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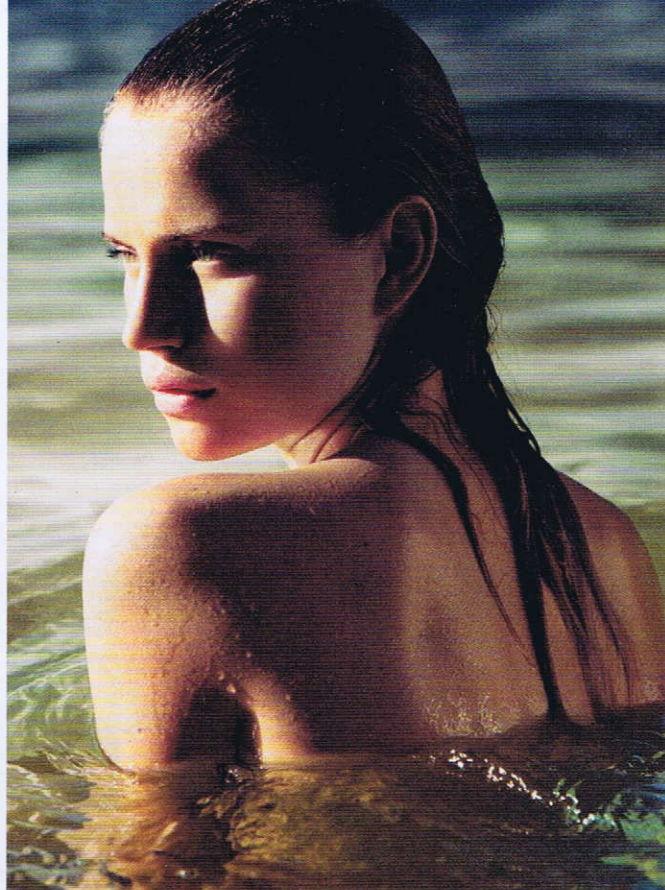
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I'm kneeling on the pure white sand of a Maldivian atoll, nearly 20 metres under the surface of the Indian Ocean. Beside me is Luisa Anderson, the Australian who first introduced me to underwater meditation at the Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru.

I learnt to scuba dive 10 years ago – on a PADI course in Gozo with my daughter, Daisy – and found swimming slowly underwater brought an intense feeling of peace. So when Anderson suggested underwater meditation I was intrigued. She develops the spas for the Four Seasons' Bali, Langkawi and Maldives resorts and is hugely knowledgeable about all aspects of Asian religions, culture and healing.

Right before the dive, I'm nervous – I can't seriously be contemplating swimming down to the bottom of the sea and then sitting for 15 minutes with my eyes shut, can I? But I'm reassured by the presence of Bella, a lovely Korean dive instructor, who is on hand to take our fins when we sit, and to watch the time. We swim slowly along the reef, through countless wildly coloured fish, and I instantly feel at home.

Reaching an open sandy area up against the coral wall, Bella points down and helps me attach weights to my ankles. I kneel lightly on the sand, settle my balance and slow my breathing. The water sways me lightly side to side, but when I stop fighting it, I return naturally to centre. I close my eyes and it's as though my mind temporarily drops anchor.

What feels like moments later – it is in fact almost 15 minutes – Bella is helping me remove the weights, and there's a huge Napoleon fish blinking at me. I feel light, happy and incredibly awake, and soon we're back on the boat, eating delicious biscuits and drinking tea.

Anderson believes the experience is so powerful because, underwater, you're just in one element, the distractions of sound, smell and air absent. I wonder if it's because it's like being back in the womb. But we agree it's a potent experience. We go again the next day and the next, finding it addictive. Now, I'm home and working on meditating on dry land. Not as easy, but easier than it was before. □

Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru (www.fourseasons.com/maldiveslg), from £890 a room a night.

DEEPLY RELAXING

ROSIE BOYCOTT finds inner peace on the ocean floor

WATSU THERAPY AT NAKA ISLAND THAILAND

Naka Island lies on the southern part of Naka Yai island, just off the eastern coast of Phuket. Its spa focuses on renewing guests' inner sense of wellbeing, and is one of only two Thai spas that offer Watsu – where the body is stretched while submerged in a warm pool to relieve aches and pains. *The Watsu treatment at Naka Island, A Luxury Collection Resort & Spa (www.luxurycollection.com/naka island), costs £103 for 60 minutes.*



REST OF THE BEST...

By LUCY HALFHEAD



FANGOTERAPIA AT L'ALBERGO DELLA REGINA ISABELLA ITALY

For centuries, people have visited the island of Ischia to benefit from the restorative properties of Lacco Ameno's volcanic waters. L'Albergo della Regina Isabella is a luxurious hotel offering fangoterapia – or mud therapy – a full-body treatment that exfoliates and purifies skin using the mineral-rich earth. *L'Albergo della Regina Isabella Resort and Health Spa (www.preferredhotels.com), from £135 a room a night. Fangoterapia costs £45 for 45 minutes.*



CHAVUTTI MASSAGE AT THE BODYHOLIDAY SAINT LUCIA

Raj Kumar learnt the ancient art of chavutti massage from his grandfather, and has been practising the technique for over 20 years. Available at the BodyHoliday resort in Saint Lucia, chavutti is a full-body ayurvedic massage with medicated oils, performed using the feet. Kumar uses flowing strokes to iron out any knots. Expect to feel taller, relaxed and invigorated. *A chavutti massage at the BodyHoliday (www.thebodyholiday.com) costs about £110 for 75 minutes.*