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Dominic Lawson

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From Times Online

December 10, 2008

Spa at Hoteldorf Grüner Baum, Austria

Healing waters, glowing complexions and exotic treatments at a family-run hotel in the Austrian hills



IMAGE :1 of 2

Rachael Scott

RECOMMEND? (4)

USP A family-run hotel and spa that feels like a home from home nestled in a pretty valley on natural thermal waters.

AMBIENCE A note in the bathroom of our room informing guests all bathrobes are "equipped with an anti-theft device and will explode when leaving the hotel unallowed" exemplifies the unstuffiness of the family Blumscheins' hotel village.

Grüner Baum used to be a hunting lodge, so don't be surprised to see the odd deer skull lining the stairways as well as photographs of past popes and prime ministers who once stayed there.

The glowing skin of the therapists is one of the most noticeable things about the spa when you walk in. This is no doubt due to Grüner Baum's natural thermal water source, which comes straight from the surrounding mountains so drinking straight from the tap is recommended.



Quellenhotel & Spa, Styria, Austria

A new three-storey, luxury spa built into the woods has pools and holistic treatments galore bringing the Austrian 'health farm' into the 21st century

The Supreme Hotel, Bad Tatzmannsdorf, Austria

Hotel Hochschober, Turracher Hohe, Austria

BACKGROUND

Liquid bliss in Germany
Brenner's Park Hotel, Baden-Baden, Germany
Buhlerhohe Schlosshotel,

There are seven bright airy treatment rooms with views of the valley's pine trees, and as we were in Austria no one had any qualms about taking their clothes off in the sauna, steam room or indoor thermal pool, although it wasn't quite warm enough for skinny dipping in the heated outdoor pool. The spa's interior is fresh and modern with a feel for traditional Austrian design of wooden panelling and the indoor thermal pool is beautifully decorated with paintings of saucy mermaids.

EXPERIENCE The first treatment I had was a St Barth Softness Body Peeling Massage. My therapist Eike mixed Au Tiaré oil from a variety of gardenia flower with frozen papaya for my scrub to remove dead skin cells. I then had quick bath before she massaged my body with a gorgeous smelling

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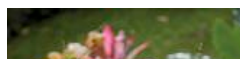
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Spas: Deutsche detoxing

coconut oil.

In the next room Richard was experiencing his first facial by Shiseido using hot towels, cooling creams, a standard steam

treatment and extractions. His therapist told him he had lovely skin for his age so he was happy before she'd even started, but he said it felt slightly odd when various creams were applied to his face.

Next for me was a very good pedicure and a St Barth Sensations Luxurious Body Mask with Pampering Relaxation Massage for Richard. He enjoyed this, although said he wasn't prepared for the intimacy of such a soft massage, which is possibly something therapists should warn their male clients about. Being a bit of a spa virgin he was even more shocked when she produced the obligatory paper knickers. He'll learn.

There are a wide range of seasonal sporting activities such as curling, mountain biking, skiing and tobogganing on offer.

FOOD The Grüner Baum spa has a juice bar serving freshly made juice and coffee only. The terraced Garden Restaurant that looks over the mountains (our cantankerous waiter simply added to the charm) serves hearty lunches such as red bell pepper soup with polenta and a sheep's milk cheese dumpling or deer stew in juniper sauce, with bead dumplings and red cabbage. The Panorama Restaurant serves à la carte and a substantial buffet.

IN-CROWD Slightly older, laid-back crowd taking advantage of the natural healing properties of the thermal waters. On the other hand, child massages are popular.

WALLET WATCH St Barth Sensations Luxurious Body Mask with Pampering Relaxation Massage – 60 mins for €75 (£68). St Barth Softness Body Peeling Massage – 30 mins for €39 (£35), followed by a St Barth Dream Exotic Beauty Bath – 20 mins for €37 (£33). Wellness Pedicure – 30 mins for €40 (£35). Two people sharing an apartment starts at €308 (£270).

NEED TO KNOW Hoteldorf Grüner Baum, Kötschachtal 25, A-5640 Bad Gastein, Austria (+43 (0) 6434 2516 0; www.hoteldorf.com)

The hotel is approximately 90km from Salzburg Airport with trains leaving for Bad Gastein about once an hour.

Swiss International Air Lines offer up to three flights a day to Salzburg, leaving from London City, Heathrow, Manchester and Birmingham. Return fares start from £229 per person including all taxes and charges and business class fares start from £558 return (0845 601 0956; www.swiss.com/uk)



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Dr Mark Porter

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