



Alice in  
*weight-loss*  
 wonderland 

# Discovering a *lightness* of being

This month our weight-loss columnist Alice Dogruyol discovers what it means to balance body and mind, get fitter, eat well and lose weight in the process, at The Body Retreat, Dorset.

I had been struggling to manage my blood sugar levels and motivate myself to exercise; I was in a vicious cycle of eating the wrong things, feeling extremely fatigued, my weight had plateaued, and I was in need of a complete mind and body reset. Despite my best intentions, I couldn't seem to find the motivation to implement all the things I knew I could be doing, so I booked into The Body Retreat, a women-only weight-loss retreat in Dorchester, in the hope that it would be the catalyst for change that I needed.

The train journey from London to Dorchester South was easy. At the station, I jumped into a taxi with two other women who were also heading to the retreat. They were "returners" who had both been several times before and could not speak highly enough about it; they couldn't wait to get started on their annual retreat and neither could I. In fact, one woman had extended her retreat to a second consecutive week as she had loved the first week so much.

We arrived at the beautiful sprawling stone farmhouse where we quickly settled in and Jules Abernethy and Julie Brealy, The Body Retreat co-founders,

warmly welcomed us into the luxurious, cosy living room. Then, in front of a roaring open fire they talked us through what to expect over the next week.

Any anxieties I had about the trip began to melt away and I quickly felt reassured that I was exactly where I needed to be. The location was stunning, the bed super-comfortable and the small group of women were lovely. The philosophy and programme



at The Body Retreat was exactly what I hoped it would be. Everything was designed around female biology and based on eating better and moving smarter whilst nurturing emotional health. I wondered: would this place finally help me reclaim my body and resolve my complicated relationship with food? I was excited to find out...

## FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

That night, we enjoyed a welcome dinner of a delicious Mediterranean bean stew on a bed of rocket with feta crumbles. And it's no surprise that the food on offer was exemplary, as Jules not only runs the retreat but is a professional and exceedingly talented chef with a profound understanding of nutrition. She managed to elevate healthy, unprocessed, simple ingredients to a whole new level that I didn't think was possible! Her passion for food and flavour was evident in every dish and there was always a thoughtful extra touch in each perfectly balanced meal. Her wild garlic pesto and grilled halloumi salad was a sensation – better than I've eaten in any restaurant in the world.



WORDS: ALICE DOGRUYOL. IMAGES: ALICE DOGRUYOL, SHUTTERSTOCK AND THE BODY RETREAT.





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Everyone's food preferences and dietary requirements were catered to. I wanted a lower-carb diet than the others, while some didn't want dairy or gluten; we were all listened to and served three beautifully prepared meals and a snack each day.

I'd stopped drinking coffee on the run up to the retreat, but nonetheless, everyone was offered a cup of freshly brewed black organic coffee every morning, which I managed to abstain from.

During the week we attended insightful talks on food and nutrition where Jules debunked diet myths, cleared up confusion around weight management and explained her 80/20 rule. Jules encourages women to follow

healthy food rules 80 per cent of the time with 20 per cent leeway, because she recognises that we aren't robots and can't be perfect all the time.

**CONSCIOUS COOKING**

Two words that were never uttered on the retreat were, "diet" or "restriction". The Body Retreat has a very clear food philosophy coined by Jules as "conscious cooking", which is about making conscious choices at every stage of the food journey. As a NLP master, behaviour coach and hypnotherapist she was adept at making us all think about what we eat, when we eat, how we eat and why we eat. This was the first retreat I had attended that took a deep dive into all





the complex aspects of food with which I've struggled for so long.

Part of our daily practice at the dinner table was to chew slowly, put down our cutlery in between each bite and to always leave a small piece of food on our plate – three things I rarely do at home. It was amazing how much fuller and better I felt just doing these three simple things at each mealtime.

### GETTING MOVING

I'm not at my fittest or in the best shape of my life, so I was worried I might not be able to cope with the daily exercise regime, but thankfully there was no pressure to attend all the activities. Much to my delight, the exercise classes were delivered in 15-20-minute bursts, occasionally a little longer, which was a revelation to me. Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to slog it out at the gym for an hour to achieve a good energy burn – exercise can actually be fast and fun! Recent research all points to 15 minutes of intense activity being more effective than prolonged gentler exercise, which was music to my ears.

Julie, a professional PT, weight management specialist, former semi-pro sports woman and ultra-marathon runner, designed and delivered our morning workouts. They got our hearts racing without being too gruelling or intimidating like other bootcamps I've been to in the past. The classes varied each day: kettlebells,

circuits, dance, Pilates, yoga, swimming and water aerobics.

### MINDFUL WALKS

As well as the intense exercise and nutritious food, it was the daily, guided country walks with Julie that were a personal highlight. Some stumps were more challenging than others; plodding uphill through muddy fields was tricky at times but reaching the top

of a hill and looking out over the rolling green hills was breath taking. To be in such unspoiled nature was incredibly uplifting and the feeling of accomplishment after completing a 10k walk was a real confidence boost. The walks varied in length and difficulty, but I managed to complete all of them.

I had fallen out of the habit of taking daily walks and it reminded me how invigorating and energising walking in nature can be. I wasn't as speedy as the others but we all caught up with each other at meeting points and had lovely bonding chats as we meandered through the woods, slopes and valleys.

### MIND OVER MATTER

For me, I believe the majority of my weight gain is certainly rooted in my emotions. As a young child I started comforting myself with food to survive the pain of losing my grandmother, and the habit followed me into adulthood. In my case, as a type 1 diabetic, I also have significant hormonal imbalances that impact my hunger levels, energy levels, feelings of fullness and fat storage, making weight loss and exercise even more





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challenging than normal. So, it was a relief to learn that Jules understands how emotions impact our food choices and she tackled this head on during the week by giving insightful fireside talks exploring the ways we relate to food. She did a great job of removing the stress from eating and making it a joyful experience. Her group hypnosis session, which was centred around self-love, nourishment and putting you back in control of your health, was a powerful end to the retreat.

### TREAT YOURSELF

Throughout our stay, we all had some wonderful massages, facials and sessions in a contraption called The Body Ballancer® – a lymphatic drainage compression garment that you slip into, lie back, then let it gently roll over your body helping to increase circulation and decongest fluid build-up in your legs, hips, tummy and bum (you can also use it on your arms). It's used by athletes to aid recovery and avoid delayed onset muscle soreness, or DOMS as it accelerates the removal of waste products and excess fluid via the lymphatic system, reducing the appearance of cellulite, improving skin tone, and giving you a super-relaxing massage. I loved it! I would happily

have used it every day and have been fantasising about having one at home, but I'd first need to win the lottery!

### THE RESULTS...

By the end of the week, I'd lost four kilos – almost nine pounds in seven days. I'd also lost several centimetres from my waist, legs, hips and arms. I'd

been weighing myself on my Withings Body Scan scales (see July issue), which showed my fat reducing and muscle increasing daily, as well as a reduction in visceral fat. It was great to see those trends emerging and all while eating three meals a day and a snack.

But by the end of the retreat, I wasn't so bothered about the numbers as I was feeling empowered, motivated and proud of myself. I was chewing more slowly, eating well and exercising.

While at The Body Retreat I also had the best blood sugar readings I've had for two years. My glucose monitor showed I was 96 per cent in range! I also learned that balance in all aspects of my life was possible. The things I was reminded of, the new things I learned, and the beautiful people I met, will stay with me for a long time. I expect I too will become a "returner" and I can't wait to go back.



The Body Retreat has locations in Dorset, Somerset and France. To find out more and book a stay, visit [thebodyretreat.co.uk](http://thebodyretreat.co.uk). Prices start from £2,350.