

TRAVEL

Healing hands help restore balance and peace

KATIE FITZPATRICK unwinds in a new-age spa and tries to quiet her 'chattering mind'

'THE pub's half a mile away," quips the taxi driver as he drops me off at the Middle Piccadilly rural spa retreat. Not that I'll even be considering it. This trip is all about cleansing and realigning the chakras.

Set in peaceful countryside, on aptly-named Peaceful Lane, my stay at the Middle Piccadilly Dorset is far from the chaotic, bustling Manchester Piccadilly I'm more accustomed to.

It had arrived with perfect timing following an emotionally challenging time. And luckily for me there were many healing hands here to help restore my balance and transport me away from the rat race.

My rather new-agey experience began the moment I stepped off the train at the picturesque Sherborne station on the weekend of summer solstice.

Middle Piccadilly is more of a home from home in a 17th century thatched farmhouse than your conventional spa with fluffy towels and bathrobes.

With my fellow peace-



■ One of the delicious dishes cooked at Middle Piccadilly rural spa retreat in Dorset

seekers I enjoyed delicious and nutritious vegetarian meals prepared by owner and resident chef Dominic Harvey. Around the table in the cosy family kitchen we shared some insightful, supportive chats before heading our separate ways to unwind, enjoy our own space, surround ourselves with nature and enjoy the blissful silence, something I was greatly looking forward to more than anything.

But unfortunately for me I found this to be near impossible. I didn't realise how much I would be

inclined to reach for my mobile phone, Facebook and Twitter until I found myself alone with no other distractions.

My first treatment was a satisfying Indian head massage set in the Star Chamber, an airy wooden hexagonal shaped building set on ancient ley lines Inside, used for shamanic workshops (more on that later), yoga and pilates. But my therapist Maya could see right through me. My body was firmly rooted to a chair but my giddy, unsettled mind was darting all over the place. According to an Indian

alternative medicine practice I'm a 'wind' person that needs grounding with stodgy foods. Bonus. Then Maya had more news for me. During my treatment she had spotted two aspects of nature that she felt represented me - a flashy magpie pecking at the window for attention and a snake shedding its skin.

After a short break I was rewarded with more time with Maya, this time for a shamanic healing session, a highlight of the Middle Piccadilly treatment menu and a truly unforgettable experience. Shamanism is an ancient practice that



involves the shaman holding a trance like ritual to interact with the spirit world and tap into Mother Nature.

Maya developed goosebumps as she sensed a malevolent spirit amongst my ancestors. I was asked to choose a stone from a bundle before settling down onto a makeshift bed as she drummed, whistled and chanted all around me. Then I was asked, keeping my eyes firmly shut, to place the stone where I feel it should go. Tentatively I placed it on my arm.

"How about here?" asked Maya, transferring it gently to an area just above the pelvis. And the pain was searing.

"What do you see? what do you feel?" she asked. "Red, burning." I gulped quietly.

I was urged to breathe hard while imagining that I was flushing water, and that troubled spirit, out of me. Maya believed that my now departed

ancestor was a woman burned at the stake for witchcraft, hence the burning sensation. And my pain was also gone.

Maya then took the time to give some extra advice - I need to nourish myself with walks and slow exercise - before teaching me a deep breathing exercise to quieten the mind.

Over lunch I discussed my healing with another guest who recalled an entirely different

personalised shamanic experience.

It's recommended to take time out to relax after treatment so I read in the cottage's lavish grounds and, for some light relief, watched television in my en-suite room.

My final treatment the following morning, this time with therapist Claire, was Hand on Heart, a slow rhythmic massage of the hands and feet to reboot the body's energy flow.

► Factfile

FULL board accommodation at the Middle Piccadilly costs £75 per person per night for the detox juice cleanse option, £100 for the vegetarian menu and £125 for the raw food option. Various retreat packages are available from £320 per person. For details visit middlepiccadilly.com Katie travelled

with Virgin Trains from Manchester Piccadilly to London Euston. Returns from £12.50 standard and £37.50 first class, with £15 upgrade available at weekends. For more information see virgintrains.com. And Katie travelled with South West Trains from London Waterloo to Sherborne. Visit southwesttrains.co.uk

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