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From Times Online

April 11, 2007

Liquid bliss in Germany

Rachael Scott enjoyed a full moon underwater concert at the Toskana Therme, an East German spa



Rachael Scott

Eastern Germany probably doesn't spring to mind when deciding on your luxury spa weekend, but "Health and Happiness" is the motto of the Toskana Therme in Bad Sulza. Built on natural salt-water springs Bad Sulza has been a centre for health since the mid-1800s when it was realised the town's salt miners suffered from less ailments and respiratory disorders because of the air they were breathing.

The Toskana Therme opened in 1999 and the small, sleepy town is now besieged by up to 1,000 visitors a day to its medical spa (Klinikzentrum), wellness park and Liquid Sound – six swimming pools housed under glass domes – where bathers float effortlessly in body temperature salt water watching stunning light shows and listening to soothing music.

Liquid Sound

Maybe there is something in the water because Liquid Sound's fresh-faced creator Micky Remann looks considerably younger than his 55 years. He got the idea from researching musical interactions with Orca whales and found the technology to reproduce sound underwater for human consumption.

Initially offered as a recreational facility, Liquid Sound has become popular with people suffering from respiratory, rheumatic and chronic conditions in the Klinikzentrum next door. During a full moon Liquid Sound hold a magnificent show of light, colour and music and special concerts with guest musicians are organised.

Vincenzo Bianco, an Italian DJ living in Berlin, had created a special set on the night I attended. As he spun ambient sounds, the water was awash with neon-coloured light. Lovers hugged while others lay motionless like driftwood. Because sound doesn't echo or reverberate in water, the body's bones act as its conductor making Liquid Sound a whole body experience.

Liquid Bodywork – Aqua Wellness

Liquid Sound's complementary massage in Aqua Wellness

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Le Kalon Spa, South Kensington

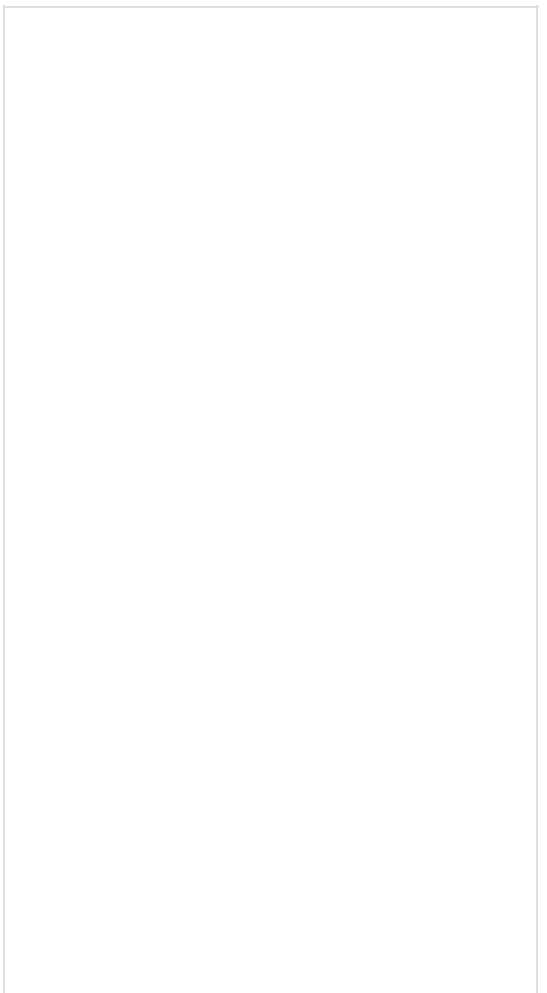
A lip-smacking fruity facial followed by a cocoa cleanser

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“Ah! You’re right,” she said, “you have big features and don’t need much make-up.” Aware of her mistake she toned it all down so when I looked in the mirror it wasn’t middle-aged Barbie staring back, but a naturally sculpted and better looking version of me. Sandra had done a great job. How wonderful it would be, I thought, to take her home.

USP Liquid Sound – a unique experience in relaxation combining state of the art technology with archaic rituals, reminding contemporary man of his relationship with nature. Centre Parcs doesn’t compare.

AMBIENCE Toskana Therme has put great effort into creating a mellow, but precise atmosphere for rest and relaxation. Everything is tailored so that doing nothing is the order of the day.

EXPERIENCE The 3-star hotel attached to Toskana Therme lacks character and would benefit from some homely touches. However, the welcoming and calming atmosphere of the spa compensates this with its five-star facilities and treatments. Other therapies included a 25-minute Cleopatra Bath with four different oils and goat’s milk with honey; the Singing Bowl Massage where different resonating bowls are used to transfer frequency on to body parts helping to restore inner harmony and Ayurvedic packages and relaxation days. Bring your own slippers.

FOOD Deciding what to have for dinner at the Felix Restaurant isn’t easy. The à la carte menu has a helpful list of potentially allergic substances in each dish, such as MSG or artificial sweeteners. Or there’s a hot and cold buffet during the evening so you can abstain from foods you react badly to or choose your own calorific content. Organic and locally sourced products are used wherever possible and the choice is varied and delicious. Chicken wrapped in swirls of mashed potato, meat or vegetable soup options, cubes of trout covered in sesame seeds, signature German sausages and a huge salad cart with various coleslaws, cabbages and sprouts. Optional sauces served on the side because they say that the more sauce the Thuringians have the happier they are.

IN CROWD An unpretentious crowd who are there solely to enjoy the healing and relaxing powers of the water. Designer babes wearing body-flaunting bikinis will make no impact on this laid-back crowd. Age ranges from 8-80 and that’s all part of the harmony Toskana Therme strives for. People queue up to get into the Liquid Sound pools from 9am and many come religiously to the full moon concerts every month.

WALLET WATCH Liquid Sound: £8.00 for two hours. Open Sunday-Thursday 10am-10pm, Friday-Saturday 10am-midnight. Opening hours are extended to 2am on full moon nights. Next full moon concert is 2nd May. Aqua-Wellness: £74.00 for 90 mins. Dr Hauschka Classic Treatment: £45.00 for 80 mins. Standard double room including breakfast and complimentary use of the Toskana Therme: £82.00

NEED TO KNOW Toskana Therme Bad Sulza, Wunderwaldstraße 2a, D-99518 Bad Sulza, Germany. +49 (0) 36 461 91080 www.toskanaworld.net. Ryanair flies to nearby Altenburg Airport (AOC).

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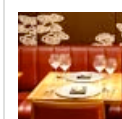
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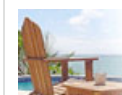
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Liquid Sound's complementary massage is Aqua wellness – a form of underwater deep tissue massage and stretching movements developed by Musia Heike Bus, who describes it as a journey back to your origins. It takes place in the Liquid Sound Temple, a high-ceilinged dome with a stained-glass window at its apex, and the idea is to relinquish yourself to the water. If you find your mind busy-beeing then you need to take deep breaths and focus on nothingness. For a control freak like myself who can't swim that's no easy objective and I would prove to be the ultimate challenge for Musia. Not that I could detect any irritation in her gentle voice.

Musia held me while I succumbed to saltwater, listened to the whale song filtering through underwater speakers and watched the coloured lights dancing on the pool's surface. She put a float under my knees and neck and lying there stiff as a board I realised the water was raising my body and I started to relax. Musia gently massaged my limbs, pulled my body and performed acupressure down my spine. This is quite an intimate experience and as I shut my eyes I could feel every ripple of water. After an hour I was floating with no assistance. I didn't find my inner child, but felt completely rested and strangely energetic.

Dr Hauschka Classic Treatment

My therapist Sandra started with a rosemary footbath and lavender hot wipes to cleanse my face. "You have an impurity," she announced. A huge spot had surfaced next to my nose and I'd made a hatchet job squeezing it. Red and pulsating, Sandra dabbed it with anti-bacterial cream and then squeezed my nose free of blackheads. It was rather odd having someone else do that.

It felt as if she were wearing tiny velvet mittens on her fingertips when she drained the toxins away from my face, neck and décolletage with a lymphatic massage. She then covered my face with a cream mask and left me for 10 minutes. I've never worn much make-up, but just to make a change, I was willing to let Sandra experiment. I have large eyes and a full mouth, so rarely wear eyeliner or lipstick. Alarm bells rang when she put eye shadow up to my brows. Then she applied blusher, which I haven't done since I was six, followed by heavy lipstick. Sandra judged her handiwork.

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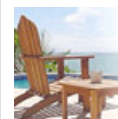
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