

Riga: Tori Mayo visits Riga, in Latvia, for a spa break

Aug 24 2010 Liverpool Echo

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Tori Mayo enjoys an invigorating spa break in Riga, Latvia

Amber Spa hotel is only a 20-minute drive from Riga, has a beautiful coastal setting and boasts an extensive list of beauty therapies, treatments and personalised holistic programmes.

Affluent Jurmala is the largest resort city in the Baltic and a popular destination for Latvians and holidaymakers from further afield looking to benefit from its natural treasures.

The nearest beach to Amber Spa is only a five-minute walk through the forest. A scenic jog, stroll or cycle are on the doorstep and there are nature trails, aromatherapy walks and entertaining beach volleyball tournaments.

In my hotel room, I was intrigued to find a complimentary punnet of tiny, tasty berries, looking not too dissimilar to small strawberries. Not so savvy on the latest health kicks, I guessed they might be goji berries.

Though eager to start selecting my spa treatment, a note from the hotel caught my eye. It detailed the weather forecast, upcoming events in Jurmala and suggested I have a vacuum body massage with lymph drainage.

Though grateful for the recommendation, which promised to help get rid of fat deposits, it sounded too complex to comprehend at bedtime. So I polished off the last of the red things and indulged in that age-old therapy – sleep.

Next morning, over an amazing buffet breakfast at the hotel's fine dining restaurant, which included Latvian curd, cold meats, muesli, salmon and German black bread, as well as cooked breakfasts, I learned that the red berries were locally-picked wild strawberries and not the latest antioxidant or super fruit.

Before my spa experience, there was time for a walk into the centre of Jurmala, once considered the St Tropez of the former Soviet Union.

Passing traditional wooden residences, typical of the area, I was soon strolling down the sophisticated main street, lined with little shops, hotels and cafes.

It was market day and stalls were selling Latvian wares including amber jewellery, hand-knitted mittens and local delicacies including freshly-foraged mushrooms and jams.

The Jurmala City Museum is worth a visit to see how the resort established itself and also the history behind its wellbeing culture.

Refreshed from my walk, I donned my robe and slippers and headed to the spa for an intense sports massage. Not the most relaxing, but it loosened knotted muscles and straightened me out.

I couldn't resist trying the Russian baniya too. A commonplace activity for Russians on a Sunday afternoon, it usually consists of a dry space to sit and relax, eat, drink and chat as well as a wet area with sauna, cold pool, showers and treatment rooms. Men, separated from women, often play cards and even

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and treatment rooms. Men, separated from women, often play cards and even broker business deals in the baniya, while women socialise and beautify themselves.

On entering the baniya, it was apparent that if I was going to have the authentic experience, I would have to bare all.

For most of the afternoon I took strict instructions from the burly but rather endearing manageress, or "poparshitsa", which literally means "steam maker".

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