

Best for weight loss

EVERY loser wins

Vivamayr in Austria combines Alpine luxury with a programme so comprehensive it will transform your health

Story by Jason Barlow



The simplicity and freshness of the food at Vivamayr is designed to allow your stomach to begin repairing itself



If you've heard of Vivamayr then you probably also know that its clients include supermodels, rock stars and royalty. But don't be fooled: there are no airs and graces in this Austrian clinic, precious few distractions, and an intense focus on one of the most basic precepts of all: you are what you eat.

This is the opposite of faddish. Austrian doctor and physician Franz Mayr determined that gut health influences everything else, and Vivamayr's two clinics – one in Altaussee, the other in Maria Wörth – make a strict dietary regimen the core of a programme that

also encompasses de-stressing, detoxification, and physical and mental healing. Friends who'd been advised me that it would be tough, but that I'd feel incredible afterwards. Several other friends were openly asking if I was feeling all right, which was a suggestion that I certainly wasn't looking it.

There's no doubt that if you're going to do Vivamayr, you've got to park your inhibitions and suspicions, because at first it's plain weird. The clinic's architecture is in the traditional wood-beamed Austrian idiom, with a view across Lake Altaussee that's so good

it inspired the producers of the Bond film *Spectre* to shoot there. But it's also a registered hospital, the clinical atmosphere only slightly offset by the absence of white coats; the staff wear white jeans and shirts instead. There's also much talk of "the Cure", the catch-all term for Vivamayr's magic rather than Robert Smith's indefatigable doom-lords. Alarm bells start

Between the vast array of treatments you can take views of – or walks in – the Austrian Alps



ringing, and the scepticism I've practically weaponised over the years is locked and loaded.

And so to my first appointment with a doctor for a 30-minute medical assessment that bluntly clears a few things up: I'm stressed, my diet is a disaster and I'm overweight. Bowel movements are discussed, we peruse the options on the blood test menu, after which she prescribes me a variety of pills. Some of these will stay in my room, others sit in a tray in my designated space in the dining area. (I'm taking an antihistamine, antioxidants, magnesium, and vitamins, as well as Epsom salts that clear the toxins from the stomach and liver, and an alkaline powder to reduce stomach acid.) Abdominal treatments follow, and an Applied Kinesiology test (placing food powders on my tongue) reveals that I'm intolerant to caffeine, dairy and egg white which weakens my muscle response. My cholesterol is also high; the cause is likely dietary, but stress is also a factor.

Much to fix, then, and various ways to do it. Traditional massage rubs shoulders with an immune strengthening infusion – an IV drip with a cocktail of vitamins – an electrolysis footbath, and a nasal reflex therapy that involves shoving a cotton bud soaked in essential oils up my nose. There's Hypoxi training – oxygen is depleted and supplied to the body at intervals to bio-energetically

You are instructed to chew so thoroughly it seems comical... until you feel the benefits

train the cells – water shiatsu with a gentleman called Erich who swooshes me around a pool until I feel like crying (in a good way), and a liver compress.

What is initially bizarre quickly becomes second nature, and even the day three crash – when the sugar and caffeine withdrawal causes low mood, fatigue and severe headaches – isn't as wretched as billed. I walk the lake on three separate occasions, and hike in the mountains.

Food and drink? Well, none of the latter. You are instructed to chew so thoroughly it seems comical until the benefits reveal themselves and the bland food allows your traumatised gut a chance to repair itself. The waitresses attend to their guests with a mixture of pity and "you're paying for it, don't blame us" expressions. Dinner for the first four nights will be light broth, which means that when a modest dish of Arctic char is on the menu, it's the greatest thing I've ever tasted.

Hunger, you see, is normal. Constantly sating oneself with sugary snacks is not. This is the revelation, along with the discovery that your appetite can be tamed with a modicum of self-control. After six days, I've lost 5kg, but better even than that my energy levels are through the roof. Which also means that stress is somehow more manageable, too, and the urge to exercise frequently is at a level I've never previously known. This is my kind of weird.



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