

Vilalara Longevity, PORTUGAL

BEST FOR R&R À DEUX



Sarah and Jenni, above, enjoyed the retro-chic vibe of Vilalara Longevity

"THE PERFECT SPA TO DO WITH A GIRLFRIEND," said Red's health director, Brigid. Well, that was all the invitation my sister-in-law Jenni and I needed to say goodbye to a drizzly London

– and frankly having just celebrated a milestone birthday apiece, we thought we'd earned it. Vilalara (all 11 glorious hectares of it) is perched high atop the Algarve's buttery yellow coast – it's a botanically lush and architecturally retro-chic resort dating back to the '70s when its modern

Moorish vibe was the absolute thing.

These days the handsome grounds also play host to a Longevity medispa, offering weight-loss, anti-ageing and detox programmes and cutting-edge diagnostic services alongside

numerous lie-back-and-try-not-to-think-of-England Thalassa water therapies. Of course, one woman's idea of a wellness mini-break is not necessarily another's. To wit, I have been booked onto a mini Longevity Detox and Anti-Ageing plan, while Jenni has opted to go freestyle. This means while I'm padding off in my slippers and gown to have a blood test or somesuch, Jenni is devouring her stack of novels on the beach, swimming in the breaking waves or watching the sunlight paint the cliffs in exquisite Pantone shades. Likewise, when I am ploughing through a plate of (actually, yummy) quinoa or grilled veggies, Jenni might be eating an actual burger. The waiting staff do an excellent line in amused faux outrage when I dare to order a glass of delicious and minerally Portuguese

white to accompany my platter of grains – just keeping my girl company! If this all sounds a bit awkward, really it isn't. This resort is all about ying and yang (as if to prove the point, there's a pair of pet swans – one black and one white – floating poetically on the Vilalara pond). And there's just something about the expansive, Mediterranean largesse of the place which invites you to chill, re-energise or get seriously diagnostic as suits. Speaking of which, the nutritional consultation I receive (after a blood analysis) is both challenging

and life-changing; flipping me – a long-term vegetarian – out of my over-dependence on dairy. (Reader, the family milk order has halved.) And an osteopathy session at the

hands of world-class therapist Ricardo Rosa is more transformative than any massage or physio treatment I have experienced in decades of managing a crummy lower back. I feel like I've grown a couple of centimetres. At dinner, overlooking the cliffs, Jenni and I compare our days, discuss the finer points of Elena Ferrante's *Neopolitan* series; and I conclude how much more rounded and therapeutic it has been to go spa-ing 'à deux' – despite our different wellness styles. Oh yes, and we do order a couple more glasses of delicious minerally white. ■

TRIP NOTES

Healing Holidays offers a five-night stay from £2,150 per person sharing, including flights, half-board accommodation, transfers and five-day Holistic Rebalance programme; Healingholidays.co.uk

Home remedies
Cut down on dairy the easy way by occasional swaps such as trying almond or coconut milk



The resort is set on top of the Algarve's cliffs



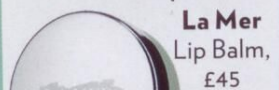
Sarah booked onto the Longevity Detox and Anti-Ageing Plan; the resort's pet swans



Vilalara's setting is therapeutic in itself



What to pack



La Mer Lip Balm, £45



Sliders, £75, Dune



Sunglasses, £400, Christian Dior

