

# SPIRIT & DESTINY

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YOUR **HOT** AUGUST HOROSCOPE with astrologer David Wells

# Could it be *heaven?*



The hills of Lake Garda are the blissful setting for a sleek new spa that combines five-star pampering with chi-balancing holistic therapies. It's the best of both worlds, says *Spirit & Destiny* health editor Lucy Hunter



The view of Lake Garda from the spa



The big Four-Oh is never an easy birthday to come to terms with. So when a chance to escape to an 'energy spa' comes up just weeks before D-day (or rather, my B-day), I don't need to be asked twice. Taking time out from school runs, deadlines and all the other relentless routines of everyday life is just what I need to prepare for this personal milestone.

And Lefay Spa & Resort Lago di Garda sounds like just the place – a spa in northern Italy offering rest and rejuvenation, with holistic treatments inspired by Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). In my experience, spas tend to be either the bracing-but-good-for-you variety, or upmarket hotels offering beauty packages that are little more than indulgences. But

Lefay merges a feeling of luxury with treatments that actually work, and follows the principles of TCM, such as massage along the body's 'meridians', or energy pathways. The aim is to ensure guests de-stress, recover their energy levels, boost their flow of chi (energy or life force) and achieve overall wellbeing.

After flying in to Brescia Airport, a taxi takes me through the lush Lombardy countryside, past villas with terracotta roofs and eggshell-white walls. As the car climbs up the winding mountain road, fringed with alpine flowers, I appreciate just how awe-inspiring the location really is. Perched high in the hills and overlooking the magnificent Lake Garda, Lefay is set within 27 acres of gentle hills, woodlands



Clockwise from left: the spa's sleek, modern exterior; there's plenty of room to relax in a Prestige Junior Suite; the opulently decorated steam room; the indoor pool is connected to the infinity pool outside



and olive terraces on the Lemon Riviera.

From the outside, the spa looks very impressive. Built into the hillside using local and natural materials, it's inspired by the 'lemon houses' typical of this fruit-growing area, and looks sleek and modern, yet natural and airy at the same time. The spa prides itself on eco principles, and has reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 510 tons a year by building a biomass plant. This burns wood chips to produce around 70 per cent of the resort's energy needs for heating.

### TURN UP, TUNE IN AND FLOP OUT

Sinking into a leather armchair in the lounge after check-in, I sip a delicious fruity (non-alcoholic) cocktail and sit back to take in the atmosphere. It's all super-stylish five-star sophistication combined with Italian good looks – despite its eco credentials, there's nothing rough-hewn about this joint.

Then I'm taken to my room, a Prestige Junior Suite. A misleading name in my opinion, as I can't see anything junior about it. The room is huge, bigger than my living room back home, light and airy with a balcony terrace. There's a dressing room, a double bed

and a wonderfully decadent round bath. I note that my husband and two children could fit snugly in this room, too, and as I flop on to the bed smiling to myself, I offer up a silent prayer of thanks that this time they don't have to. It really is just me-time.

All I have to do now is slip into my swimsuit, don the fleecy robe that's been thoughtfully left on the bed, and go and explore.

The pools are the centrepiece of the Lefay spa, which will delight all water babes like myself. The undulating pool starts inside and sweeps outside. An automatic door lets you swim out to an infinity pool, but also keeps in the warmth (again, very eco-friendly). Once alfresco, bathers can bask in the sunlight and look down on the rolling hills and shimmering lake below. There are underwater jets for hydrotherapy, and a few short steps away there's another whirlpool, as well as a 25-metre outdoor swimming pool.

I swim 30 lengths, which proves to be a sensory delight rather than hard labour. The scent from the herbs and flowers dotting the hillside is delicious and honeyish, and the purity of the air is incredible. We're so high in the hills that the clouds appear to be almost touchable, and as the heat

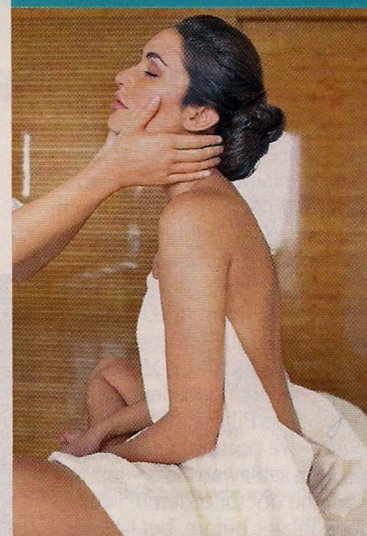
from the pool steams gently, it feels like I'm swimming through the clouds themselves.

Chilling out in the labyrinth of the spa rooms completes my workout. There are aromatherapy, Finnish and steam saunas, a 'bio sauna' panelled with olive wood and one sauna for women only. Lefay operates an uninhibited European spa etiquette. Once in the sauna, costumes are strictly forbidden, and, despite being equipped with a Velcro-stripped towel, many don't bother covering up. Mixed nudity might seem eye-popping at first, but it's not too hard to adjust. And if you're truly shy, you can relax in the women-only sauna.

The recommended treatments here are tailor-made to each individual, so before I book my slots with the therapists, I have a consultation with Dr Maurizio Corradin, the spa's health director. He's a qualified medical doctor, as well as an expert in Chinese medicine and sports medicine, but he doesn't speak English, so a translator asks questions about my health and wellbeing. When Dr Corradin clocks my poor posture, he recommends →



Above: a tranquil place to relax and unwind. Below: choose from Eastern and Western treatments





Clockwise from left: the summery Red Phoenix garden; the Green Dragon meditation area; fine dining at Lefay's La Grande Limonaia; the food is healthy and delicious



not only two energy treatments tomorrow but also a session with the in-house physio, who will guide me through some back-straightening techniques.

Before then, I get a chance to sample the Lefay cuisine at dinner – a five-course marathon. While the dishes are healthy, the accent is definitely on delicious, and the chef sticks to seasonal foods in keeping with the hotel's eco credentials. If you're slimming, there's plenty of mouth-watering low-calorie choice. Before I even sample the five courses, I'm given free rein at the buffet, where there's plentiful garden-fresh salad and yummy Italian treats such as *bresaola* (a low-calorie air-dried salt beef). After that I feast on pappardelle pasta with anchovies, followed by turbot, and then a scrumptious Bavarian berry parfait for pudding – a healthy option, apparently. This is all washed down with some excellent local red.

## UNDER PRESSURE

As I wake the next morning, I can't stop a grin spreading across my face as I realise it's another tough day at Lefay. Breakfast is a feast of plenty, with a buffet loaded up with anything you could possibly fancy – fruit, cereal, croissants, cakes, smoked salmon and meats, as well as a hot plate where the chef will scramble eggs for you as you wait. I load up with a plateful of melon, and then wolf down scrambled eggs with mushroom. No cake today, but I do allow myself a warm croissant.

After a brief lie-down on a sun lounger, I'm introduced to Lefay's resident physio, who gives me a lesson in Feldenkrais Method, a system that incorporates similar methods to Pilates. It's designed to improve posture and movement through self-awareness – just what the doctor ordered. I've done Pilates before, but I'm still



pleased to be taught a few new stretches to take home.

After that I enjoy one of Lefay's signature treatments – an energy massage, combining Western techniques with pressure on specific acupuncture points. I have experience of acupuncture, and I can feel the familiar tingling sensation when my energy points are stimulated. Dr Corradin has also prescribed a facial massage using a product line called Yang Ming, which means 'brightness, vitality'. The aim of the treatment is to relax my muscles, smooth wrinkles and make my skin look more lustrous.

At first I find the pressure too gentle, but the therapist is highly skilled and before I know it I've relaxed so much that half an hour has gone by. I wake up feeling completely refreshed, and a peek in the mirror confirms that I do indeed look glowy and fabulous.

After all this blissing out, even I realise that a little exercise is in order, and another 30 lengths in the almost empty exercise pool assuages my guilt a little. Then I amble into the Energy and

Therapeutic Garden, a lovely outdoor space with five meditation areas, each symbolising a different season and stage of life.

In woodland to the east, Il Drago Verde (the Green Dragon) represents new life, bursting with evergreen plants and herbs, particularly the refreshing aroma of mint. Each area has its own colour and planting scheme with aromatic or medicinal herbs, and evocative names such as the Red Phoenix, the White Tiger and the Black Tortoise. I walk round them all, taking time to meditate at beautiful little pit stops, before finishing in Il Centro (the Centre), surrounded by the invigorating scent of lemon balm. For the more energetic, there's a 2.5km running circuit, which winds through hills and woods. Hmm, maybe next time.

The next morning is departure day, and I can't help but feel a little sad that I'm about to be thrust back into the big, bad real world. But as I take another quick swim in the perfect pool, my body feels so much more alive than it did when I arrived. My muscles and sinews are no longer clenched taut with city stresses.

Lefay is simply the loveliest of places. The combination of fresh air, breathtaking scenery and state-of-the-art luxury is nothing I've ever experienced before. Next time I have a landmark birthday, I can't think of any other hills I'd rather run to. **SPIRIT&DESTINY**

## FACT FILE

- For more information on the Lefay Resort & Spa, visit <http://lagodigarda.lefayresorts.com>
- Kuoni offers 3 nights' half board at the Lefay Resort & Spa in a Prestige Junior Suite, including

British Airways flights from Gatwick, private return transfers between Verona Airport and the spa, and the use of an airport lounge in the UK. Prices for October 2010 start at £862 per person based on two sharing, not including treatments. Call 01306-747008 or visit [www.kuoni.co.uk](http://www.kuoni.co.uk)

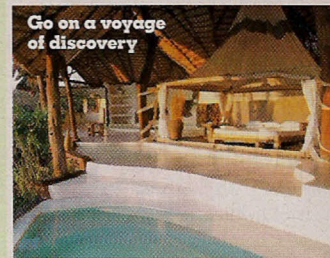
## TRAVELLER'S CHECKS

### GOTTA DANCE

Learn some fancy moves this summer, as well as getting in some yoga practice, on a Dance and Movement Week with Healthy Options. The holiday takes place on the sunny island of Lefkas, where you'll learn salsa, contemporary and Greek dancing, as well as tai chi, all just yards from the beach. Daily yoga and Pilates classes, a massage, herbal walk, aqua-safari boat trip, and sailing and paddle-boarding 'tasters' are all included. The week costs from £549pp, room-only, based on two sharing, including tuition and return flights from Gatwick. For dates and details, call 0844-499 2909 or visit [www.healthy-option.co.uk](http://www.healthy-option.co.uk)

### SAFARI FOR THE SELF

Take a safari to your inner self with the African Body Works package at Kenya's luxurious Shompole lodge. The three-day schedule in the Great Rift Valley takes you on a customised holistic journey using lifestyle consultations, meditation, yoga, and body- and breath-work



to help you deal with passive stress. Left unchecked, this can lead to health problems and even depression. Why not add a wildlife safari in the Masai Mara for the holiday of a lifetime? To Escape To offers four nights all-inclusive at Shompole, including the three-day African Body Works programme, international flights and transfers for £2,750 per person, based on two sharing. Call 020-7060 6747 or visit [www.toescapeto.com](http://www.toescapeto.com) for details.

### GET YURTY

Yurts are the five-star crash pads of the camping world, and you'll find a gorgeous selection in beautiful settings at One Off Places. There are Uzbekistani yurts in an Andalusian olive grove in Spain, a yurt with a transparent dome for stargazing in Cornwall, a Mongolian yurt on an organic smallholding in Portugal, and yurts with sea views in Lanzarote. Don't forget to pack the yak. Prices from €245 (£205) for a week. Visit [www.oneoffplaces.co.uk](http://www.oneoffplaces.co.uk)