

## VIGILIUS, ITALY

A breath of fresh, mountain air. Literally

BY DAVID ANNAND

In every 19th-century novel worth its salt, some consumptive or another heads off to the Swiss Alps to salve his ills in the region's soothing climes. It's a noble tradition that continues today, but it has, of course, just one flaw: it means going to Switzerland, famously the world's most boring country. Mercifully, an alternative has emerged in the shape of Vigilius, a beautiful mountain spa that perches nest-like in the Italian Dolomites.

Accessible only by cable car, the hotel is completely vehicle-free. The only background noise is an occasional lowing, and the air is so pure that it makes *High School Musical* look positively filthy. And it smells blissful, too. Whether it's the woody perfume of the local larch trees from which the hotel is built or the sweet smells of Tyrolean cooking, the whole area hums with earthy goodness.

As does the expansive spa with its treatment rooms, saunas and two pools, one of which extends outside so you can soak up the sun that filters through the canopy of evergreens. The treatment list is extensive, with the emphasis on natural oils infused with local herbs making the massages especially soothing. The spa's Sodashi luxury facial in particular is the perfect preparation for a restorative ramble among the mountain pines.

After such activity you'll be ready for food, and you won't be disappointed by either the fine dining at Restaurant 1.500 or the hearty fare at Parlour IDA.

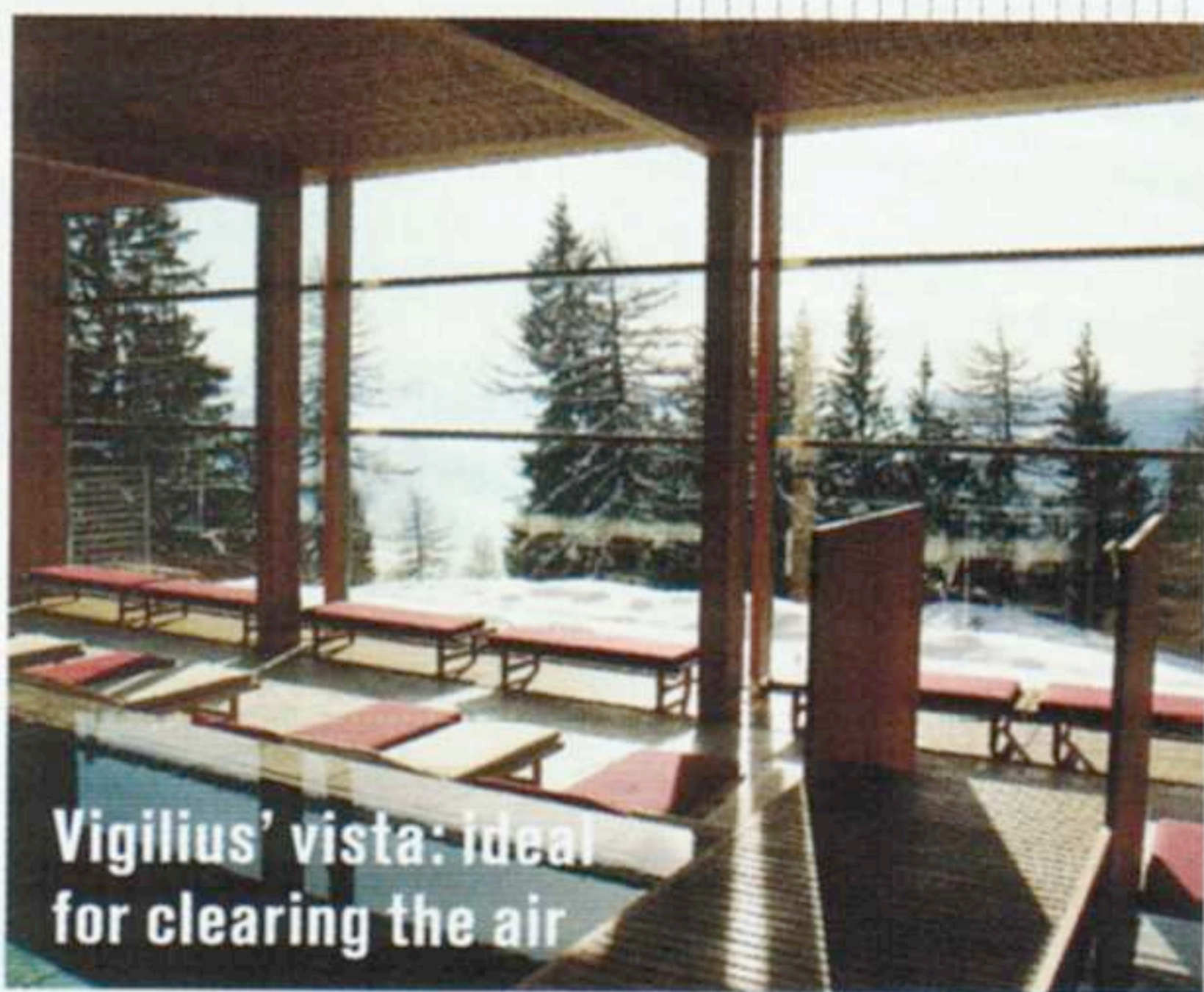
Invigorating and rejuvenating, like the countryside that surrounds it, the Vigilius spa is a tonic of the old sort, albeit with a modern sensibility. And there's not a cuckoo clock in sight.

Rooms from £207, with treatments from £34. Vigilius Mountain Resort, Vigiljoch Mountain, Lana, Italy. 0039 047 355 6600, [vigilius.it](http://vigilius.it)

**DO** Pack sun lotion. The mountain sun is so bright, you can sunbathe even when there's snow on the ground.

**DON'T** Take ski poles, as the middle-aged German hikers use them and they do not look cool.

UV Protection  
SPF 20 by  
Clarins, £26.  
0800 036 3558



Vigilius' vista: ideal for clearing the air



The Couples spa suite at Esperanza – just add you and a significant other

## ESPERANZA IN BAJA, CALIFORNIA

Much more than just another tequila sunrise

BY BILL PRINCE

American resort hotels can be, well, stiff. Staid. Lacking in the cool stuff. They're excellently run, sumptuously appointed and forensic in their commitment to service. But sometimes you want less of the crisp shirt and more of the back rub.

Auberge Resorts knows this, having brought a European air of indulgence to the almost fetishistically pristine Napa Valley. For an even more relaxed vibe, however, take the next commuter flight out of LAX to the tip of the Baja peninsular where, a few miles north of party town Cabo San Lucas, lies Esperanza, an ocean-front development overlooking the Sea of Cortez.

While the, ahem, in-depth tequila-tasting course helps to create a proper Mexican vibe in contrast to the many *faux*-adobe developments that litter this coastline, it's in the spa that Esperanza's elemental coastal environment really comes alive. Each of the seven treatment rooms features its own tiny private garden, shielded with a traditional *latilla* canopy. Here, carved stone bowls filled with hibiscus flowers and bougainvillea evoke the fragrant desert environment beyond, maintaining the illusion that, a few feet away, a fully functioning resort

community is hard at play. (There's golf, cookery classes, a local art tour and even Spanish lessons available.)

Home-team treatments use indigenous, enzyme-rich tropical fruits, rich oils, sea greens, desert minerals and plants to concoct a variety of site-specific products, including a Couples Clay Bake (120 minutes, £349) that incorporates *damiana*, a traditional Mexican aphrodisiac. Closer to GQ's solo-travelling heart, however, is the Corona Beer Face Lift (75 minutes, £50), promising to refine the pores and tighten the skin even before you've experienced its spirit-lifting capabilities, and the Hombre Head-To-Toe (90 minutes, £133), the ultimate full-body massage.

So the next time you find yourself killing time in La-La land, longing for something a little less strait-laced in the service department, join Stiller, Paltrow and Martin, Clooney and the rest of the Baja-vocates and head to Esperanza. Cathy Matos Mexican Tours offers six nights at Esperanza from £3,273 including flights, taxes and transfers. 0870 890 0040. Esperanza, Carretera Transpeninsula km 7, Manzana 10, Punta Ballena, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico 23410. 0052 624 145 6400, [esperanzaresort.com](http://esperanzaresort.com)

**DO** Read James Frey's *Bright Shiny Morning* – it's set in LA but, as you'll be flying into and out of there during the course of your stay, it sort of works.

**DON'T** Leave for Esperanza without watching Ben Stiller's remake of Neil Simon's *The Heartbreak Kid*, shot almost entirely on location here.