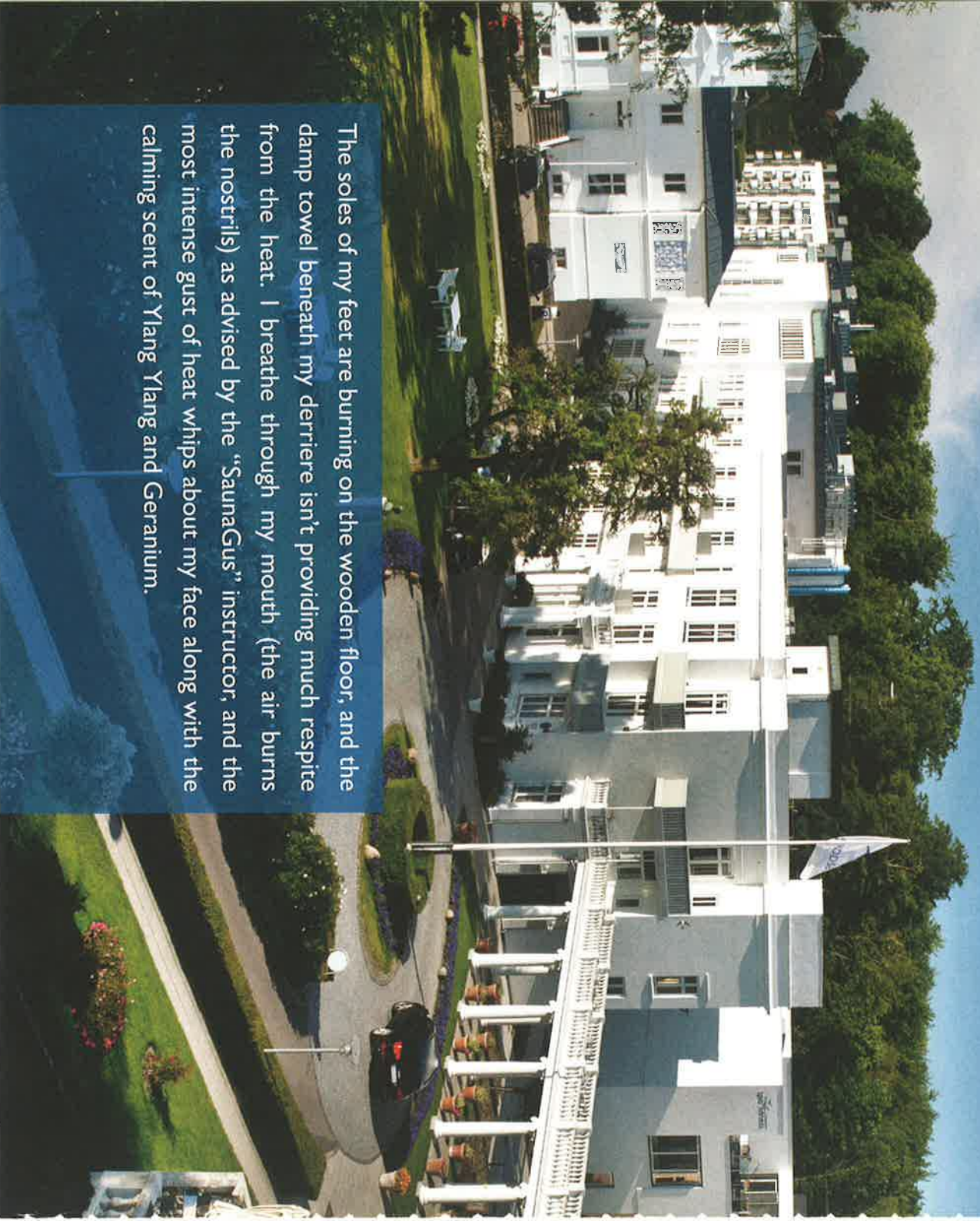


TRAVEL

# HYGEEE YOGGA

Sarah Dawson takes a dunk in the Baltic Sea on a yoga and spa trip in Copenhagen.

The soles of my feet are burning on the wooden floor, and the damp towel beneath my derriere isn't providing much respite from the heat. I breathe through my mouth (the air burns the nostrils) as advised by the "SaunaGus" instructor, and the most intense gust of heat whips about my face along with the calming scent of Ylang Ylang and Geranium.





I'm visiting the Skodsborg Kurhotel in Copenhagen and experiencing their 'piece de resistance', the SaunaGus (Mist Sauna), which whips guests up into such a heated frenzy they're begging for a dunk in the cold sea across the road to cool down.

The hotel's SaunaGus instructors have won Bronze medals for their heat-flapping skills (yes, there are competitions), and Tina Andersen, our 'Gusmeister', is a fabulous ambassador - think Xena Warrior Princess meets Helena Christenson, she's strong, toned, beautiful and swims in the Baltic Sea every day.

Perfectly positioned beside the Oresund Strait which flows into the Baltic Sea, the relaunched Kurhotel Skodsborg is the largest Spa in Denmark. This former residence of King Frederik 7th turned Sanitorium in 1898 and continues to thrive on the wellbeing philosophy of its founder, Dr Carl Ottosen, namely air, light, water, rest, nutrition and exercise.

Prepare to enter a cool, minimalist, Hygge-rich ambiance where huge windows reflect maximum light, scented candles dance with the senses, and cosy sofas and log fires soothe the soul in the heart of winter. Yogi, what's not to love about this Royal retreat with Michelin-starred menus and juices to 'de-age, 'de-stress' and 'de-tox, Scandi luxurious style, and over 35 different yoga and meditation classes each week?

Back in the SaunaGus Tina invites us to detach from our external cares and worries. I'm beginning to feel quite serene then I covertly open an eye and observe Tina whipping her damp towel energetically, and regret sitting in the hottest corner of the sauna. She whispers: "Just three more minutes" and I resist the urge to dash to the cold shower.

We follow Tina outdoors and cross the road to the hotel's private jetty where we face the Baltic Sea. There's six of us, each with puce faces, slicked back hair and white bathrobes. The first 'dunker' heads down the ladder and clad only in swimsuit we lower our bodies into the Oresund, which Tina confirms is a pleasant' 12 degrees. "The quicker you get in, the quicker you get out!" she adds.

I'm screeching and face contorting at the 'freezing' immersion, but after a few minutes I surrender then climb back up the ladder and into my cosy bathrobe. Pink blobs are patterning on my skin (that's the circulation adjusting to the cold) and I suddenly feel really high. In fact I find I'm whooping and begging "again!"





Cold water and sea swimming is reportedly on the rise in the UK and swimmers in my hometown Brighton notoriously dip on Christmas Day (the hardest, every day). It seems an act of madness, but there's method to it. Cold water gets the heart pumping, the circulation flowing, toxins obliterated and the immune system stimulated. Think of it as Shock Therapy. In sending blood to the vital organs the body also releases endorphins, which explains the elation and glee. The natural 'high' also comes from the activation of a neurotransmitter (noradrenaline), a natural antidote for depression/stress, which makes perfect sense - who can even remember their problems while wading into intensely cold water?

I head to the Yoga Suite for an evening class. The yoga growth in Denmark is similar to the UK, and the hotel offers over 35 weekly yoga/meditation classes from Ashtanga to Svaroopo and handpicks top class instructors.

I've not come across Svaroopo yoga so I opt for Piyana Pommer's class. Piyana (also a Shiatsu practitioner, Coach and Reflexologist) trained in the US, where Svaroopo originates. In Sanskrit 'Svaroopo' translates as 'finding your inner self or be your own bliss', and is described as a soft, meditative and therapeutic form. She encourages us to 'be in the body', rather than focusing on the body in action to gain a deeper experience of Self. After some gentle floor-based stretches, opening the hip flexors through deep lunges we flow through a Sun Salutation then a Warrior sequence before a blissful Savasana.

Next morning I join Hatha yoga teacher Ann-Louise Haarty for a stress-reducing Hatha class. I've only been up for an hour but I'm very happy to begin the session with a 30 minute Savasana and meditation. After warming up Ann-Louise works us up into Dog, Cat, Child's pose, and a standing sequence followed by pranayama and a final Savasana.

I spend the rest of my time at the Skodsborg indulging in the outstanding Michelin Starred expertise of Erik Kroun (the hotel won Best Restaurant in Denmark, 2017). I take a cookery lesson with the hotel's rather famous Michelin Starred Chef-turned-Crossfit-Guru, Author and Lifestyle Mentor, Thomas Rode. He's a strong ambassador for the Paleo diet, which influences the hotel menu - my delicious lunchtime sandwich appears to have an entire avocado sliced on very dense nutty bread and is topped with prawns and smoked salmon. I'm full till suppertime so I squeeze in a refreshingly upbeat evening meditation class with Bjork, who incorporates aromatherapy and trance music to open the heart.



The hotel fringes a Unesco wild deer park/forest known as "Dyrehaven" so I bicycle through the peaceful forest before another SaunaGus. In the Sea my companions are bobbing around in the water in wet suits in an aqua version of Cross Fit known as WOD with Thomas Rode, and after yesterdays calm the water is choppy so everyone is battling with the waves as well as the cold. The immersion is worth it for the subsequent 'high'.

If you're suffering with stress, anxiety, exhaustion or depression and don't live near the Sea or a Lake, you could try Tina's advice: switch from hot/cold/hot/cold in your daily shower. I've been doing it since my trip, and haven't had a cold since. And if you're after the real thing, book into the Skodsborg.

#### **VITAL STATISTICS:**

Kurhotel Skodsborg, Denmark is located 20 minutes from Copenhagen beside the ocean and forest.

A double room at Kurhotel Skodsborg costs from £167 per night (based on two sharing, including breakfast and full Spa access). Call +4545585800 / email [info@skodsborg.dk](mailto:info@skodsborg.dk) or visit [www.skodsborg.dk](http://www.skodsborg.dk)

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