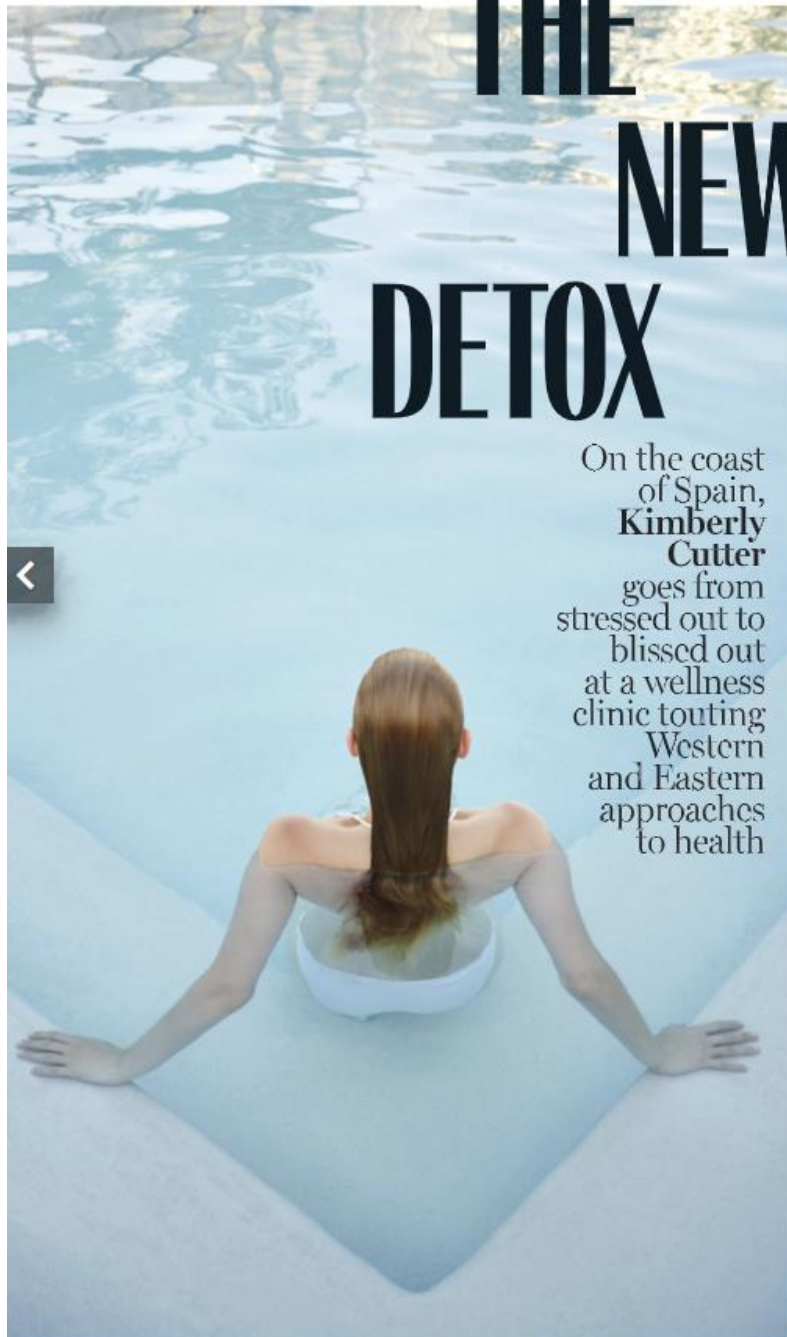


THE NEW DETOX

On the coast of Spain, Kimberly Cutter goes from stressed out to blissed out at a wellness clinic touting Western and Eastern approaches to health



The man from SHA met me at the airport. Tall, French, and handsome, he took my bags, bundled me into a purring Mercedes, and drove me through the mountains of Spain's Costa Blanca until we came to a glowing white compound of hanging gardens and terraces stacked in the hills like a posh cruise ship, where he announced, in a solemn tone, "Madame, we have arrived in SHA."

One does not arrive at the SHA Wellness Clinic; one arrives *in* the SHA Wellness Clinic, like it's a country or a religion, a world in which you must immerse yourself completely. As it happens, Madame was badly in need of SHA. Madame, it's fair to say, was a bit of a basket case. I had just come off a book deadline and had been working more or less like a maniac for the past six weeks, subsisting on coffee and chocolate and my husband's Christmas cookies, waking up every morning at 4 a.m. and writing, basically, until I fell over each night. I was at the point where I was leaving my phone in the freezer and my sneakers in the oven—the point where my skin looked like a bad oyster and my hair looked like a dirty broom and my husband had taken to eyeing me like I was a creature from the zombie apocalypse whenever we passed each other in the hall. When the call came from *Marie Claire* asking if I wanted to attend a weeklong stress-management and detox retreat at a wellness clinic on the southeastern coast of Spain, I nearly wept with gratitude.

The place is so glamorous, it could easily be mistaken for a Bond villain's compound. I followed Lara, the guest-relations coordinator, past a splashing fountain, through the pale marble-and-glass lobby, and up a staircase lined with fresh orchids into a minimalist gray cocoon of a suite with a private terrace, a steaming Jacuzzi, and eye-popping views of the Sierra Helada mountains. The vibe was pure zen-Paltrow. You can see why people like Naomi Campbell and Petra Nemcova have been here.

Lunch was served in an enormous glass box (to the right of the helipad), with the Mediterranean flashing in the background. Leggy models and silver-haired billionaires drifted by in white robes and slippers while Sade crooned "Smooth Operator" softly through the speakers. I ate a silken tomato casserole, followed by a sublime monkfish tataki and a dessert of cocoa crème with hazelnuts, and wondered, *How is this detox?*

But underneath the fabulousness, there was a distinctly serene quality to my lunch. The talk was hushed and phone use minimal. Not a selfie was taken, not a cocktail consumed. I was mildly disgruntled when my request for water was refused. ("Is better not to drink while you eat," my server said gently. "After, I bring you tea.") And my attempts to chew each bite 50 times, as I'd been instructed, were entirely unsuccessful. But instead of feeling stuffed and sugar-jumpy the way I usually do after such a meal, I felt calm and steady, as if a pure, clean flow of energy was moving through me.

Alas, by 2 p.m., I was back to my usual worn-out state. I lay down in my room for a 20-minute catnap and woke up two hours later—late for my first appointment. At SHA, each guest is assigned a "care team" of experts; the general practitioner on my team was José Ramón Sanders. "I think you are very tired, yes?" the doctor said when I arrived bleary-eyed at his office.

"Yes," I said.

BEAUTY

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The infinity pool at SHA Wellness Clinic in Alicante, Spain

After I filled him in on the details of my general life insanity, he nodded sympathetically and said, “We see many people who have these problems now.”

“Do you think you can fix me?” I asked, sounding more despondent than I’d intended.

He smiled. “Yes, we can fix you,” he said. “With the Detox, we will cleanse your body of toxins and allow it a chance to rest and heal. Then, with the Stress Management, we will treat your anxiety and fatigue and teach you new tools to manage your emotions going forward.” He laid out a plan for the week that included a dizzying array of treatments ranging from vinyasa yoga and mindfulness training to colonics and a new cognitive treatment called transcranial photobiomodulation that apparently has been effective with stressed-out people like me.

At the core of my SHA program was a macrobiotic diet, which, along with natural therapies, SHA’s founder, Alfredo Bataller Parietti, credits with curing him of colon cancer in 2008. Inspired by his experience, Parietti—a successful real estate developer—decided to build the kind of place he wished was around when he was diagnosed: basically a five-star health temple with a top-flight medical clinic that embraces both Eastern and Western approaches to healing. The 15 MDs on staff work in concert with acupuncturists, herbalists, psychotherapists, energy healers, cuppers, and underwater-shiatsu masseuses to create a kind of holistic health rainbow increasingly popular thanks to the explosion of the wellness movement. SHA may be the only place in the world where you can get stem-cell therapy, genetic testing, live blood analysis, Botox, and a mani-pedi all in one day.

My next appointment, with nutritional consultant Melarie Waxman, shed more light on the food situation. (I was hoping to lose the five pounds of Christmas cookies I’d gained.) Waxman explained that the SHA diet is not about calorie-counting

but based on the yin-yang philosophy that health and vitality are achieved by finding balance in life. “Our blood is mildly alkaline, however stress and certain foods can make fluids more acid, and that can lower energy levels and compromise the immune system,” Waxman explained. “Alkaline-forming foods help to keep the body strong.”

Depending on their goals, guests at SHA are placed on one of three eating plans: a weight-loss diet called Kushi, a moderate version called Biolight, or the SHA gastronomic menu—all of which create an alkaline state and give the digestive system a chance to rest and repair itself. Apparently, my lunch was part of the Biolight plan—i.e., healthy but not nuts. For the next week, I would continue on this surprisingly satisfying diet, which consisted mostly of whole grains, cooked vegetables, legumes, beans, and seaweed, plus small amounts of fruit and the occasional fish. There would be no caffeine, no dairy, no refined sugar, no alcohol. The food was so good, you would happily pay through the nose to eat it even if you weren’t trying to rid your body of toxins.

Still, I felt awful for the first few days. The detox process is not a pretty one—even under the best of circumstances. After a deep-tissue massage and a dinner of endive-and-chicory salad with blood-orange sauce and mushroom risotto, I woke up at 4 a.m. with a headache that felt like my skull was caught in a bear trap. My hip bones and spine ached so badly, I couldn’t fall back asleep. “That’s the acid coming out,” Waxman told me when I saw her a few hours later. “You can ask for *ume sho kuzu* tea at breakfast; it’s very good for a headache.” She also told me if the tea didn’t help, I could get acetaminophen from the nurse. The tea did nothing for my headache, but thankfully the acetaminophen did.

“I had a headache too in the beginning,” said Cosima, a woman from London who sat next to me at lunch and was finishing up her second week at SHA. “Your body’s having caffeine and sugar withdrawal. It will go away in a few days.”

Achy and exhausted, I forged ahead with my appointments. I received a colonic from a Russian woman who cried, “Oh là là, very good!” when she was especially pleased with her results. I met a traditional-Chinese-medicine therapist

No purse.
No problem.

BEAUTY

who assessed my “energy health” and prescribed something called Bioresonance therapy to unblock my liver, kidneys, and spleen and “activate” my vitality. This involved hooking me up to a machine that looked a lot like a 1970s stereo, having me spit into a little glass vial, and holding on to an attached vibrating brass ball that supposedly “normalizes” electromagnetic waves in the body that are on the fritz. Later, I met Beatriz, who gave me acupuncture that, for a little while, made me feel as calm and satisfied as a spoiled cat. There were daily yoga classes and therapeutic massages and workouts at the gym that I dragged myself to no matter how hideous I felt. And on the third day, there was Bruno.

Dr. Bruno Ribeiro do Couto is the head of the cognitive-therapy unit. He asked “How are you?” in a way that made me want to tell him everything. I told him: I felt like hell. I told him that I’d been sleeping like a crazy person for the last few months, that I felt anxious and depressed and completely burned out. Then I said more: “I feel like my phone is killing me.” I told him that I felt like I was constantly being pulled in 1,000 different directions at once, that I was exhausted by the endless emails and texts and bleating re-

also told me that I needed to learn to put my phone in a drawer.

“Does anyone actually do that?”

He nodded gravely. “Kim, you must learn how.”

The treatment itself lasted for about 30 minutes. I couldn’t feel a thing while it was happening, but the next day, I began to feel better. Slowly my headache and body aches abated. I slept soundly that night and woke up at 7 a.m., humming with calm, clear energy. I joined a morning group walk to the lighthouse and zipped joyfully down the path toward the sea like I was being swept by a giant broom. I started kicking ass on the treadmill at the gym and making friends at yoga class. Suddenly, everything seemed to be clicking. My miso soup, oatmeal, and hummus breakfast tasted like heaven, and the Tibetan bowl massage by a man named Juan Pedro made me feel that my soul was singing in my body.

Most important, later that afternoon, I met with a stress-management consultant named Conceição Espada who provided me with the least sexy but probably most valuable teachings of my week at SHA—ones I’m still using after being home for three weeks now. After talking to me for an hour, Espada confirmed everyone else’s

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minders on my phone, exhausted every time I looked at the headlines, or at the frantic grinning cancan of Instagram, or at the poor dying orangutans and melting icebergs on Facebook. “It’s too much,” I said. “I can’t sleep, and when I finally do sleep, I spend the whole time dreaming about the poor orangutans.”

He looked at me closely for several moments. “You are very depleted,” he said quietly. “The world seems very overwhelming when you are this tired. We must build you back up again.” He had me take a series of neurocognitive tests on the computer (remembering sequences of numbers and patterns) that confirmed I was a burned-out monster. Then he brought out a cap that looked like it was made of white and blue Legos and strapped it to my head, along with a little blue clip that attached to my right nostril. This, he explained, was the photobiomodulation cap—a laser therapy that’s been studied at Harvard that relieves symptoms of PTSD, depression, brain injuries, and anxiety by boosting cell renewal in the brain. “The cap reads and modulates brain activity and applies gentle rays to specific areas of the brain to rebalance cellular recovery,” Ribeiro do Couto explained. “It’s been very successful. I think within three or four years, these will be very common.” He

opinion that I was “deeply out of balance” and instructed me in something called abdominal breathing, which is very simple but incredibly calming. Espada also taught me a mindfulness training exercise in which I stared at a candle flame for half an hour. She also gave me a mandala coloring book and colored pencils, with strict instructions to color one mandala each day, and it all sounds a bit silly and insubstantial (when I told my husband about the coloring book, he laughed and asked, “Isn’t that very five years ago?”), but the point of these exercises has nothing to do with the newest or latest or coolest or most high-tech. Quite the opposite. The point is to slow yourself down and notice the serious miracle of being alive—in a body, on a planet hurtling through space—which we tend to forget when we’re fielding a constant barrage of emails and texts and pinging phone reminders and thrilling images on our screens. Focusing on your breathing, or coloring, or staring at a candle flame can sound extremely dull after nonstop deadline stress and tech stimulation, but such steady, Espada insists, is the key to our sanity, and, increasingly, I think she’s right.

So I breathed. I colored. I stared at the candle flame. I felt better. And somehow along the way, I lost five pounds. **mc**