

Spa STIMULATION

Dubai-based lifestyle guru, Faiza Rangoonwala, 44, makes a pilgrimage to the A-list's Mediterranean destination spa.

Styling by SALLY MATTHEWS

Words by AOIFE STUART-MADGE



If the thought of a week spent purging the body on a macrobiotic diet conjures up ideas of deprivation in the name of detox, think again. A new breed of super-spas are offering total rejuvenation of the mind, body and soul – all achieved while nestled in the bosom of opulence. Dubai-based lifestyle guru Faiza Rangoonwala recently visited one such haven: Spain's SHA Wellness Clinic, where A-listers like Kylie Minogue and Naomi Campbell come to relax and recharge in an environment that is as discreet as it is luxurious.

Forty-four year-old Faiza knows a thing or two about taking care of her body: in her everyday life, she follows a strict pescatarian diet and enjoys jogging, yoga and pilates to keep in shape. So a week of macrobiotic cooking, outdoor yoga sessions and floatarium sessions are not too daunting a prospect, in fact, she relishes the idea, especially as she has been named the Middle Eastern ambassador for the resort.

She would have made the trip sooner, she insists, but, in an all-too-familiar tale, her hectic Dubai schedule prevents her from devoting as much time to her healthy lifestyle as she would like. Having recently

launched a new fashion venture, on top of managing her thriving furniture business, any travelling she does is on work trips to her native Pakistan - with little time for relaxation. "My furniture workshop is based in Pakistan, and I have to go at least once a month to oversee the work," explains the mother of two. "And my new venture with Pakistani fashion also entails travelling back and forth."

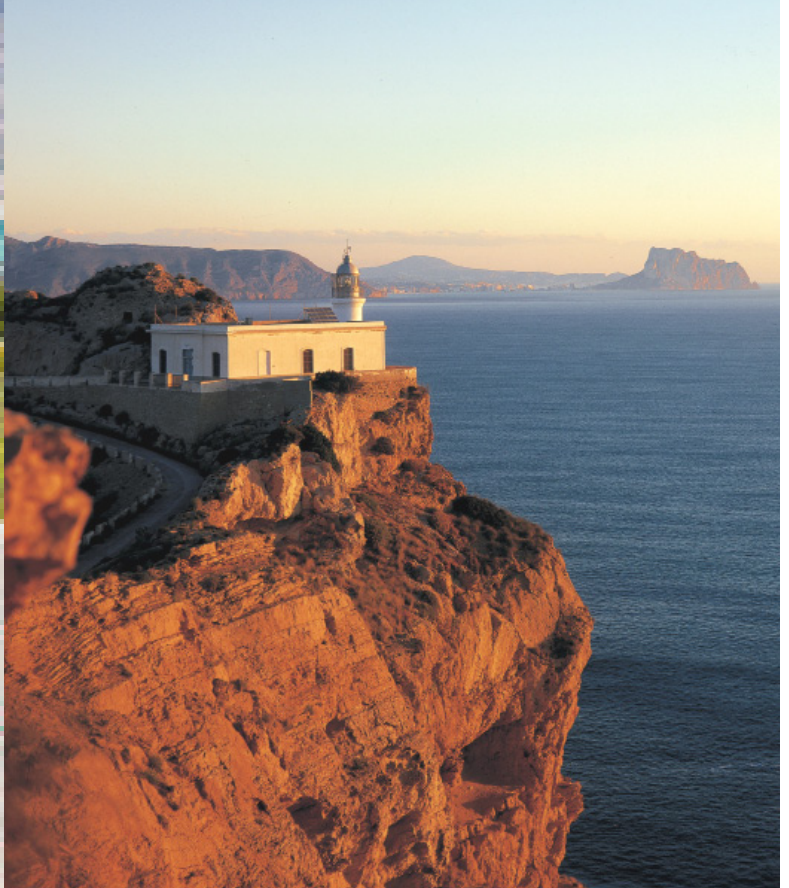
Blessed with natural beauty, she skips in-salon hair and nail treatments in favour of at-home maintenance. Her one concession to pampering is an annual trip to a destination spa. "I am so not a regular salon and beauty treatment person!," says Faiza. "That's because I'm lucky to have great skin and hair. I prefer to do my own hair and nails, and once a year I travel to a destination spa where I get myself thoroughly pampered with facials, massages, and I detox." In fact, the clean-living enthusiast admits that her spa trips are her one addiction. "I definitely am hooked on getting away from it all, and on getting that me-time once a year."

And where better to renew, refresh and revitalise than the stunning Mediterranean coastal resort at SHA? Travelling with a group of friends from Dubai, Faiza describes the resort as the "best medical wellness

Inside one of the spa's minimalist treatment rooms



Faiza takes in the stunning views from the pool



facilities I have been to” – high praise from a destination spa connoisseur. She adds, “I learned so much about myself and came back with a changed outlook.”

A typical day at SHA began with an early morning walk to take in the stunning coastal views, either along the beach or to the nearby lighthouse, followed by breakfast (“a delicious rice porridge, along with rye toast and stewed fruit and a bowl of miso soup”) served on the terrace with sprawling ocean views. The resort consists of five separate architectural structures – decorated by renowned interior designers Elvira Blanco Montenegro and Francisco Palacios – that are all connected by bridges. It houses 93 suites, swimming pools, waterfalls, Zen, Mediterranean and tropical gardens. Faiza describes how the setting augmented her state of relaxation – even before setting foot in a treatment room: “The spa is set in the hill, overlooking the quaint town of Altea, in the south of Spain,” she explains. “The spa and hotel is a beautiful piece of architecture, and has been designed on split levels with rooms facing the sea.” She adds, “The views are magnificent, with the sea in the backdrop. There was a refreshing aroma of pine, as the vegetation is very lush.”

After breakfast, Faiza would have a medical consultation or a beauty treatment: the resort offers an array of wellness, anti-aging and aesthetic treatments, blending Oriental practices with Western technique – something seasoned traveller Faiza has experience of. “I have been to Thailand several times to spas, so am familiar with Oriental medicine such as acupuncture and reflexology.”

At SHA, Faiza opted for a combination of detox massages, lymphatic drainage, and hydrotherapy treatments, coupled with craniosacral therapy, and a facial (she stopped short of any cosmetic procedures, preferring to let nature take its course on that front). “The craniosacral therapy was different to any other treatments I’ve done previously. It is meant to unclog blockages in your system,” says Faiza. “I did it specifically for my back pain, but it ended up being very emotional as the focus of the treatment changed.” The most long-lasting results, says Faiza, were from the seaweed wraps on her lower body. “I felt smoother afterwards and the effect has stayed.”

An hour a day was spent in the resort’s hydrotherapy circuit which uses water, either internally or externally, to revitalise, maintain and ▶



Yoga enthusiast Faiza strikes a pose in the spa's stunning outdoor area



restore health and prevent disease, followed by a macrobiotic lunch (“a crisp salad with Oriental dressing or a barley risotto”), and some downtime by the pool. “The poolside is gorgeous, and the terraces are tastefully decorated with sunbeds and cabanas,” says Faiza. “I spent a lot of my time in this area spacing out and just soaking up the views.”

Come 5pm, there was just time to squeeze in another treatment before curling up with a book to watch the sunset. The day was finished with a healthy dinner (non-gluten lasagna was a favourite). “There was always live music, and good conversation,” says Faiza. “There was four of us at our dinner table when we arrived, and 12 by the end!”

Lavish treatments and sparkling repartee aside, the aspect of the trip which has made the biggest impact is the nutritional advice, says Faiza. “The nutritionist was brilliant and I have managed to incorporate her advice into my eating plan and see a big difference. Three months later, the positive effects have lasted.”

Faiza adds, “All the food served at the spa is macrobiotic and I really enjoyed it. The standard of every ingredient used was of the highest quality, and the fusion of Japanese and European cuisine made every

meal delicious.”

Back home it’s a diet she intends to continue. “I have already incorporated the use of seaweed in my diet, as its nutritionally really good for you. I am also a big fan of miso soup, and the use of brown rice instead of white.” And the experience has made her entire family healthier as a whole. “My husband and teenage children have learned to love eating more vegetables, and we are making a transition to organic vegetables and fruits, as we have started growing them in our garden.”

Ultimately, says Faiza, she gained so much more than she ever hoped or intended. “I usually go to a spa to detox, catch up on my sleep and lose a couple of kilos.” After this trip, she felt renewed – both inside and out. “I was glowing, sleeping better and much more relaxed. Before the trip, my digestive system was giving me problems, now those are resolved. I also have a much more positive outlook to life.”