

# Fiona Duncan



The best places to stay in Britain and Ireland



**I**t's a new year and I am renewed: cleansed, balanced, detoxed,

invigorated and almost dangerously relaxed. And the new me has been achieved not by living off seaweed on a far-flung island or jetting to India, but by hopping on the bus to Park Lane and holing up at the COMO Metropolitan hotel for 24 hours. Most British hotel spas offer no more than pampering treatments; at the Met's Shambhala Urban Escape, experts conduct treatments that certainly pamper but also dig deep and get results.

First up for attention was my wandering mind, which I took along to one of Jody Shield's monthly LifeTonic sessions. "You may like to bring a cushion", we were advised. What a twit I felt, clutching a great orange velvet thing that was all I'd had to hand as I filed with Jody's blonde, beautiful and cushion-free devotees into a room close to the minimalist hotel's Nobu restaurant. As it turned out, I was grateful



for my cushion and felt sorry for my fellow 60 or so participants sitting for three hours with their eyes closed.

Jody practises "modern healing to soothe the soul" and in a calm, persuasive voice lulls her audience into a mass meditation in order to locate and dispel bad memories ("frozen inside us like polaroids") and to find their happy inner child and have fun with it.

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Having "let go" or tried to (tissues were on hand), we were then asked to become "sponges" in order to "receive". Feeling rather sleepy by now, and idly wondering if I needed more washing powder, I wasn't sure what we were supposed to be receiving. But thanks to my cushion, I was comfortable and had a nice, soothing time, which passed, as Jody had said, in a flash. My inner child, however, remained elusive.

"Enlightenment lite" you might call it, designed for the quick-fix smart phone age – but still, I felt calmer for it and softened for what was to come. In the spa, I

embarked on a programme of detox and rejuvenation for face and then body and drifted blissfully on a heated bed, occasionally rising to shower away a scrub or soak in a hot bath. The constant motion of soothing hands eased away my troubles; muscles were unknotted; my face was lifted and plumped with something called Hydraderm Cellular Energy and a ThermoLift Mask that covered eyes and mouth, leaving only the nose to breathe; pressure points were stimulated and mugwort was burned at meridians (moxibustion) to aid detoxification.

The practitioners were masters of their art. Louise has been a Guinot facialist for 15 years and her bespoke treatments elicited amazing results. Jana's detoxifying skin treatment preceded an invigorating salt scrub and hot bath and a nurturing Shambhala massage. Finally I met Ayako for moxibustion and Japanese acupuncture on my dodgy knees, plus a powerful shiatsu massage.

Evening came. Nobu's Japanese-Peruvian cuisine makes the perfect

## WHAT TO DO

So as not to spoil all that good work on your body and mind, head for Hyde Park – London's vast lung – and stroll to the Royal Albert Hall (020 7589 8212; royalalberthall.com), the rhubarb and cream-coloured concert hall built by Queen Victoria in memory of her much-mourned husband. New for 2017 is its daily Secret History Tour during which you will discover the unexpected story of London's most iconic concert venue, hear backstage gossip and tales of ghost hunters, gangsters, suffragettes, swindlers and stars – including one who was so overawed at the sight of the venue that he decided to go horse-riding instead of turning up for his concert. As a dazzling modern contrast to the Albert Hall, head for the Serpentine Sackler Gallery (020 7402 6075; serpentinegalleries.org), opened in 2013 in an 1805 gunpowder magazine just across Hyde Park's Serpentine Bridge from the Zaha Hadid-designed Serpentine Art Gallery, which includes a curvaceous café/restaurant, The Magazine, and exhibition space. Current exhibitions include the early drawing and paintings of the late Zaha Hadid and the work of the New York-based film artist Lucy Raven (both until February 12).

complement to a day of treatments in the spa. At dinner I glowed like a worm and next morning, as I looked down on London from our cool, minimalist Penthouse Suite, felt energised, invincible, young, fun and free. Blimey, I think I just found my inner child.

Old Park Lane, Mayfair, W1K 1LB (020 7447 1000; comohotels.com). Doubles from £371 per night, excluding breakfast; one-night Body, Mind and Spirit Wellness Package from £705 per person. Access possible for guests using wheelchairs.

## READER OFFER



To the manor born  
Combe Grove Hotel, Bath  
From £115 per person

- Two-night stay in a Garden Lodge room with valley view
- Breakfast daily
- Glass of prosecco or bottle of beer pre-dinner
- £25 dinner allowance on first night

Save up to 35 per cent on a relaxing one or two-night stay at Combe Grove Hotel, an 18th-century manor house set in 70 acres of woodland near Bath. With a leisure club and spa, including an indoor pool, sauna and steam room, it is the ideal location in which to recharge and refresh.

Fred Mawer, *Telegraph Travel's* Bath expert, says: "Panoramic views unfurl from the main house, southwards across Monkton Combe valley and a patchwork of rolling countryside as far as the chalk white horse at Westbury."

Book by January 31 for stays until March 31 (Sunday to Thursday; blackout dates apply). Quote "TELP"; 0333 122 5096; see terms: telegraph.co.uk/tt-combe-grove-hotel



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## COMO Metropolitan London

### How it rates

8/10

Location	8
Style/character	6
Service	9
Rooms	7
Food and drink	9
Value for money	7