



A VEGUCATION

Chris Allsop discovers that a switch from Italian indulgence to Ti Sana's raw food detox isn't as painful as anticipated

It was an Italian holiday – a week in Lombardy – so there had been something like five coffees a day, fresh ravioli in butter and sage, my body weight in Gorgonzola. And when it ended, there was Hotel 1711's Ti Sana Detox Retreat & Spa blocking our approach to the airport, with its Healthetarian philosophy, raw food diet, and ominous desire to improve.

Award-winning Ti Sana, tucked away inside the village of Arlate, is perfectly placed for a detox after larding it in the Italian Lakes. It's a family affair: Erica D'Angelo masterminded the retreat while Erica's father, Amedeo, who greets us at reception, is the poster boy for the regimen – the high-powered business exec who, in three months, dropped 55 lbs at the age of 56. Most importantly – and key to Ti Sana's *modus operandi* – is that Amedeo has happily maintained both the regimen and his lower

weight – although he admits to the odd scheduled pasta-related indulgence.

Alice supplies our welcome packs (bronze tongue scrapers included – 'Toxins are released from the tongue,' she explains, recommending we scrape twice daily) and itineraries for our abbreviated Wellbeing Boosters (usually two to five night stays). It's a full day and, swiping our first scheduled snack – a frothy juice shot of carrot and apple – we head over to the educational session. My first morning without caffeine, I barely keep up; but Mario's gist is that prevention of illness, rather than modern medicine's onus on the treatment of acute issues, is the name of the game here.

At lunch, we're introduced to the sugar-free, no animal protein, raw food menu. The black-clad, militantly slender staff deliver the first course: a cabbage, cress and rocket salad

accompanied by a small bowl of grout (actually a creamy tomato and walnut dressing). On the side are some flavourful seed-packed crackers; in survival mode, I use these to mop up the remainder of the dressing. Next up is cauliflower cous cous and chopped almonds. The food is imaginative and delicious. At another table, an English woman (on the fourth and final day of her retreat, partner to a man with cheeks as glowingly ruddy as a ripe Tuscan tomato) exclaims, 'Is that an olive?'

After lunch, there's a gap in the itinerary, so I pour a cup of the all-you-can-drink Kangan Water (pH9 to help combat internal acidity) while my wife helps herself to an herbal tea. We

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take a stroll beside the serene River Adda (the source of the smooth stones in Ti Sana's walls), accompanied by the call of a lone cuckoo and the odour of wild garlic. My wife bites into a smuggled-in pear. 'Ah, sugars,' she sighs.

Back at 1711, we enrobe and descend into the subterranean spa. No Dante analogies here: the elegant spa is a pleasure cavern in gold trim, all curves and dangling basket chairs. The first treatment is a candlelit Ofuro Bath with Epsom Salts, which prepares me perfectly for my ensuing full-body massage. An hour later, I'm tingling top to toe, and what heat I leached in during the bath is now glowing in my pampered musculature.

At 4pm, we collect our second and final juice-shot snack. After experiencing Ti Sana's array of spa equipment – mood showers,

infra-red spa, hammam, waterfall shower, Jacuzzi salt cave –we're wiped. Grabbing fistfuls of walnuts, we relax on springy recliners and gaze at the glitter-covered ceiling, feeling entirely like giant, contented babies.

But we have an appointment with Mario for our Bia (Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis) and Tomeex (Tomography Electrolytes Extra-Cellular) tests, so it's dressed and over to the medical wing. Following a questionnaire on our habits and sense of wellbeing, Mario hooks us up to his machines. My wife's diagnosis is too much acidity and – surprise, surprise – she's prescribed more vegetables for our healthier lives post-retreat. However, when it's time for my results, I'm told: 'fewer vegetables'. My head's spinning, but it could just be the caffeine withdrawal.

Afterwards is dinner, where we're surprised to find our food cooked (to aid digestion). One day in, and I'm instinctively checking my cutlery allocation to guess at the number of courses. Two tonight: cauliflower, green leaf, onion and cumin soup followed by a citrusy avocado salad. It's tasty, but we're confused by the presence of breadsticks and wine at other tables; it transpires that the restaurant is open to outside visitors. 'Who comes here for dinner?' someone whispers. 'Sadists,' is the hissed reply.

The bed is as comfortable as the room decor is tastefully opulent, and our alarms wake us far too early. Somehow, driving our rental Fiat 500 through the rainy night, we find the airport without a single wrong turn. And no coffee. Perhaps they're on to something there... info@wellbeingescapes.com (wellbeingescapes.com/ti-sana-italy.html)

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