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LIFE LESSONS

*Germany's Ayurveda
Parkschlösschen is on
a mission to re-energise
and rejuvenate*

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Life

SCIENCE

Germany's Ayurveda Parkschlösschen offers an authentic Ayurveda experience focused on setting guests on the path to a healthier lifestyle

WORDS NORA ELIAS

One thing that immediately strikes you about Ayurveda Parkschlösschen is the attention to detail. This is evident from the very beginning, in the comprehensive pre-arrival consultation form and the schedule for the day ahead that awaits you in your room. It continues with the detailed information about the theoretical principles behind and the practical

implications of Ayurveda that is available to read and the tips on the evening activities, which include workshops and cooking classes, in your information pack. Throughout my three-night stay at the five-star resort in Traben-Trarbach in Germany's wine-producing Rhineland,



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there is an obvious commitment to keeping guests informed about what is on offer. At Parkschlösschen, it's not just about experiencing Ayurvedic treatments and cuisine; it's about understanding the concept behind and benefits of it.

This thorough approach is a reflection of the commitment of the management team behind the family-owned resort, which is entirely centred around Ayurveda and where the philosophy permeates every aspect of operations. Established in 1993, Parkschlösschen came into existence after businessman Wolfgang Preuss became inspired by his transformative stay at a now-defunct Ayurveda resort in Germany's Black Forest. “My husband is an entrepreneur, so he's always busy, and at the time he was not living very healthily; drinking a lot of coffee, smoking and not sleeping much,” explains his wife Brigitte Preuss, co-owner and general manager of the resort.



Brigitte (left)
and Carina Preuss

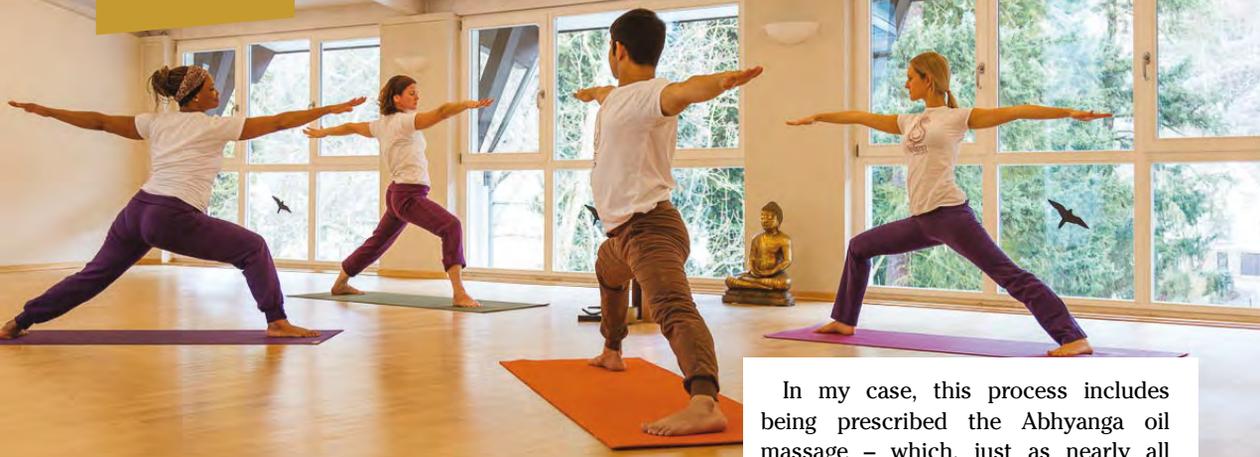
“When he came back after 10 days, he said he couldn't remember feeling that good in 20 years. So he decided he wanted to build something that would allow other people to have the same positive experience he did,” she explains. Today, Brigitte manages the resort on a day-to-day basis, along with the couple's 28-year-old daughter Carina, who grew up with Parkschlösschen and is now its junior general manager. While Parkschlösschen offers a selection of programmes, including an anti-stress programme, a yoga retreat and, as of October, an Ayurveda Lifestyle Coaching Retreat, most guests at the 58-room resort come for the panchakarma cure that is at the heart of both the Ayurveda philosophy and the resort.

All about the cure

The length of stay for a panchakarma cure can vary; with a minimum of 10 days viewed as necessary to experience the full benefits and a two-week stay also being a popular option. Recommended in Ayurveda to do annually, the cure detoxifies the system, cleansing it of toxins and excess waste, and is also said to help relieve stress and restore the balance of mind, body and soul. The programme involves a schedule of Ayurveda massages and other treatments, detox drinks to rid the body of “ama” (waste), enemas and ghee – clarified butter that guests drink for its ability to dissolve fat-soluble toxins. While weight-loss is often a side-effect, this isn't about appearance, it is, as Carina Preuss explains, about “ensuring that our entire system, body and mind, is clean enough and well-functioning enough to keep us full of energy”.

An essential part of the Parkschlösschen take on panchakarma is that the programme is always closely tailored to the needs of the individual. The detox drinks you have, the natural





supplements, if any, you take and the treatments you receive are all prescribed by one of the doctors on staff following a pulse diagnosis on day one. After my pulse consultation – in Ayurvedic medicine it is believed that the pulse provides important answers when it comes to the nature of your constitution, your state of mind and your overall health – Dr Vanita Kansal advises that I have too much vata. The programme for my short “taster” version of the panchakarma cure is consequently designed to reflect this.

According to Ayurvedic medicine, everyone has elements of three key life energies: vata, pitta and kapha, with an inherited predisposition towards one or several of these. Regardless of our individual dosha makeup, these energies need to be balanced and integral to the panchakarma cure is restoring a dosha equilibrium that has become out of sync due to an unhealthy lifestyle. “In the past 20 years, peoples’ lives have become much more stressful, there is more pressure on us all the time,” Kansal explains. “We have lost ourselves a bit and effectively live machine lives. However, the cure helps make you yourself again and bring your doshas back to the harmonious levels they should be at.”

In my case, this process includes being prescribed the Abhyanga oil massage – which, just as nearly all Ayurveda massages, is performed by two therapists; a Nabhi Basti, where a dough ring is placed around the navel and subsequently filled with oil; a Padabhyanga foot massage; a Vishesh deep tissue massage and Shirodhara, during which warm oil is poured over your head. All treatments are designed to relax, harmonise and restore calm and balance to what has been diagnosed as a stressed and overactive mind.

The personal touch

Brigitte Preuss says that while some guests “come after a severe illness”, or following emotional hardships, “such as the loss of a partner,” most arrive at the resort to “regenerate, improve their health and be fit for another year”. While the majority of rooms are double rooms, Brigitte explains that many choose to do panchakarma by themselves. “Many people come on their own, which I think is good, because it’s a very different kind of experience. You might not feel very well, especially for the first few days, and you might be tired and need to rest after your treatments. It’s really time for yourself,” she says.

While the bulk of guests are from Germany and surrounding countries, guests also arrive from the rest of Europe and from further afield, including the US,



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Canada, the Middle East and even India, the home of Ayurveda. Many come back year after year, with Brigitte explaining that, “we have people who have been coming here once a year since we started”. With a relatively limited number of rooms, Parkschlösschen has an intimate, personal feel. You come across the same fellow guests regularly during your stay, and the staff quickly recognise you and remember who you are.

While you are free to explore the scenic landscape around the resort, with bikes provided for this purpose, guests primarily spend their time at the property, taking walks in the picturesque private park, having treatments or simply resting. “Most people stay here at the house, partly because the cure makes you tired, partly because they have their treatments and their schedule and partly because they have all their meals here; they can’t go to a normal restaurant,” says Brigitte. This, she adds, means that “you see the guests all the time, which is nice, because you get to know them. It’s not like in a normal hotel, where people just check in and check out again.”



Food at the forefront

Food is integral both to the Ayurveda philosophy and to Parkschlösschen. Detailed information about how to eat

according to your doshas and other principles of Ayurvedic cuisine features in all rooms, the resort has a teaching kitchen where Ayurveda cooking classes are held and, in 2008, a Parkschlösschen cookbook was published, with recipes by head chef Eckhard Fischer.

All food served at the resort is vegan, with the exception of the occasional use of yogurt. This is not, Brigitte comments, because Ayurveda dictates a vegan or vegetarian diet – it does not – but because “when you’re doing the panchakarma cure, your body does not tolerate animal protein”. However, if you imagine vegan food to be dull and restrictive, you need look no further than the creative and delicious cuisine at Parkschlösschen – some of the best food I’ve had – for that theory to be refuted. Though of course it helps to have a team of talented chefs prepare it for you.

The nutritional aspect will also be key to one of the most recent innovations at the resort, the launch of the Ayurveda Lifestyle Coaching Retreat this October. The brainchild of Carina, a qualified yoga instructor who is passionate about educating the public on the positive impact of an Ayurvedic way of life, it is designed to provide a deeper knowledge of Ayurveda than is possible to dispense in the daily workshops and lectures at the resort.

The Ayurveda lifestyle

Relatively restricted in numbers, the retreat will take between six and nine people and is, Carina explains, “targeting people who work a lot and have very stressful lives. People who need to deliver a lot at work, but who also want energy for themselves – who don’t just want to sit around in their private life.” The concept behind the retreat is to equip participants with practical



and realistic tools that will help them incorporate Ayurveda into their daily lives. “Ayurveda means the science of life, and we want to give them the tools to keep their body and mind functioning optimally,” Carina says.

The retreat will not only include daily yoga and meditation sessions, but also lectures on how to live according to your natural biorhythm and tips on how to work the Ayurveda cleansing routine – which includes scraping your tongue – in to your daily schedule. When it comes to nutrition, the programme will, Carina says, “speak about how to eat according to your body type and constitution, your doshas. We will also teach people how to quickly make fresh and healthy breakfasts, lunches and dinners.”

That the meals are quick to make is, she adds, essential, because “you’re talking about everyday life, so it needs to be something that will fit into your daily working routine.” The first retreat will be in German, but Carina hopes this will only be the first of many, including ones held in English in the future. “We’ll see how it goes, but I would like to have them a few times a year,” she says.

Eschewing expansion

Despite the solid success of the award-winning resort, Brigitte says there are no plans for expansion. “Every guest is treated as an individual here, it’s a concept that requires very careful thought, it’s not something you can duplicate,” she explains. “We always say that this is a family hobby. Of course it’s not really a hobby, because it has to make money, but it’s not a cash cow. What we’re interested in is doing something good for people’s health and doing the best possible job with what we have – rather than making it even bigger.” ☺

www.parkschloessen.de

FAST FACTS

- Rooms: 58
- Total staff: 89 permanent members of staff, 36 freelancers
- Therapists: 34 permanent, 10 freelancers
- Doctors: Four
- Ayurveda treatment rooms: 13
- Private relaxation rooms: 12
- Other treatment rooms: two for beauty treatments, two for physiotherapy, one for private meditation, one for craniosacral therapy, and two herbal bath treatment rooms
- Other facilities: two yoga studios, an indoor swimming pool, lecture space, a retail boutique, a gym, a private park, a teaching kitchen
- Awards: 2013 World Spa & Wellness Awards – Destination Spa of the Year, Europe; 2014 World Luxury Spa Awards – Best Luxury Ayurveda Spa, and others

