

THE CURE AT VIVAMAYR ALTAUSSEE

By Caroline Phillips



The talk en route to the resort is scary. 'They'll put us on a diet of 600 calories a day.' 'You'll be given so much Epsom salts you'll need Pampers.' Such is the speculation among journalists on the way to the VivaMayr Resort Altaussee, the spanking new wellness and health clinic on the shores of Lake Altaussee in Liezen, Austria.

Ah yes, but is VivaMayr Altaussee going to be like her 'mother,' the VivaMayr clinic at Worth – also owned by the Androsch (industrialist) family? Mrs. Putin almost lives at the Worth one. Isabelle Adjani is a fan. So too Kristin Scott Thomas. Plus VivaMayr at Worth is a place over which *patients* – as its guests are known – wax lyrical. But is this just because it costs so much money and involves so much discomfort that patients have to believe it works?



VIDEOS



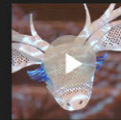
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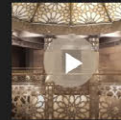
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VivaMayr Altaussee turns out to be a supersize-me glass and wood-clad chalet in a little village of historic homes and 15th century church. It's 100 steps from the waterside and encircled by snow-capped, limestone mountains – including one called the Loser. There's air that's fresh as toothpaste and 'drink me' crystalline water. It's here that Austria's high society vacations; where Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler holidayed; and where Sigmund Freud has visited, and *James Bond* been filmed.

It has Austria's biggest salt deposits – much of it used in the clinic's salt-themed spa with its salt hammam, saltwater swimming pool and Watsu (aquatic bodywork) in brine floating pools. Plus it's in the bottle of Glaubersalz (salt laxative) that patients have to drink daily....but let's not go there right now. (The clinic gets curative saline water from Salzburg and mineral-rich thermal spring water from its back yard).



Inside, VivaMayr Altaussee looks less like a clinic than a first class lounge at Heathrow Airport – with bright lighting, miles of wooden floors and walls, and swivel seats and pouffes in lime, lilac and pink. Except instead of airline uniform, the staff wear....brace yourself....dirndls. On the first floor, there are medical and treatment rooms aplenty.

There are 56 much-jollier-than-any-medical-clinic bedrooms with picture windows and wood-surrounded terraces. Additionally, the bathrooms boast loos that almost wipe your bottom and will certainly spray water up your undercarriage and then dry it. (For the latter, press the icon with the hairdryer on the remote control. The red button brings two nurses to your bedroom door, as I discover.)



I'm here to do the Cure, an approach devised in the early 20th century by Dr Franz Mayr – a physician passionate about the link between gut and health. I'm lulled into a false sense of security on the first day, despite the oddity of dinner being served at 5pm. There's no sign of the famed clear broth and stale spelt rolls which patients have to chew a gazillion times before swallowing. Instead there's five-star-restaurant fare.

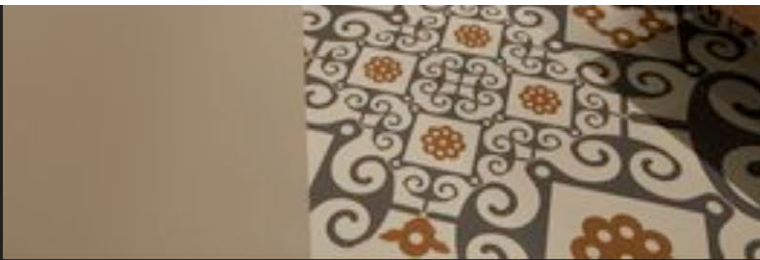
We're given delicate potato soup, veal with tagliatelli, and a chocolate and cream mousse that induces a transcendent state. Chef Martin Stein was an award-winning restaurateur. I go later into his kitchen to have a cookery class with him – it boasts more state-of-the-art gadgetry than you can shake a stick at – and learn how to make things like quinoa risotto.



On day two – after a medical appointment which combines whizzo diagnostic tests with naturopathic therapies – I'm put on the MAD diet: a German acronym for a gentle exclusion eating plan.

It's not a detox for the faint-hearted. Every morning, patients drink a bottle of Glaubersalz to (how shall I put this delicately?) clear themselves out. 'Make sure you leave enough time for it to work before leaving your bedroom,' explains Dr Fegerl, who has matinee idol looks and an overarching interest in intestines. Still I find myself often legging it out of the dining room, hell-bent for the lavs.





At meals, diners chew, chew, chew – 30 or 40 times – to prepare food for digestion. There's no drinking allowed from half an hour before a meal to 90 minutes afterwards. (Liquid interferes with the digestive processes). The idea is to clean the gut, cure it, then eat a highly alkaline diet. The Cure also involves lots of expensive supplements.

Food comes in teeny portions – but somehow, with all that chewing slowly and mindfully, mostly I don't feel hungry. (Patients are supposed to eat in silence; the dining room is meant to resound to the sound of chewing). Breakfast is a king's meal comprising such items as sesame and ginger mousse, char cured salmon trout and spelt porridge. Lunch of fennel brandade is fit for a prince. And dinner? Are you ready? Yes, it's that clear broth served in a teapot and spelt or, in my case, soy bread. Paupers fare better.



To fill in the time between not eating, there are daily activities, like Nordic walking. The hardier among us walk 7.5km around the lake every day, its towering mountains reflecting in the water – and we sniff in air cleaner than that in oxygen canisters.

A lot of time is also spent having treatments. I have an applied kinesiology test – in which my muscle strength is tested against various substances to diagnose illness and find treatments. I have nasal reflexology – in which two cotton buds are stuck up my nose. (It clears the nasal passages and sinuses). I have a daily abdominal massage with a doctor. 'Your tummy is getting softer,' she says, appreciatively.



I'm also attached to a drip to have an infusion of vitamins and trace elements. I try a spot of aerial yoga – suspended from the ceiling in a pouch – which is like going in utero to do stretches. Finally, I end my stay with an *ärztliche abschlußuntersuchung* – I can't find an umlaut on my computer, just know that this is my final medical appointment – in which it turns out that I've lost two pounds, got a flat tummy and seen the light.

So is VivaMayr Altaussee like her 'mother,' VIVAMAYR at Worth? The answer is she's a younger, prettier version. Make-up guru Lisa Eldridge is already a devotee, and soon, no doubt, VivaMayr Altaussee will be attracting celebs aplenty. But does it work? We leave after a week with glowing skin, sparkling eyes and having begun to tackle our health and/or weight issues. But for this patient, at least, The Cure proves impossible to sustain in daily life.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Prices start from €220 per night for single occupancy and €175 for double occupancy. The price includes individually devised or medically prescribed dietary cuisine, prepared by award-winning chef Martin Stein based on the principles of Modern Mayr Medicine. Mineral water, all teas and the daily programme (including water gymnastics yoga, Nordic walking, daily sports activities and 2 medical lectures) are included in the price. Medical treatments start at €40 for massage and €150 for first initial consultation.

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Caroline Phillips is an award-winning freelance journalist who contributes to publications from Sunday and daily newspapers to glossy magazines and various luxury websites. To see more of her work, go to www.carolinephillips.net.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEEK