

NEWS WEBSITE OF THE YEAR

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Spa Spy: Grand Hotel Kempinski High Tatras, Slovakia

By Spa Spy

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The Grand Hotel Kempinski in Slovakia is a Grade II listed building

Our sleuth investigates the curative claims of wellbeing retreats worldwide. This week: Grand Hotel Kempinski High Tatras, Slovakia

The spa

Sat on an Alpine lake almost 4,500 metres above sea level, Grand Kempinski's perch on the High Tatras - mountains bordering Slovakia and Poland - takes 'spa with a view' to new heights (sorry). If looking out over several hundred snow-flecked peaks isn't your bag, tropical rain showers, a salt bath caldarium and ice fountain hydrotherapy shower should do the trick. Or, you know, the no-clothes zone of the Finnish sauna. Spa does not judge.

Kempinski

The symptoms

Spa was idly scrolling through accommodation options for a weekend getaway to Vienna - lockdown had made us a little tired of our own four walls, naturally - when there appeared an image of a pool with a glorious mountain view. This magical place was in Slovakia, it turned out - had the cosmos planted the picture on this webpage? An algorithmic trick? An incompetent compiler of said list? No matter, the deed was done: Austria would merely be the gateway for a city-turned-nature break. Granted, there are simpler ways of getting to Slovakia than through another country, but Spa has chosen not to get sidetracked by this minor detail.

The prescription

A stay at the Grand Hotel Kempinski High Tatras, where the exertion of some wholesome hiking could be immediately restored by the wellness options on offer. Spa arrived at night, winding down the dark, tree-lined path to see the grand structure of the Grade II listed building aglow. Once ushered in and provided with Kempinski-branded face masks, it was up to the room which, once the curtains were flung open the next morning, provided a truly winning natural view. So inviting was the sight of the lake and mountains, in fact, that Spa was inspired to take to the wild the following morning - after a slap-up breakfast in the dining room, of course - all with the promise of a sumptuous Slovak meal and signature treatment to follow.



The Zion Luxury Spa is open for treatments, including the signature 'Juniper Tickle', for 12 hours a day

In the spa area, a full marble affair, chandeliers glisten above the pool, where drinks can be ordered to the loungers from the bar. And after a dip - in the regular pool, whirlpool and the hot tub - it was time to begin sampling the various offerings of Kempinski's extensive wellness area. Flitting between the sauna and arctic shower for some hot-and-cold therapy soothed the strain of aforementioned peak-clambouring; indeed Spa took the myriad rooms as a sort of relaxation challenge, trying as many as could be squeezed in before the evening's kale-wrapped deer dinner. One eagle-eyed attendee did peer into the Finnish sauna, evidently hoping for an eyeful, but his mournful closing of the door suggested he was left wanting.

The procedure

Spa was first through the spa doors at 9am (there are 12 hours of treatments a day, an excellent touch) for her juniper tickle - steady on - a 75 minute affair that involves the dried berries being rubbed into the body with hot oil, before a head and foot massage. The therapist was surprised to learn how little of a role they play in British cuisine, though heartened to hear that we enthusiastically engage them for gin - a little nibble was offered, though a Hendrick's is surely the best use for them. The warming treatment felt just right for the alpine setting and, unsurprisingly, the Zion Spa makes excellent use of the Tatras' natural gifts - pine and lime oil and juniper tonic pop up in its aromatherapy and massage treatments. The hour and a quarter-long treatment whizzed by in no time at all.



The High Tatras mountains are on the border between Slovakia and Poland

The verdict

Fresh mountain air and a touch of juniper tickling made for a wonderful visit (though Spa would advise flying in to either Slovakia or Poland, thus saving many, many hours spent traversing borders). Kempinski High Tatras doesn't do small scale: for a stunning natural environment, 19th century structure that looks straight out of a Wes Anderson film and modern spa to indulge your wellness needs, it's just the place.

The details

Rooms start at €250 per night. The Stay & Relax package, which includes a 30-minute back, neck and shoulder massage per person and a 2-night stay, starts at €340 per room per night. kempinski.com/en/strba-strbske-pleso/grand-hotel-high-tatras/