

It's no good detoxing the body if the brain's going bonkers. Paul Croughton selects some holidays for the mind

WELLBEING Kent

The concept of "finding yourself" often seems to include exotic beaches, or a mountain perch. But the people behind Lotus Journeys have chosen a more rural location to get you back in touch with who you are (or, at least, who you were). At a private country house, set amid four acres of organic garden and orchard in the Kent countryside, the two-, three- or five-night retreats begin with a thorough consultation that covers such topics as depression, anxiety, burnout and stress management, the results of which are used to design your individual programme of treatments. Among the unlikely techniques is laughter yoga — it prompts the brain, which can't differentiate between real and fake laughter, to release endorphins that can have a powerful effect on the mind, according to practitioners. "I've known people who have come off long-term antidepressants after only a few sessions," says Shelley Shiston, one of the course leaders.

A two-night retreat starts at £325pp, full-board; 0845 170 1747, lotusjourneys.com

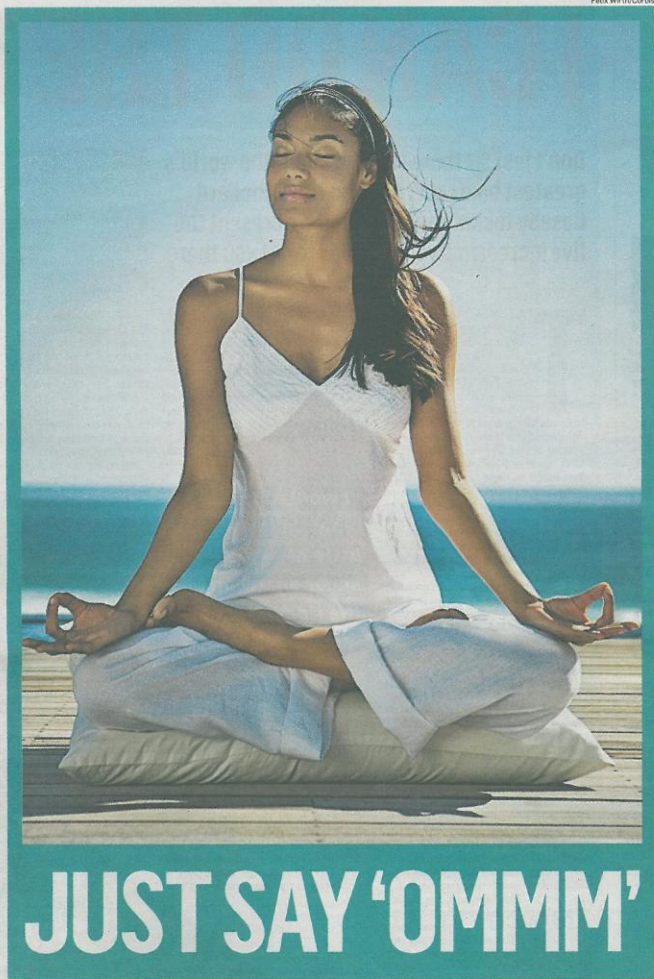
SHUGENDO Val d'Isère

If Wordsworth had spent less time looking at daffodils and more time googling "martial arts", he may well have found a lot to like in Shugendo, a lesser-known ancient Japanese religion wherein enlightenment is obtained through the study of the relationship between man and nature. It's based around an ascetic, mountain-dwelling lifestyle, where harsh treks and tasks are undertaken to promote spiritual growth. There's no shortage of mountains to practise on in the Alps, which is why Sylvain Guintard, a Shugendo acolyte for more than 35 years, runs his courses there, introducing folk to the techniques he mastered while living in Japanese monasteries for 12 years. On a six-day course, you will join Guintard for hikes and meditation under freezing waterfalls, to become one with nature (and probably as blue as a smurf). Once you've thawed out, he'll keep your wits sharp by teaching you the art of shurikenjutsu — blade-throwing.

Be quick: this year's course starts next Sunday, and costs £181pp, 00 33 4 79 06 04 08, www.martialarts-valdisere.com. Lyons and Geneva airports are each a three-hour drive away from Val d'Isère. Fly to Lyons with British Airways (0844 493 0787, ba.com) or EasyJet (easyjet.com), or to Geneva with EasyJet (easyjet.com) or BMI Baby (bmibaby.com). Or take the train, via Paris and Chambéry, to Bourg St Maurice, where you can catch a bus up to the resort (0844 848 4051, railurope.co.uk)

JUST STOP! Ibiza

Strange but true: Ibiza is a great place to do very little. And on the Just Stop! retreat, you get to do that in abundance. The course was devised by Larah Davis, a holistic life coach and master of NLP (that's neuro-linguistic programming), and Rebekah Penfome,



Felix Wirth/Corbis

through Zen macrobiotics and traditional Chinese medicines, as well as promoting wellness and healing with motivational mindset techniques and meditation. She then throws in yoga and Pilates classes, so the rest of your body doesn't get jealous. In fact, it will revel in the lush surroundings of Kahanda Kanda, with its long infinity pool, lily ponds, abundant, attentive staff and serene sense of wellbeing. Real Holidays (020 7359 3938, srilankaportfolio.co.uk) offers the six-night trip from £2,815pp, full-board, including flights and transfers

COSMOVISION Bolivia

The Kallawayas people of Bolivia have an extraordinary history of healing, which, according to tradition, comes directly from the soul of the Andes mountains. To heal the body, they believe, one must first fix mind and spirit, and this is done with daily incantations to Mother Earth, and a ceremonial reading of coca leaves to predict future life patterns. Kallawayas doctors first used penicillin and quinine 2,000 years ago, and they are still revered in the community for their knowledge of the powers of up to 600 herbs and plants. In fact, Unesco recognises the Kallawayas' "Andean cosmovision" as a masterpiece of the "oral and intangible heritage of humanity". Staying on the banks of Lake Titicaca — the vortex of cosmic energy, according to legend — you can join the Kallawayas in their ceremonies and hike to the highest point on Isla del Sol, the largest island on Titicaca, to drink from the sacred fountain that brings eternal youth and happiness. The sunsets from up there are pretty special, too. Sunal Traveller (020 8758 4774, sunil.co.uk) has a 10-night Bolivia itinerary from £2,699pp, which includes a day with the Kallawayas, some meals, flights, private transfers and excursions

AYURVEDA India

Those of a sceptical disposition may need to control their eye-rolling during the rest of this paragraph, as Ayurveda is an ancient Indian health system centred on your individual dosha. Everyone, apparently, is made up of a unique blend of three physiological factors that govern bodily processes, at least one of which sounds like a sandwich. So a healthy body has a balance of these three doshas — vata, pitta and kapha — while an unhealthy body has an imbalance. Why bother? Well, proponents claim that Ayurveda can, over time, provide detox, help alleviate back pain and symptoms of ME and arthritis, as well as calm, soothe or stimulate the mind, depending on what is required. An excellent introduction is to be had at SwaSwara, a luxurious 260-acre cliff-top retreat overlooking Om beach, in Karwar, Karnataka. Here you'll enjoy daily treatments as prescribed by the Ayurvedic doctor, as well as yoga, meditation, hiking, archery, pottery, cookery, painting or bird-watching in the jungle. When you're not otherwise engaged, you can take yourself off to the beach or lounge by the pool, and then tuck into fresh, healthy food (and wine) at dinner. Safe to say, boredom will not be a concern. A seven-night Holistic Beach Holiday starts at £1,100pp, full-board, including flights and transfers, with Wellbeing Escapes (0845 602 6202, wellbeingescapes.co.uk)

a psychologist and hypnotherapist, with the intention of getting clients off the hamster wheel and thinking more clearly. The workshops might sound a bit hippie — verbal nutrition (where positive language is used to fuel good feeling) and sound healing (where affirming sounds bolster self-belief) — but the idea is sound: you'll learn how to say no, avoid taking on too much, cut out stress and provide time and space for yourself. What you do with that space is up to you, but there are daily yoga workshops, massages, sunset hikes and evening activities, all taking place in a small, traditional country house at a secret location in the north of the island.

A five-day all-inclusive Just Stop! retreat costs £780pp, excluding flights, with Ibiza Retreats (ibizaretreats.com). Airlines flying to Ibiza include EasyJet (easyjet.com),

Thomsonfly (thomsonfly.com), Monarch (0877 940 5040, flymonarch.com) and British Airways (0844 493 0787, ba.com)

SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE Japan

The traditional Shikoku pilgrimage, on the smallest of Japan's four main islands, is a 750-mile walk around 88 temples, in honour and recognition of the monk Kukai, who founded the Shingon school of Buddhism. In all likelihood, you won't fancy that, so get some of the benefits with much less of the sting on a Hidden Japan tour. You'll spend time at a temple on Mount Koya, taking part in the morning service and meditating in the evenings, under the expert tutelage of a priest who will also school you in Shingon breathing techniques.

Inside Japan (0117 314 4620, insidjapan.com) has the two-week Hidden Japan trip from £3,240pp, including B&B accommodation in hotels and temples, some meals, activities, guides and flights

FOOD THERAPY Sri Lanka

It has been said, by persons more uncharitable than yourself, that the best way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Well, Samantha Gowing, an award-winning restaurateur in her native Australia, believes that you can plough on past the heart and reach the soul. Sam claims to be a "therapeutic chef", and her retreat at the boutique hotel Kahanda Kanda, on a working tea estate only 30 minutes from Galle, uses food as medicine, fixing digestive disorders and food sensitivities