

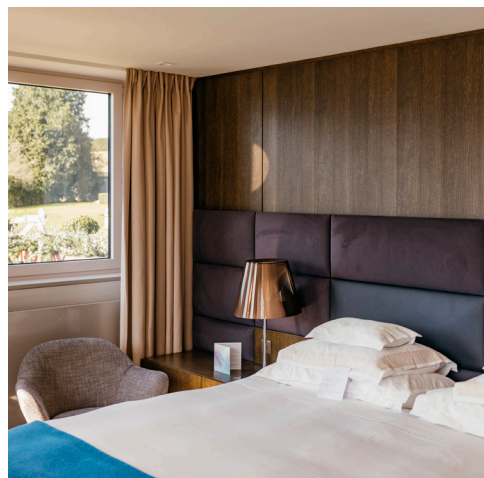


With a holistic approach to wellbeing, juice days, cryotherapy and inviting menu options, Clinique La Prairie is a spa whose benefits promise to extend beyond its polished doors.

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MADE TO LAST



1. The spa and wellness center
2. Enlightening reads
3. The clinic's luminous pool
4. Cosy room with a view
5. Overlooking Lake Geneva
6. Talented chef David Alessandria cooks healthy meals

It's minus 180c and I'm sitting in an icy cube wearing a pair of shearling slippers and woolen socks. Outside, my therapist Vararat is reciting the benefits of extreme cold – or cryotherapy – and what it can bring to the body and its metabolism. As the endurance reaches Everest-style chilliness, she resorts to a simple “You can do it!” The aim is to reach three minutes but, after two, I am already starting to feel the pinch.

I'm three days into a Reset Detox programme at Clinique La Prairie – a historic centre of health and longevity perched on a hill overlooking Lake Geneva, just outside Montreux, and, until this moment, there has been nothing much in the way of deprivation. The meals – though low in calories – have been delicious helpings of items such as red mullet cooked in fragrant spices, served on starched linen cloths by decorous waiting staff. One lunch ended with a vegan chocolate mousse. Only the glasses of odd-tasting “hydrogen water”, which are offered before each meal, hint to the fact this is a serious regime in a “medical spa”. “Giving too hard a detox can be counterproductive,” says

Mounir Ziadé, an internal medicine specialist who oversees the detox programme and its slightly more serious cousin – the Master Detox, which includes a “juice day,” colon cleanse and DNA test. “It should be healthy, of course, but it should be pleasant – then you produce the endorphins, dopamine – which of course is so much better than being stressed and starving.”

Here, a sense of serenity and jovial service feel part of the cure. Sunshine bathes the lobby where guests bask on white bouclé sofas sipping herbal infusions that come to dominate life here. The snowcapped Alps are visible from nearly every window, towering over the lake. After a breakfast of berries, vegan yoghurt and herbal tea, it's time for a jog along the corniche towards Montreux – passing locals rowing across the lake in skiffs and small children ambling on the shingle that lines the shore. I return in time to join CEO Simone Gibertoni for lunch, where a detox juice packed with turmeric (an antioxidant) is served in a long-stemmed cocktail glass. “Clinique La Prairie is a trust, so we invest our profits directly into research and



development,” says the Italian, tucking in to his roasted chicken and butternut squash. “We're at the forefront of preventative health, diagnosis and treatment. But we're also a family business – you feel it here.”

While the service is familial, there is no shortage of serious hi-spec technology on offer. The medical centre (connected to the spa through an underground tunnel) is staffed by 50 clinicians. Most guests take a DNA test on arrival, which is sent to a lab in Lausanne to help doctors see how the body processes caffeine, sugar and fats. There's also an epigenetics test – a technology with only two years on the market. “The epigenetic test is the expression of the genome – this is how the environment is expressed in your gene,” says Gibertoni, explaining the clinic's partnership with a company called Gene Predictis. “While your DNA is set, your epigenetic shows us something different. This is the way you play your piano.”

For me, it's time for a scan of the body for metals and minerals (good and bad). “You are clearly eating good quality fish,” says Ziadé, who warns that his patients'

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mercury levels have been rising as marine pollution worsens. For me, he also warns against sleeping or eating next to my phone (high levels of cadmium are present) and recommends more iron in the form of lentils. “And I can safely say no one is trying to poison you,” he says, jokingly, as we review the results mineral by mineral (arsenic included).

It's a thought I reflect on the next morning when suspended upside down during a session of “aerial yoga” (where you use Cirque du Soleil-style pieces of fabric to stretch and support the body). By now the lack of coffee, tea, alcohol and dairy is starting to trigger the occasional pang of yearning. My dietician, the emphatic and reassuring Ada Nisianaki from Athens, is quick

to dissuade me from dashing off for a morning espresso. “Focus on the small changes you are making in your diet,” she says, explaining the clinic's approach to food. Nisianaki is keen to change the long-term behaviours beyond the clinic walls. “Next week you'll be back in your kitchen, you'll open your cupboards and that's when you have to think, ‘Is this really healthy?’ Do your carbohydrates come from whole grain? Empty your life of things that are not part of your nutrition.”

While we're debating the merits of spelt and quinoa, some of the guests here are in search of an elixir of youth. Between deep-tissue massages and stints in an infrared booth, they are nipping off for doses of biostimulants, antioxidant drip therapy and meetings with estheticians. The clinic has a reputation for its longevity programme, which has attracted a host of stars. They check in for a comprehensive regime that combines the four pillars of medical care, nutrition, movement and wellbeing.

For me, it's the penultimate day of treatment. I have just been exfoliated with a salt scrub and wrapped in seaweed pulp. On my final jog along the lakeside, I feel lighter – like I have shed a second skin. But there's also a profound sense of perspective; I have come away with a new set of habits and insights into how my body works.

It's not so much about extending life but making the most out of every moment. The goal is to wake up every morning feeling vital. As I leave for the train station to return to Geneva, I ruminate on the doctor's words about how to take the clinic's principles beyond these polished doors. “The idea that your regime should not just be balanced but pleasant, joyful and sustaining is key to a rich and nourishing longevity.” I hope some of it sticks as I return to the real world and its vices. — K

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