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SPA TRAVELLER

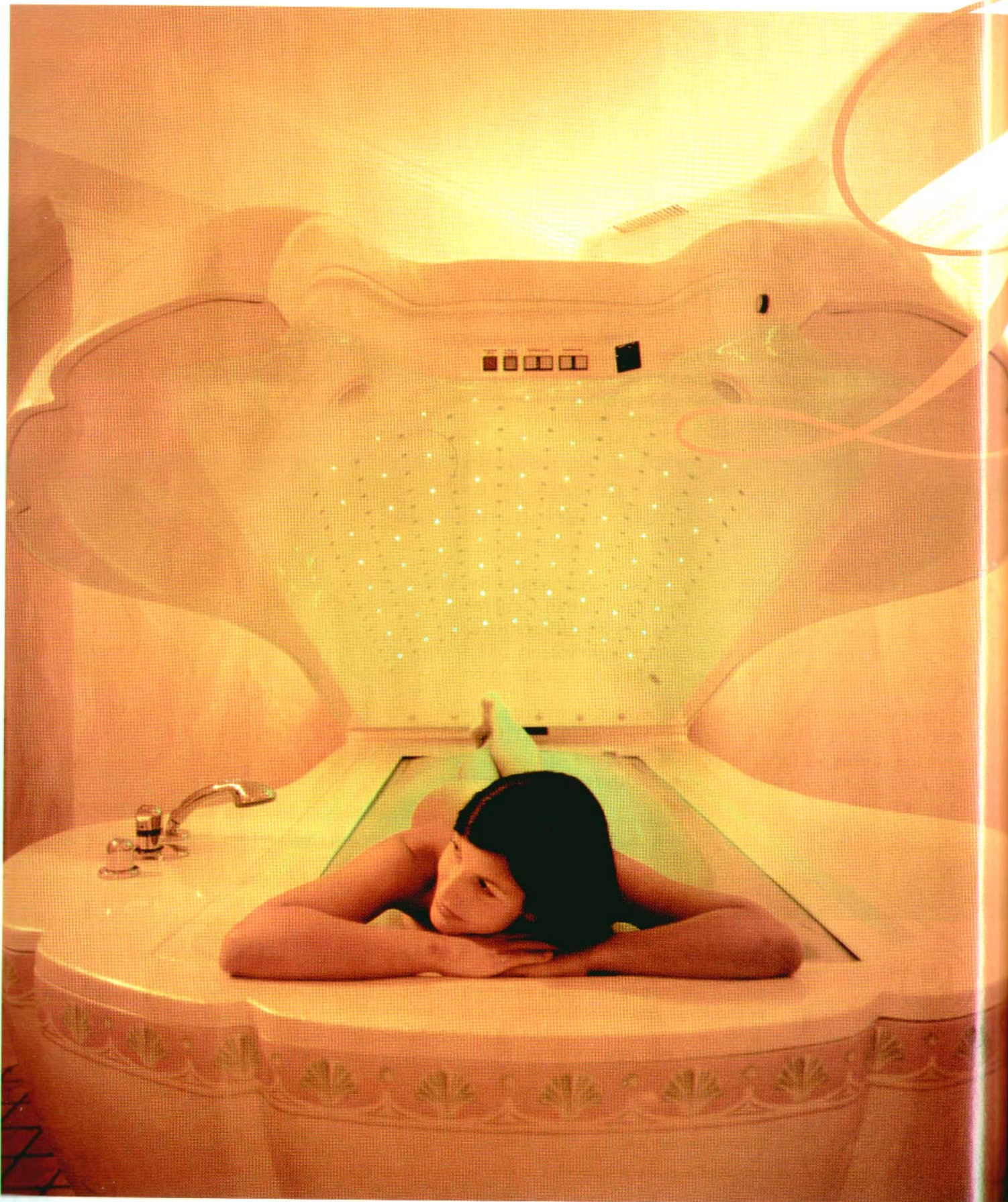
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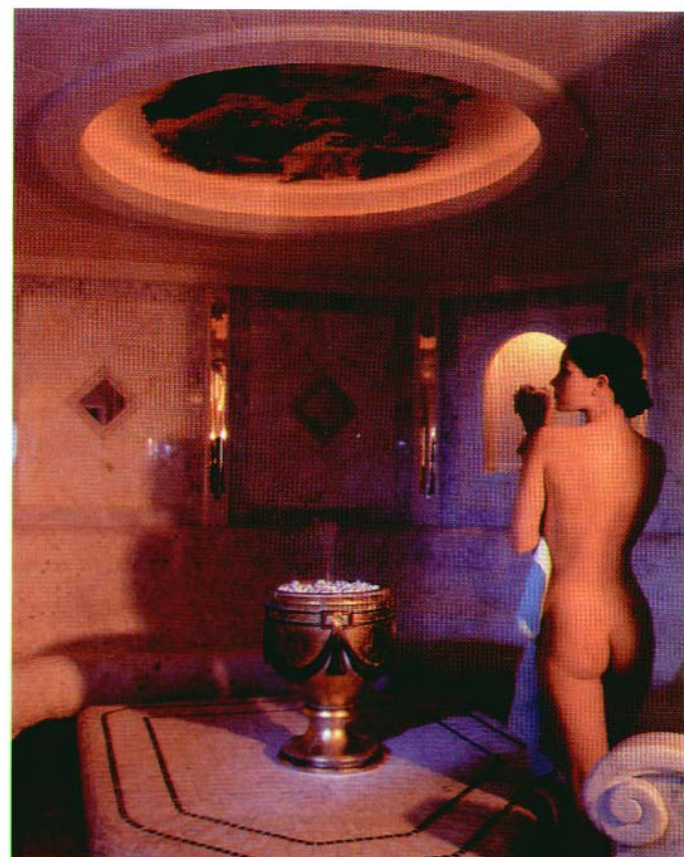
£3.50 QUARTERLY WINTER 2002/03





All-inclusive LUXURY

A fully equipped spa all to yourself and all-inclusive gourmet healthy eating – is this a dream come true for enlightened spa-goers? **Sarah Clark finds out...**



When you think of all-inclusive holidays, do you think of sunny beach trips with never ending sangria, an economy option with a sea view and naff cabaret? A visit to the Hotel Fortina in Slieme, Malta would certainly strip you of those preconceptions and plunge you straight into the world of luxury spa accommodation and top-class hospitality.

Set in a gorgeous location, the Fortina has stunning views across the water to Valetta. A small fee buys you a boat trip across the water, and there you can take a horse drawn carriage up and down the sea front if the other public transport isn't to your taste. Within the hotel there are 200 rooms, some of which have a jacuzzi bath, balcony and complimentary mini bar.

I was lucky enough to find myself in a top class room with sea views and a jacuzzi. Note to self – when trying jacuzzi for the first time, make sure the water is deep enough. The first mistake I made resulted in water everywhere and a change of clothes...

“It's set to be the first hotel in the world where clients can experience a selection of treatments in the privacy of their own bedroom. No expense will be spared”

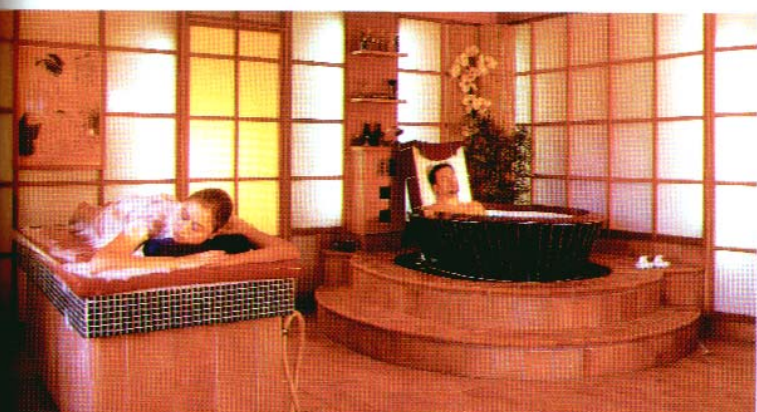
Holidaying among friends (and footballers!)

The relaxed, informal atmosphere of the hotel seems to attract 'regulars' – predominantly British and European. I met one couple on their sixth trip to the hotel, and many visitors who couldn't stay away from the place. Past and present Manchester United players have stayed there (including the divine Mr Beckham) and foreign players in the local team are often spotted wandering the place.

It's rare to find a hotel that attracts such loyalty, but in this case, it's not difficult to see why. The whole concept of Fortina is that 'all-inclusive' should mean just that – the only extra charges are for some of the beauty treatments in the Spa Mediteranee – although two thalassotherapy treatments per day are included in your stay.

You can't go to Fortina and not try out the thalassotherapy spa treatments. Added in 1995, the already excellent facilities are being extended to include ice grottos, a Laconium, mud treatments, fun showers and even a Japanese flower bath. During my stay I had the luxury of trying a few treatments, including a session in a Dermalife capsule. Looking and sounding like something out of Star Trek, the capsules combine relaxing heat treatment, infra-red treatment, a mechanical massage and aromatherapy, all in one thirty minute blissful session.

The Spa Mediteranee is the only spa in the world using sea-water concentrated to the power of three for detoxification. The pools are available for a swim, and the water is used in a variety



of treatments. There's an Aquaciser (an underwater exercise machine originally developed for racehorses!), 14 treatment rooms, a pool and a jacuzzi. The only area in which the spa is let down is the changing area, which is mainly communal and rather small. I expect that when the spa is extended, the changing area will also be improved to accommodate the extra guests.

Getting active

After a relaxing spa treatment or two, the temptation is just to doze off. It would be a shame to waste the time though, as Fortina also has an impressive range of fitness options. The exclusive Body Control Pilates studio (with classes run by top UK Pilates expert and author, Lynne Robinson) is always in demand, and as part of the spa expansion plans, permanent instructors for T'ai Chi and Pilates are being employed at the resort. Exciting variations on a theme, such as Combat T'ai Chi and even Aqua-T'ai Chi will be on the fitness repertoire, as are the existing classes and 'Top Class' gym facilities already open to all residents as part of the package.

Food, Fortina style

If all that fitness and health makes you hungry, and it certainly had that effect on me, then head for the restaurants, of which there are no less than four, including a Mediterranean style bistro; a delicious à la carte selection; a relaxed buffet style restaurant with views over Valetta; and the newest addition – Qui-si-Sana (Here is life). Qui-si-Sana specialises in catering for anyone with dietary restrictions (including diabetics, wheat and dairy free) with a fabulous gourmet selection that almost defies description as a 'diet menu.' All menus were devised with top London nutritionist Fiona Hunter. If you're not feeling too saintly, there are also five bars.

I sampled the Qui-si-Sana menu and although my original thoughts were along the lines of 'Salad and brown rice', I was more than pleasantly surprised. Sushi, soup, and twice baked goats cheese with walnut were among the starters, with venison, duck, beef and salmon featuring in the main courses. A little hint: The desserts in the Garden View are absolutely to die for, so I'd suggest NOT going there every night if you are watching your weight!

The buffet menu at the La Valette restaurant could be improved – it probably appeals to people who enjoy all-inclusive menus at other resorts, relying heavily on English dishes, including the ubiquitous fry up, which is not so 'spa'...



A little bit more sophisticated will be the Japanese/Thai and Italian restaurants, the Spanish Tapas bar, and the coffee shop planned for the future. And let's not forget the fine cigar bar that will be just for the residents of the spa rooms. Well, I suppose too much healthy living needs an antidote?

Spa of the future

An ambitious expansion plan at Fortina is set to turn the hotel into a 'resort within a resort' by creating another 150 rooms, including over 50 specially created 'Spa bedrooms' and nine huge 'Honeymoon Spa Suites'. The luxurious bathrooms will contain spa facilities and a large indoor or outdoor jacuzzi.

To add to the luxury, 25 of the spa bedrooms will have a private outdoor pool. It's set to be the first hotel in the world where clients can experience a selection of treatments in the privacy of their own bedroom. No expense will be spared – a state-of-the-art spa bath with eight different settings, a colonnade shower/steam cabinet, and a Dermalife capsule will grace each room.

Fortina's marketing manager, Cliff Agius knows that the rooms will be a success because "they will appeal to those people who would like the treatments but are shy about removing their clothes, or prefer to have treatments in the privacy of their own room."

FORTINA'S RECIPE FOR STRESS RELIEF

All Inclusive stay at Fortina

All food, breakfast, lunch, dinner and any snacks. All drinks, including spirits, local wines, cocktails, local beers, soft drinks, teas, coffees.

Thalassotherapy treatments (maximum of two pool treatments per day).

Aerobics, step aerobics, slide, aqua aerobics.

Boat trips (1st May until 31st October)

Two different full day trips – Comino &

Southside, including beer, wine, soft drinks and lunch.

Harbour cruise - all year around

Underwater safari - all year around

Free canoes, free windsurfers and free scuba introductory diving lesson - summer months only (1st May – 31st October)

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Flights available from all London airports and transfers to the hotel can be arranged if booking direct with the hotel, or on the web site: www.hotelfortina.com