tests from ultrasounds, ECGs, CT and MRI scans to hormone screening and urinalysis.

As someone carrying a little, er, 'holiday weight', much of my programme is centred on food – or the lack of it – with carefully planned 'Modern Mayr' meals pre-empted by 'bitter waters' and tinctures to aid digestion, and instructions to chew each mouthful 30 times before swallowing, easing pressure on the gut.

Lectures, life-coaching and daily meditation and yoga in the glass-roofed relaxation room help to free the mind, while the swimming pool, sauna suite and vast gym offer panoramic views of the surrounding mountains, and a lounge and library allow time to read, relax and reflect.

But for me, the real magic happens in the treatment rooms where ice-cold 'Kneipp' leg baths invigorate; reflexology aligns; full-body scrubs energise and two of the best deep-muscle massages I've ever had make mind and body whole again. After a few days, I'm physically and mentally lighter, infinitely more rested and ready to take on the world. Call it a gut feeling, but a little touch of Mayr could be just what we all need.

A one-week Basic Programme at Park Igls costs from £825 per person, with single rooms from £140 per night.



THE COUNTRYSIDE

More green space and cleaner air are just two of the reasons to schedule a trip to the countryside soon. As more time is spent staring at computer screens, taking in a broader horizon is a welcome treat for the eyes, while escaping urban pollution is a gift for the body's heart and lungs. Those attractive views are also a catalyst for action, sparking a desire to get outside in the open and naturally increase levels of physical activity. Take yourself away from the city's heavy, concrete walls and sky-scraping towers and you'll feel your spirits soar.

WHERE TO STAY

Le Mas Candille, France

With its sleepy, labyrinthine villages, dusky, rose-pink sunsets and rolling, vine-clad hills, Provence captures the essence of rural bliss.

A short drive inland from the glitz and glamour of red-carpeted Cannes on the Côte d'Azur, this effortlessly elegant slice of the south of France is a world away from the dazzling superyachts that vie for attention in the Mediterranean marinas of nearby Saint-Tropez and Nice, yet no less seductive.

Secluded discreetly behind a cypress tree-lined wall just beyond the medieval village of Mougins, Le Mas Candille needs no such obvious displays to entice interest, instead choosing to captivate guests with its confidently understated sense of sophistication and style.

Built around a converted 18th-century farmhouse 'Le Mas' offers traditional, pretty French rooms. The hotel also has bright and spacious contemporary suites in 'La Bastide' and 'La Villa Candille' with sweeping views over tranquil gardens, the famed perfume-producing town of Grasse and the Pre-Alps beyond.

With Pablo Picasso a one-time resident of the village, and the fantastic private collection of the Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins just a short stroll away, it's unsurprising that art is also a priority at the hotel, with striking modern pieces rising up from amid the lavender, and standing sentinel over the infinity pool and its casual-dining Mediterranean restaurant, La Pergola.

Head chef David Chauvac creates art of the culinary kind in the Michelin-starred, fine-dining Restaurant Le Candille too, including a six-course Discovery Menu that will rank among the best you've tasted, paired with the region's Provençal wines, all served by smart and refreshingly un-snooty waiters under twinkling skies on the terrace.

Indulging in incredible food, wine and art is a sure way to help any unwinding to begin, but for those who need more intensive TLC, the hotel's fitness area, hydrotherapy pool, sauna, jacuzzis and Japanese-inspired Spa Candille will oblige. New 360 degrees Wellbeing and Ultimate Pamper & Relax programmes deliver private Pilates sessions, reflexology and facials, while ESPA body rituals with wraps, exfoliation and aromatherapy massage are Zen masterpieces all of their own.

At Le Mas Candille, perhaps the greatest art you'll discover is learning to make time for yourself.

Prices start from £839 per person, based on two adults sharing a Classic Room for four nights including daily breakfast, return flights with BA from London Heathrow and private transfers, plus one four-course meal including drinks at Le Candille, and one 60-minute treatment per person at the Spa Candille. inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk/lemascandille.com.



PHOTOS: (BOTTOM) JEAN-JACQUES GIORDAN; (CENTRE) NICOLAS DUBREUIL; (TOP) CHRISTOPHE POZZO DI BORGO

THE BEACH

Who doesn't feel better after spending an hour or two beside the sea? The health benefits of being near the ocean have long been known and as early as the 18th century doctors would send patients to the coast for some rest and recuperation after an illness. Today's science confirms the fact that proximity to the sea improves wellbeing, while looking at 'blue space' lowers levels of stress. Fresh, sea air can also improve sleep as it's charged with healthy, negative ions that help us absorb oxygen. Time to kick off your shoes and head to an island...



WHERE TO STAY

Lady Elliot Island, Australia

Nowhere on Earth beats Australia's Great Barrier Reef when it comes to an ocean escape. Stretching more than 1,600 miles along the Queensland coast, this Unesco World Heritage Site is home to some 900 islands and cays, floating in the pristine waters of the Coral Sea. High-end resorts have staked their claim on some of the islands, with chic spas, yachts and restaurants attracting the jet-set, but while a little luxury can be a wonderful thing, something as monumentally fabulous as the world's largest reef system really needs no adornment. For me, it's best stripped-back and bare.

You don't need jewels: there are bedazzling white beaches and year-round golden sun. You won't need your heels: barefoot you can feel the sand between your toes and cool water soothing your feet. And you won't miss the gym: swim, dive or snorkel and you'll feel stronger and fitter than ever. You can throw away your watch, too – things will happen (or not) on island time.

Lady Elliot Island, an Eco Resort at the southernmost end of the reef, understands that the natural wonders are the stars of this show. Here, it's all about the ocean and the incredible creatures that live on the reef.

A nesting site for turtles and seabirds, the coral cay lies within the protected Greater Barrier Reef Marine Park, and its pristine waters are teeming with life. Offering a safari with a difference, guests can test their metal as a hunter of the 'Big 8' – whale, shark, turtle, manta ray, giant clam, Maori wrasse, potato cod and, of course, Nemo, the anemone fish – diving around the island, following the snorkelling trails, or cruising on the glass-bottomed boat.

Unpretentious and easy, the resort offers comfy accommodation in a range of cabins and suites, and tasty, buffet-style meals in an open and breezy beach-view restaurant and bar. The staff, comprising young, passionate marine biologists, friendly and patient dive masters, and knowledgeable reef experts, have arguably the world's best office, and it shows.

Ditch the make-up, don't worry about your hair, snorkel with turtles until your skin crinkles and drink wine as the sun sets beyond a breaching whale. The rest of the world can wait.

Eco Cabins on Lady Elliot Island start from £107 per person per night, sharing a twin room, including breakfast and dinner. ladyelliott.com.au.

Words: Lauren Jarvis

Lauren is a travel writer, editor and photographer with a special interest in wellness, wildlife and adventure.



PHOTOS (THIS PAGE): JEREMY SOMMERVILLE. OPPOSITE: JEMMA CRAIG