

# This is what true happiness feels – and smells – like

*Mary Lussiana finds inner peace at an Italian spa dedicated to bringing joy back to your stressed-out life*

**T**he concept of happiness was somewhat elusive as I sat in a crowded airport with three flights to catch to get home for Christmas while a storm wreaked havoc with my flight path. It was testament to my lesson with Giuseppe, the Master of Laughter, that I could manage even a wry smile. I was returning from Puglia's Borgo Egnazia, and its Happiness Break. The inner self is gaining ground in the trillion-dollar wellness world. Two paths seem to have opened up: one that follows a results-driven, science-based, medical concept, and another, still in infancy, which focuses on improving health by increasing happiness, whether through helping you realise your purpose in life or just encouraging you to slow down enough to smell the roses.

Smelling is key on the Happiness Break. It's the starting point to the programme (although a "pro-happiness questionnaire" sent out before you arrive acts as a supporting tool, mainly around diet). At the first consultation you are given four little bottles to smell, and your reaction tells the therapists what you need.

I very much liked the first smell, was indifferent to the second, quite liked the third and was indifferent to the fourth. They represented resistance, resilience, opportunity and

which chimed painfully with how I was feeling. I had arrived frazzled from a busy few months of non-stop travel and deadline-juggling, while also trying to achieve that impossible work/family balance.

While my programme was being customised, I asked Erica D'Angelo, Borgo Egnazia's director of well-being, how she arrived at the idea of the Happiness Break.

"Happiness has been shown to have a physiological effect, a direct impact on your health," she explained. "No matter how fit or lean you are, if you are not happy and balanced emotionally your cells will be impaired by the altered stimulation of stress. Chronic excessive stress (unhappiness) stops cells and organs working properly, leading to an increase of stress, generating a vicious cycle."

When it is put like that, one wonders why the industry has taken so long to start thinking about how to make us happier, rather than just more beautiful or more shapely, the desire for which is often driven by an innate unhappiness, or lack of confidence, in

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the first place. Why not treat the cause, not the symptoms?

The Happiness Break aims to improve the quality, and increase the length, of your life. It draws on nine common denominators (known as the Power 9) found by Dan Buettner, a journalist and *National Geographic* fellow, in the lives of the world's longest-living people in the "blue zones" of the planet, from Costa Rica to Japan to Sardinia.

The approach ranges from eating a

(essential to being happy). It is this that Erica hopes people will take away with them, alongside the habit of physical movement, however gentle or extreme, and making time to relax with family.

So how does it work? You don't really understand the whole puzzle until you reach the end of the three or six-day programme and have your concluding olfactory test and chat with, in my case, Isabella. She revealed how the staff had personalised each of my treatments to give me what I needed for greater happiness.

I started with a session in the Roman Baths, to detox me physically and mentally. Flickering candlelight and hot water pools were interspersed with a freezing cold-water bath with ice, a bucket of cold water dousing and a saline flotation tank.

Mind and body cleansed, I was pointed in the direction of dinner. Having noted from my questionnaire a need to lose weight, the staff had chosen courses for me across all the restaurants to remove the stress of navigating the menus. I wasn't convinced, not wanting to miss out on



BORGO EGNAZIA

**FIND YOUR INNER JOY**  
Luxurious Borgo Egnazia in eastern Puglia; main and below



as a starter and ravioli of lamb with langoustine and verbena as a main – in the Michelin-starred Due Camini.

My days began with stretching and Iyengar yoga with inspirational Carmine, a wiry, tough instructor. "You won't die today," he said as I winced at the contortions he put me through, and the feeling of liberation afterwards was noticeable.

The spa sessions knocked me out each time. The intense U Berafatt ("beautiful" in the local dialect) massage combined stretching techniques and deep movements to realign the entire body structure, and the "Bedda" facial used a tailor-made treatment to restore elasticity and glow to the skin.

The therapists had been told, I discovered at the end, to concentrate on my head, to aid mental relaxation.

Then came the laughter class. My half-English side balked at clowning around with Giuseppe, who had me doing impersonations, but he was brilliantly persuasive. I loved joining him to tell a story using two chairs, a suitcase and clothes as props. The aim

## SPA BREAKS

Three more breaks that promise to bring joy

**GUIDED BY GRATITUDE AT FOUR SEASONS RESORT BALI AT SAYAN**

Walking meditation, water blessings, being swung to sleep in a silk hammock and chakra ceremonies with an ex-Buddhist nun focus on what we have to be grateful for and make this a life-changing experience. **From £2,470, for three nights in a one-bedroom suite based on double occupancy (fourseasons.com).**

**INNER AND OUTER GLOW AT EUPHORIA, GREECE**

Euphoria pays equal attention to nurturing your inner and outer self. The programme helps you to discover personal obstacles to happiness you never knew

existed, and remove them. **From £579 per person for three days including seven spa treatments and chakra balancing (euphoria retreat.com).**

**A PILGRIM'S GUIDE TO HAPPINESS AT SIX SENSES BHUTAN**

The idea that happiness matters more than wealth is woven into the fabric of Bhutanese life. The spas at Six Senses map your own path to happiness, using question cards to prompt reflection and a notebook to list "five things I am grateful for today".

**Red Savannah (redsavannah.com) offers a package from £8,965 per person, with flights, transfers and eight nights across four of the Six Senses properties.**

Four more bottles to smell, this time representing beauty, action, change and happiness. From these I learned that I should spend more time on myself, introduce some change to my life, and that Christmas is actually a source of happiness (if I don't cut it too fine with travelling). New Year resolutions for 2020? Tick.

**Vair Spa's three-night Happiness Break at Borgo Egnazia is available from £1,568 per person on a full board basis, based on two sharing. Two consultations, four fitness classes, one "Art of Laughter" lab**