

TRIED & TESTED

ME TIME

As wellbeing becomes the true luxury in the lives of consumers, A&E Editor in Chief Lara Mansour Sawaya discovers Clinique La Prairie, one of the world's leaders in finding the healthy balance between luxury and wellbeing



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In my role as an Editor in Chief of a luxury lifestyle magazine, I am privileged to be on a constant journey of discovering amazing locations and live unique experiences, at various places around the world to share them after with my readers and people around me.

Travel will always be my main source of inspiration and cultivation as it keeps me on a constant learning curve. Lately a new sector has emerged, creating a big hype around wellbeing destinations. It was only natural for such a sector to develop so rapidly as today many of us lead fast-paced and hectic lifestyles, where dedicating time ourselves and our own wellbeing has become a precious commodity, in other words, a true “luxury”.

I was invited to Clinique La Prairie last September, but only this summer was I able to dedicate almost a entire away from everything and everyone I know to focus on me. I rarely get those moments – the moments where you are only in the company of your thoughts and listening to no one but yourself – it was much needed.

This uber-exclusive health and wellbeing establishment is the only one of its kind in the world and is the pioneer in the development of cell therapy and research into vitality, enhancing the immune system and slowing down the ageing process. With a special scientific approach to wellness, Clinique La Prairie supports the wellbeing of its clientele using intimate and bespoke treatments that really look into the genetic make-up of each and every guest. The intimate 55-room property offers one of the most exclusive experiences in the world and attracts some of the most demanding clientele looking for visible, positive results.



Clinique La Prairie Chalet Verbier



Chateau Tsar Suite



Garden



Spa Pool



Residence Junior Suite

The clinic provides a number of tailored and bespoke programs that attend to the individual needs of the clients – whether it's weight loss, detoxing, dietary problems or general wellbeing for example – while the Medical Spa of Clinique features over 50 result-orientated treatments carried out by professional doctors.

I managed to fit five days in between my work trips, to discover the Master Detox Program. This experience usually requires seven days. I was only able to stay for five yet despite this I really felt like a different person the day I left... read on to discover more about my experience.

Day 1 - The arrival. Discovering how what we eat affects our body

I have always considered Switzerland among the most beautiful countries in the world. Its nature, its colours, its weather all this blended together has an instant, natural therapeutic effect. Montreux, the beautiful town overlooking Lake Geneva and the iconic Alps mountain range was around an hour drive from Geneva airport. It was raining heavily that day and all that was on my mind was, what if I get bored? What if it is too strict? The thought thread went on...

I arrived and checked into my suite which had a terrace with the most amazing view, despite the fact that it was raining. I prayed for better weather and rushed back down to the lobby where I was welcomed by Christine, my Dietician, who looked after my food program during my stay. We sat in the lobby lounge and the first thing she said was: 'you will be on a vegan diet!' Of course, I smiled and said 'okay' out loud, while in my mind I thought: 'worst case scenario if I ever wanted to cheat I can'. Christine went on to say that I also wouldn't be allowed to have any coffee, sugar, or any food with gluten. Here's when I forced a smile and said 'let's see'. I selected a few dishes from the menu that looked interesting. The way it works is that you select your lunch and dinner every day from a designated menu that supports your program.

After setting my food program I rushed to have the "Visia Test." This is where a device analyses how the skin is ageing and exposes any damage on the skin that the naked eye can't see. Luckily, my skin wasn't too bad for my age, however there was obvious sun damage detected. So, it is more sunscreen and less sun exposure for me.



Restaurant Terrace

After my treatment, I went to the medical spa lounge and met a great person that I now consider a friend, Nigel Franklyn, Spa Consultant at Clinique La Prairie and a world traveller who is on a constant quest to find the latest innovations and solutions to add to the offerings of the clinic. Nigel took me through the clinic's unique offerings and shared a bit of what is in the pipeline.

The highlight of my day was what was exactly needed after a long flight, a body treatment. It was only then that I discovered the magical effect of the seaweed detoxing body wrap.



Spa Lounge



Treatment Room

Manuela, my therapist, explained the healing powers of seaweed and the relaxing effect it has on the body, as it is known to take all the stress away. And indeed after this 90-minute treatment I felt so relaxed that I wanted nothing but to sleep.

Dinner was at 7pm, my choice was pumpkin soup for starter and gluten-free pasta with mushrooms for my main dish which later became my favourites and on repeat. But before I ate any of my meals I was always given a glass of hydrogenated water (meaning it has been infused with extra hydrogen gas) to drink.

Relaxed, sleepy and after what was a not-so-bad vegan dinner, I was ready to sleep. 9pm lights off.

Day 2. A new substitute for coffee and a not-so-bad feeling

An early rise with a body coordination class with my Trainer Guillaume. It was a bit tough as he insisted I do planks and highlighted the great effect it has on our core's strength. I will admit that it took me a while to do it right but eventually it worked out. Little did I know that later that night my muscles would be so sore that I couldn't turn while sleeping in my bed.

Okay so back to my day. My breakfast consisted of a selection of fruits, hazelnuts, raw almonds and fresh juice. Of course, I was longing for my cappuccino but no I wasn't allowed. So they suggested I try chicory, which looks like coffee in colour and has a certain toasted taste to it but is basically a plant-based drink. To

be honest, it wasn't bad, the taste is weird at first but in a way it quenches your caffeine craving, in other words, it tricks your brain and gives the illusion of having coffee.

The treatments of the day started with a deep cleansing facial using the signature products of Clinique La Prairie and it left my skin radiant, fresh and bright. Next I went to have my medical consultation with Dr. Magali Flot, the Medical Nutritionist, for what they call "metal and mineral" test.

This happens with a device that they simply cross over the four parts of your palm in order to read and detect the average of the metals and minerals in your body. My result was shocking, as I had a very high aluminium count in my body. Dr. Flot even asked me to wash my hands just in case there was any cream left over on them and he then repeated the test. The result remained the same, so I was advised to check my cooking utensils at home and make sure nothing contains aluminium, check my deodorant and body care products and make sure they are aluminium free and restrict any use of aluminium foil in cooking, as she knew that that was a common method when people cook. The rest of the analysis looked good. I can't hide the fact that I was a bit preoccupied but she assured me that, with taking the above precautions, levels should regulate again.

That afternoon the weather got better and I sat on the outdoor terrace looking at the stunning views and wondering in my thoughts about how our hectic lifestyles divert our attention from really checking ourselves and always listening to our body to know when it is time to slow down.

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The day ended with a Visceral Massage with Manuela who explained the importance of this treatment. The techniques used restore normal visceral (organ) movement and function and help to integrate the function or movement of the body as a whole. It's a very gentle abdominal massage that can be performed by massage therapists, osteopaths, allopathic physicians, and other practitioners to treat things such as constipation, post-surgical adhesions, back pain, and even stress, mood and sleep issues. Manuela used her hands to assess tense spots and gently compress and move certain soft tissues, feeling out for tender spots and scar tissue. What I recall was that she was focusing on my stomach, and the next thing she was waking me up at the end of our treatment!

Day two ended over a quiet dinner. At the restaurant, you have the same designated table prepared daily according to your programme. At mine, a detox herbal tea was always keeping me company. I had my soup, my main dish and my dessert (of course no sugar or dairy products) but it tasted great.

That night I couldn't sleep well as I was sore from the morning workout.

Day 3. A colourful day

Early rise, feeling light and so peaceful, the weather was amazing as the sun came out again and the view out of my terrace was simply divine. I went out to enjoy a morning walk around the lake. It was so refreshing. The colours of Montreux are just beautiful.

My day continued with a colour and a photo-stimulation session, which is a kind of anti-ageing treatment also known as light therapy. Photostimulation uses light to artificially activate biological compounds, cells and tissues. Skin cells can be photo-stimulated in the same way as plant photosynthesis to improve oxygenation and stimulate the skin cells responsible for collagen and elastin

production. The means smooth skin which regains elasticity and density, and therefore having an anti-ageing effect.

During the treatment, you have your eyes covered and all you can feel is the strong light of red, green and white consecutively. The treatment takes around 15 minutes.

Another relaxing afternoon followed until it was time for my highly anticipated Thai Massage. Nithaya, the lovely Thai Therapist who has been performing these treatments for 15 years as not only a certified massage therapist, but also a medical one as she used to work in a hospital and is a physiotherapist. So could you imagine the mix in her technique?

I arrived to the treatment room and was greeted by her. She asked me to sit on the edge of the treatment bed where she started examining my posture, my shoulders, even the spine alignment. To her, my body was tense (no wonder) and this was negatively affecting my posture and blocking the energy channels in the body.

I laid down and she started the treatment. I won't hide the fact that I was in pain most of the treatment and she was saying it is normal and to breathe out when I feel discomfort. 90 minutes after this intense massage (yes intense as at one point she was walking on my back), she applied a muscle relaxing cream and asks me to slowly stand up. And here is when I have to tell you that it was the first time since I had both of my kids that I could stand straight! (Did I mention the numerous times I heard my bones crack?) Well, at the end it felt great and I just felt that I wanted to sleep!

Early dinner and a very delicious pumpkin and passion fruit soup was waiting for me, followed by a plate of grilled vegetables and hummus dips that really looked great visually and didn't taste that bad. I then treated myself with my favourite fruit watermelon and called it a day.



Relaxation Room

Day 4. Mixed feelings of pain and relief

Not a great feeling, I tell you! I woke up super sore from the Thai massage and the muscle stimulation it involved and I was barely able to walk. It reminded me of the last month of my pregnancy, but it seems at Clinique La Prairie they know and expect these post-treatment symptoms, that's why I had a planned early session of "Yogalates" with Guillaume, my trainer. An hour of what is to be a mix of yoga and Pilates movements with stretching techniques outdoors in the open air and under the beautiful blue skies. Honestly, I enjoyed it so much and it felt so good afterwards as it released all my muscle discomfort. Breathing had a lot to do with that since, according to Guillaume, many of us (including me) breathe in the wrong way. Learning how to inhale and exhale properly and deeply soothes pain, relaxes muscles and most importantly brings in the oxygen to all your organs in the right amounts.

Relaxed and happy, I headed to my planned treatment – a body wrap that helps with firming and detoxing the skin.

Lunch was followed by a very interesting workshop with Olga the Dietician who took me through all sorts of healthy food components and recommendations for healthy, balanced eating. Olga had a prepared a special table set up at the spa café where she displayed all kinds of important foods with rich sources of minerals and vitamins so I could learn about each one and make sure to eat what is needed for my body.

The agenda that followed had two interesting treatments; the first was Cryotherapy, which literally means "cold therapy". This is a technique where the body is exposed to extremely cold temperatures for several minutes. The theory for whole-body cryotherapy (WBC) is that by immersing the body in extremely cold air for several minutes, you could receive a number of health benefits.

Despite the freezing -192 C that you are exposed to, there are numerous benefits such as reducing migraine symptoms, numbing nerve irritation, reducing arthritic pain, combating stress and reducing inflammation in the body.

Following this refreshing treatment, it was time for a relaxing massage that included what they call a "singing bowl".

The so-called Tibetan singing bowls are wonderful instruments made of an alloy of metals that have been used for sound healing and sound therapy for centuries. They are believed to originate in India and its neighbouring countries, although the history does not provide a clear-cut answer to their origins. The special thing about these bowls is that they produce a rich variety of harmonics and vibrations that have the capacity to stimulate us on a physical (relaxes the muscles, increases bowel movement, etc.), energetic (increases our vital energy, harmonises our personal resonance, etc.) and mental level (induces us to a meditative state, opens emotional blocks, etc.).

It was indeed a much-needed treatment to end my day.



Thai Massage

Day 5. My last day at the clinic

Adopting a vegan and caffeine free diet wasn't bad after all! And sugar free as well! By the fifth day, I felt so relaxed and energetic, but most importantly so much at peace. My skin was seriously radiant and I was totally convinced on how the food we eat and the lifestyle we lead affects our body and our wellbeing.

I enjoyed a morning swim at the iconic indoor pool that has a panoramic view of the beautiful Alps and thanked myself for giving my body and wellbeing such a personal treat.

After checking out and before heading to Milan – my second destination – I had a nice chat with Simone Gibertoni, CEO of Clinique La Prairie. He is tasked with the mission of growing this luxury clinic and its philosophy by continuing to maintain its exclusivity and unique approach to wellness.

Wrapping up my bespoke experience and discussing the future of the destination and its unique approach to wellness and its expansion into the rest of the world, I ask him:

Do you think you will grow the concept of Clinique La Prairie around the world?

That's a very important question and in fact something we are working on. You told me you found this a very exclusive place and you tried treatments that you haven't found anywhere else in the world and this is true. We have only 35 rooms but 350 staff, so on average six or seven staff for each guest – you don't find this anywhere else in the world. So whatever we are going to do in the

future, we have to keep this idea of exclusivity and a customized, tailored service. As you can imagine we always have customers asking “why don't you create somewhere for two hundred women in the United States?” for example. We are not interested in this.

What we envision in terms of development is basically explained in three different steps. The first is what we call City Hub – once they are back in their own city, we would like our guests to be able to find a place where they can continue to follow the programs from Clinique La Prairie under the guidance of our doctors, coaches, nutritionists etc. We know that despite us trying to do our best in the week while you're here, in order to sustain it you need to be following a program throughout the year until you come again. So we are building City Hubs all around the world – this is the first step and we are hoping it will help people live a longer and more healthy life. The second step is that there are technologies that we have developed at La Prairie that you can take with you. So we have created a holistic health campaign, which makes some of the technology that you experience here, available after your stay. The third step is that there are programs that you might want to do more regularly. So we are thinking about opening three more clinics – one in the United States, one in South East Asia and one in the Middle East. Hopefully this will allow some of the programs to be available locally to our clients who don't want to come all the way to Switzerland so regularly.

That's it – we don't want to open 200 clinics and the ones we do open will have the same set up – very exclusive and around 40 rooms. This is the only thing we are good in doing and we don't want to change that. What you receive here cannot be commercialised because the cost is so high and we cannot be anything but exclusive.



Simone Gibertoni, CEO, Clinique La Prairie



Spa & Residence

What do you think are the main challenges that you face?

In terms of challenges the first one we have is how can we make potential clients understand what we are. If you look at communication it may seem that we are more or less the same as others, but we know that we are different so we would like to improve the way we tell our clients, or potential clients, that what we do is very different. The second challenge we have is that with our system you have to care about the medical aspects. Whatever we do, even if you want the most spiritual treatment it has been chosen because of the science behind it and it has to be proven to work. That is how we challenge ourselves with any treatment we provide. It's about research, development and investment. The other challenge for us is to promote to people that we are very serious and everything is scientifically proven and our doctors are always behind the work we do. The majority of our clients will have a house bigger than the clinic with a private chef and a private doctor, so when they come here they need to find something unique otherwise they can stay at home. Our challenge is to make these people understand our value and comeback to us.

You have customers coming from all around the world – how do you offer something that will cater for everyone?

I always use a matrix of countries and age when I talk about wellness, so the wellness request of someone from China in his thirties is very different from the request of an American of the same age. So we have three big chunks of wellness philosophy – Asian, American and European – they are very different. So the question is how can we ensure these people buy our philosophy and trust us? Skincare is all about credibility our business is even more about how good we are at building this credibility and the fact that we have been here for 90 years shows this.

The bespoke approach is very important to you what can you tell us about that?

There are a few trends in wellness as you know, but for me the most important is the bespoke approach, which is more and more linked to genetics. I always say that the future of wellness is going to be a deeper, customized program because we know very well that in genetics there are people that can drink ten coffees for example,

but there are people who cannot drink even one because their system is not built for it. So you can't tell everyone that to detoxify they shouldn't drink coffee because that is not true. I believe the future of wellness is going to be more about the customization of the program, starting from the genetics. That's why we are acquiring a genetic company and why all of our programs include a genetic test. The human touch is super important for us so that's something that will be very difficult for us to balance in the future because many people want to experience technology and artificial intelligence within wellness.

Do you think the fast-paced lifestyle of today is meaning people are missing connecting back to the human touch?

What we often see here is actually people wanting to get away from all this technology and social media that will ruin their lives. So it is true that the human touch should be more and more important. The market would like us to create clinics of 200 or 300 rooms but we do the contrary, we are creating clinics with fewer rooms. This is also why we created the Private Retreat. This Private Retreat is the concept of having a private doctor, chef and nutritionist only for you. This can be for one week or two weeks but it means that all Clinique La Prairie services are available only for you. It is the ultimate in bespoke service and wellness.

How would you describe Clinique La Prairie in one sentence?

This best way to describe the uniqueness is that it is a perfect fusion between medical, wellness and luxury experience. You won't find this kind of experience anywhere else.

What is the message you want to spread?

The message for us is really our vision and mission. We would like to help our clients live a longer, healthier and better life. We are seeing a lot of people who have everything they want but they are not happy and healthy and so not living the life they want to lead. So when they come here we encourage them to step into a different life. That's our dream.

Reviewed by Lara Mansour Sawaya