

HIP YOGA ANDALUCIA, SPAIN

I had never tried yoga before, so was rather anxious when I found myself on a week's yoga retreat with classes twice a day, and no means of escape besides hiking into the mountains outside Granada. It was the idea of restricted food for a week that worried me – but, fortunately, the chefs, Lauren (who used to cook for Madonna) and Vincenzo, served beautifully presented, tasty, macrobiotic, wheat-, dairy- and sugar-free dishes designed for better digestion.

Days would start with fresh juice delivered to your room, followed by optional hikes into the hills before breakfast and then two hours of yoga. There were four of us – varying in levels of experience from super-flexible experts to complete beginners like me – and Gail, our instructor, kept us all challenged. I didn't conquer the headstand, but my tree pose and downward dog showed marked improvement by the end of the week; when I returned to work, I noticed how much taller I sat at my desk and how open my shoulders had become.

After relaxed and lazy lunches served out by the terrace, afternoons were spent reading, cooling off in the pool and enjoying massages (welcome relief to over-stretched muscles), before more yoga in the evening and then dinner. There were also various sorts of life-management courses and alternative therapies from the wonderful hostess Susi. Sometimes these helpful and therapeutic sessions induced tears in other guests, but they gave me tools

Resident puppies are known to steal underwear; roaming sheep are prone to gatecrashing yoga classes

to boost my assertiveness and alleviate stress.

Highlights Time to oneself, beautiful surroundings, delicious healthy food and small yoga classes that give results: I felt leaner, taller, slimmer and much more motivated. **Lowlights** The early-morning hikes never occurred (maybe I didn't ask for them often enough), although they may not have been particularly enjoyable in the heat.

Insights Come alone to get the most out of your time here; bring a book to read, and hire a car so that you can 'break out' and explore the mountain landscape and the exquisite Alhambra in Granada. Instructors for different weeks include Denise Christian, Gail Couzens and Jean Hall, who probably all attract different sorts of yogis and followers. I did take up yoga on my return and



SWEET AND LOTUS

Molino Bajo, Spain – the venue for Hip Yoga

am still taking the occasional class, but fitting sessions around office hours isn't the same as an entire week of dedicated yoga and blissful pampering in the sun.

Hip Yoga (07966 223165; www.hip-yoga.co.uk). Six nights, from £1,100 a person full board, including airport transfers, all yoga classes and a massage, based on two people sharing. Courses are held at Molino Bajo in May and June; March and September course venues to be confirmed. Ryanair (0906 270 5656; www.ryanair.com) flies from London Stansted to Granada. ELEANOR SOUTHALL

VALLE DE VIDA NEAR MALAGA, SPAIN

This holistic yoga retreat and spa is on a beautiful 18-acre site in a valley full of silver-green olive trees in the midst of the impressive Pizarra Mountains, just 30 minutes from Malaga.

Comprising a rustic Andalusian finca and a scattering of eight Native American tepees across the valley, Valle de Vida's facilities include an outdoor pool with bar, a hydrotherapy tub, a steam room, a hilltop yoga platform and a spa offering a range of treatments, from osteopathy and acupuncture to shiatsu and reflexology.

For group bookings, bespoke yoga, Pilates, t'ai chi and mosaic-making retreats can be arranged throughout the year, with instructors, therapists, chef, cleaner and a crèche all on hand.

Highlights Sleep in a luxury, high-style

tepee (all have tiled floors, comfortable bedding, rock-crystal lights and electricity) and feel close to nature. Indulge in a midnight dip in the hydrotherapy tub while star-gazing. Treat yourself to osteopathic treatments from first-rate practitioners and enjoy yoga asanas while taking in the panoramic mountain views.

Lowlights Resident puppies, renamed 'Pants' and 'Socks', are known to steal underwear. Roaming sheep are also prone to gatecrash yoga classes.

Insights Groups of between 10 and 28 can be accommodated – ideal for a holiday with family and friends or for house parties. Alternatively, when there's space, couples can book a romantic B&B experience.

Valle De Vida (+34 951 238614; www.valledevida.com). Ring for details and prices. British Airways (0870 850 9850; www.ba.com) flies direct to Malaga, from £69.

CLUB MED MARRAKECH MORROCCO

Club Med Marrakech's venue, La Palmeraie village, now offers an elite, luxurious hotel within a hotel – Le Riad, which contains 60 separate suites (choose either a roof terrace or garden), all accessed via guarded gates. The jewel in La Palmeraie Club Med village's crown is the Cinq Mondes Spa, with the best treatments from around the world, using only the most natural oils and creams, on one menu. The list of massages includes ayurvedic, relaxing and rejuvenating options. There's also a traditional hammam.

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER MICAUD. STYLED BY KIM HERSOV. BIKINI, £225. LIZA BRUCE (020 7235 8423). HAIR BY CHUCK AMOS AT JUMP. USING BUMBLE AND BUMBLE. MAKE-UP BY GREGG BROCKINGTON AT JUMP FOR KEVIN AUCOIN. MODEL: REKA E AT MARILYN NY. WITH THANKS TO CAP CANA RESORT, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC