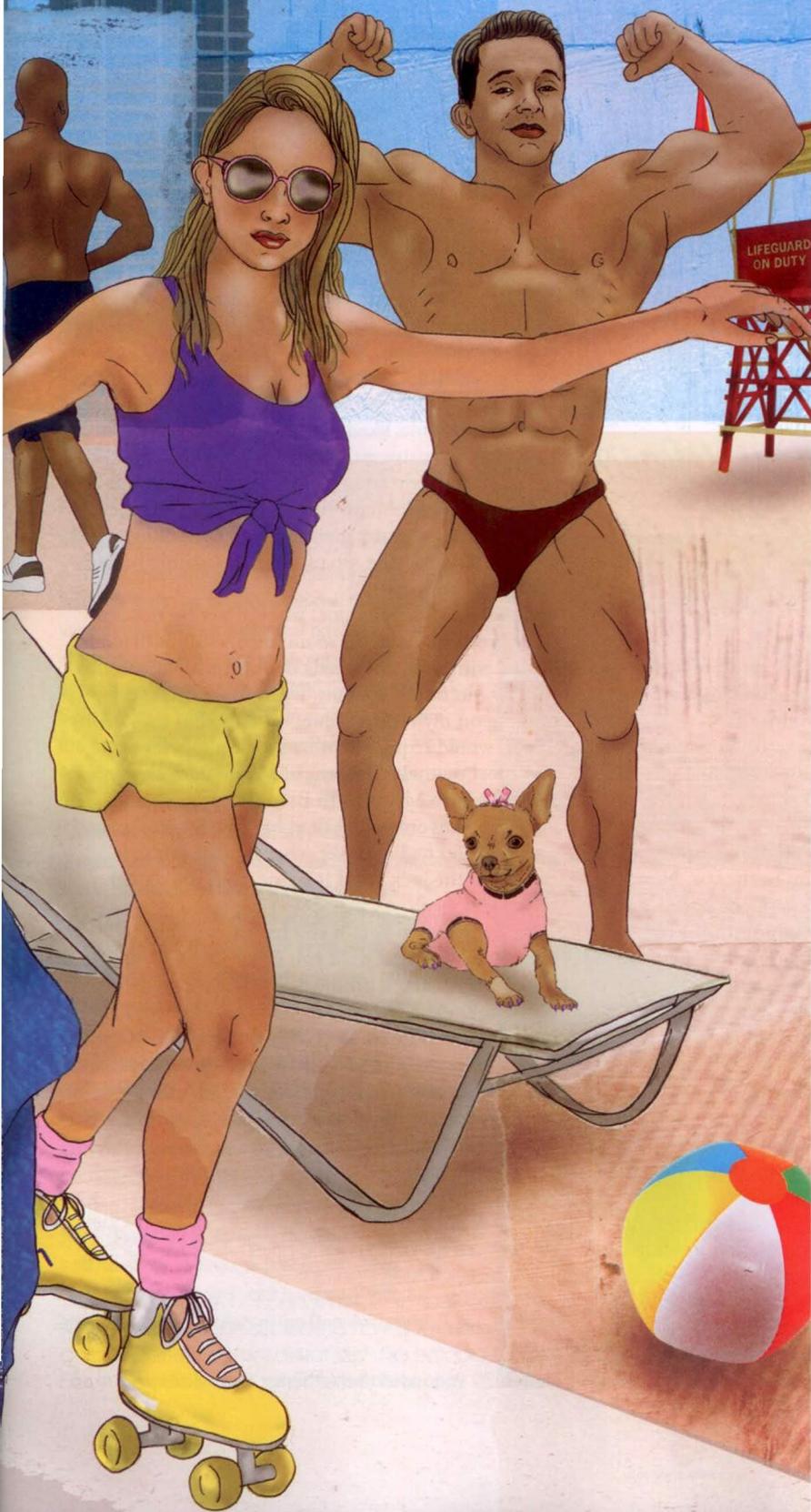


Miranda takes

Miranda Hart surrenders to a spa sojourn in Miami, land of the body beautiful, where – despite several episodes of unprovoked nudity – she is pummelled into inner peace...



Miami



As I pull up at the intimidating Vegas-esque resort entrance I wonder what on earth I am doing at a spa in Miami. This isn't just a hotel with a jacuzzi; this is a spa proper, a way of life. A place to cleanse and enhance, both mentally and physically. I don't feel particularly in the mood for either, thank you. And in Miami, of all places! Miami – known for the lithe and tanned 'bodies beautiful' parading the beach to show off how bloody tremendous they look in their new bikinis. I won't lie – I remain firm friends with the M&S one-piece with in-built bra. This could be a disaster.

I arrive in time for dinner and my worst fears are recognised as the upbeat waitress skips up to my table. 'Hi, I am Meredith and I will be serving you today!' She talks me through the menu, explaining that the numbers to the side of every dish represent (prepare to be horrified) the calorie count, and the italicised numbers break it down into sugar, carb, fat and sodium content. Well, that's ruined everything, frankly. I am not Oprah Winfrey.

I panic and say, 'Do you do fries?' 'Yes,' chirps Meredith. 'But we don't do normal fries here, we do artichoke fries. You must try them, they are DELICIOUS.' I reply that I would love to but inside I am thinking 'artichokes are vegetables. Their function is to adorn a salad. They have no place masquerading as a chip. What next – alfalfa cheesecake?'

The next morning the weather is beautiful and I simply must brave the beach. I apologetically wander to a sun lounger, rocking my Birkenstocks – which, I gather (too late), are now only fashionable for Home Counties ladies who grow their own veg. There is a woman in front of me with the most perfect legs. I couldn't feel more out of place. If Pamela Anderson jogged past they would probably whisper, 'Who's that woman? She's let herself go.'

I decide to retreat and call room service to ask for some breakfast tea. If in doubt, a nice cuppa. A knock on the door. Someone from housekeeping places a handful of cotton buds in my palm and wishes me a nice day. What's happened here? I rush after him. He tells me I asked for Q-tips. No, no, breakfast tea – I pronounce it like he might be deaf. He can't understand the British accent, but even so, how does breakfast tea sound like Q-tips? And, more to the point, why at 11 in the morning would I want 50 cotton buds? They must think I am mental.

Right, forget the tea. Time for the spa area. I'll relax in the steam room, that's a good place to start. Not that I have ever believed that sweating in a tiled box with strangers can be relaxing...

What greets me can only be described as aggressive nudity. Not a kind of 'Sorry, I am naked. It's just that I prefer it, but I'll creep about and try not to upset you.' More a 'Hi! Look at me and my fabulous body! You probably want me to sit right

next to you, even though there is plenty of room, and let's chat as my breasts swing in your face.' One word: unacceptable. I am afraid I am someone who firmly believes life is more fun with clothes on, or certainly with the lights off.

I try the sauna. There is someone meditating (naked, obviously) and I am told 'please don't make any noise with your feet'. WHAT?! What am I supposed to do here? Harness the power to hover and float? When I walk, I probably will make a bit of noise with my feet, you naked idiot.

It's now time for my deep-tissue massage. I am ushered into a treatment room and told to pick up a gemstone. I choose a blue one and the therapist says I have chosen inner peace. Good, because at this point that is certainly what I need. She then says I have to look at the fountain and declare my intention for the massage. I say, out loud, 'Not to break wind on the massage table.' The therapist stares at me, horrified, as if I have just said I would like to kill nine puppies. In Britain I would have got a titter for that, surely. The massage begins and it is a pummelling like I have never known. This woman can't have inner peace; she is taking out some anger issues on me. And why is

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she starting on my bottom? Surely we start with some massage foreplay at the shoulders and work our way down. This woman? Straight to my arse.

However, I start surrendering to it. The massage bed is heated. Pop *The Archers* on and I could be at home in bed with my heated blanket (minus the arse pummelling.) I start to truly relax. It's the best massage I think I have ever had and something shifts in me as I make my way back up to the spa. Now, you are going to be amazed at what happens next. Careful you don't choke on your cappuccino froth. Ready? Yours truly finds herself strolling into the steam room, fully naked. I am doing it, baby. I am not at aggressive nudity stage; I am at 'Sorry about what you are seeing. I will try and keep all the wobbly bits as far away as I can. Oops, soz, boob on head.'

The next morning there is a spring in my step. I can conquer all. I put on a sundress and head to the beach. A terrifying middle-aged Miamian (are they called that?) with a bichon frisé dog (there's a LOT of that) approaches me. 'Nice dress.' Wow, affirmation from a body beautiful. She doesn't need to know it's a pregnancy dress and that I am not, and never have been, pregnant. We'll ignore that. I realise the beach isn't that intimidating and it's predominantly full of true eccentrics. I am seeing hairpieces, dogs on sun loungers, people jogging while saying to themselves, 'You can do this, come on', a woman carrying her dog

in the sea (no, really). I think I might be the most normal of the lot.

I am now a fully paid-up member of this spa and decide to enrol in an exercise class. Now, once again, dear reader, you might be in for a shock, for what do I partake in? Indoor rock climbing. I know! I wait at the bottom of the wall for Geoff my instructor. Between you and me, I'd secretly hoped Geoff might be my future husband, but in walks a man of five foot one. I still haven't ruled it out. We'd have the perfect children. Geoff is brilliantly American in his motivation but nothing can help me when, halfway up, I get a serious case of vertigo and can't move. I then get hysterical and Geoff is flummoxed as I shout, 'I will just have to live up here.' My fear turns to giggles when I see a woman in the gym below doing an exercise that requires wandering around with a resistance bungee harness attached to a much taller instructor. That gets me back down the wall. I want to do that.

Buoyed up with making it halfway up the climbing wall (no mean feat), I pick up the timetable of activities that previously I'd been too scared to consider. First up, aqua strength in the rooftop pool, then candlelit yogic stretching and even – and this is the big one – the 'What's Your Personality Type?' lecture with Brad. For those intrigued let me share. The aqua-strength session involves a woman – who incidentally looks liked Helen Hunt and on whom I develop a massive girl-crush – at the side of the pool demonstrating the manoeuvres we should make within: side steps, runs, lunges, all with the resistance of the water giving the effect of doing gentle weights. I soar to the top of the class (mainly because everyone else is over 75).

Candlelit stretching does what it says on the tin: there is an oak-panelled room filled with candles and dotted with individual mats upon which we stretch the day out of our systems. I vow to do this every evening on my return home. 'What's Your Personality Type?' would require another article altogether, and I feel that what I learnt in Miami with Brad should stay in Miami with Brad. But if you go, visit him. Anyone called Brad has to be met in my opinion, and he is a clever, 'change your mindset' Brad (not the jock you'd imagine from the name). I have changed!

So, I say this to you, if you have some dollar – *sings* 'for dollar is what you need' *bows* – and want to tick Miami off the list, you must go to Canyon Ranch (FYI – it sits on Miami Beach, a far nicer stretch of beach than the other hotels on South Beach). Plunge in, it's REALLY fun. Now excuse me, I must be off for a non-alcoholic, sugar-free cocktail (43 calories) and some artichoke fries. Warning – they taste like charred soap. □

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.co.uk/tattlerspa; 020 7529 8551) offers four nights at Canyon Ranch Miami from £1,700, including British Airways flights, selected activities and classes.

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