

# SYSTEM REBOOT

From herbal treatments in a Tyrolean castle to an urban healthy-living hub, our pick of Europe’s best spas and wellness centres will inspire some time away to reset and galvanise body and mind.



## 1. Castel Fragsburg Merano

### BEST FOR: HERBAL TREATMENTS

A hunting residence from 1624 and a 14th-century castle sit on a private hill high above Merano. Castel Fragsburg, the Ortner family’s five-star hotel, is more than just a stately home. The culinary creations of Michelin-starred chef Egon Heiss and the deep knowledge of natural remedies offered by Renate De Mario Gamper in the hotel’s spa are fuelling the reputation of this exceptional place far beyond the borders of South Tyrol.

“Elderberries are one of the best home remedies,” says De Mario Gamper as she holds a stem of the fruit in her hand. “We use the flowers for soothing poultices.

We make tea and syrup from them too and extract juice from the ripe berries in autumn.” According to De Mario Gamper, this juice has potent health benefits. “Take a tablespoon in tea every day as an immune-system stimulant.”

Today, wearing a hazel-coloured, ankle-length cotton skirt, she is standing with her long black hair loose in the garden of the five-hectare estate, the morning sun bathing the façade of the hunting lodge and the surrounding apple orchards in a soft light. She turns to a fig tree. “I add some of these young leaves to a green smoothie that my husband and I drink every morning,” she says. “Try one. It has flavours of coconut and vanilla.” Then she spots a thistle that has sprouted up as tall as a man in one of the beds. “The milk thistle!” she exclaims. “The ultimate detoxifying agent.”

This tour of the castle grounds with the modern alchemist, as she calls herself, turns out to be a journey into a parallel world. De Mario Gamper has an encyclopaedic knowledge of plants. Not only does she know the healing properties of almost everything

that she finds, she is also an expert in the uses of stems, flowers, leaves and fruit. Her historical knowledge runs deep: she quotes 12th-century German Benedictine abbess and polymath Hildegard von Bingen, alongside 16th-century Swiss physician and alchemist Paracelsus and Johann Künzle, a 20th-century Swiss herbalist.

For guests, she channels all of this into a four-hour biophilia course and a similarly immersive incense ritual that promises “an opportunity for transformation”. There are also alkaline baths in goat’s milk or spring water, taken in a larch-wood tub with a view of the mountains.

To the right of the narrow road that leads up from the hunting lodge to the castle is the Soul Garden, which is run in collaboration with an organisation that encourages volunteering for young people from Merano. This is where De Mario Gamper gathers some of the ingredients that she uses for her spa treatments, alkaline baths, home-made oils and hydrolates, including rose petals, nasturtium, mallow, ribwort plantain, marigolds, nettles and



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Ingredients gathered from the garden include rose petals, nasturtium, mallow, marigolds and wild herbs



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1. Breakfast on the balcony
2. Castel Fragsburg’s verdant exterior
3. Treats from South Tyrolean chef Egon Heiss
4. Renate De Mario Gamper
5. Fertile grounds
6. Kick back amid nature
7. Poolside at Teranka

PHOTOGRAPHER: Piergiorgio Sorgenti. IMAGES: Teranka

all kinds of wild herbs. “I collect other plants in the Dolomites, such as St John’s wort, which I have just prepared as an oil for a deep massage that relieves pain and relaxes the muscles,” she says, watching a blue and black wood bee in the flower beds.

Up at the castle, which is reflected in the newly created wooden-edged swimming pond, Alexander Ortner Jr, known as Xandi, barefoot and in cargo shorts, is busy working in the garden. Finger-length dragonflies circle the pale pink waterlilies that cover half of the pond. Ortner has spent the past few days planting 120 fruit trees on the estate with fellow students from the Vienna University of Technology, where he completed his bachelor’s degree in architecture this summer.

“My great-grandfather bought the hunting lodge in 1955,” he says. “In 2019 we were lucky to be able to purchase the associated castle.” The family is now in the process of remodelling the place room by room and giving each space a new purpose. The wood-panelled knights’ hall, the chapel and a dining room are ideal for weddings,

## 2. Teranka Formentera



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### BEST FOR: ISLAND ESCAPISM

A short ferry ride from Ibiza brings you to Formentera, a magical corner of the Med. The smallest of the Balearics takes you back to a simpler time when island living meant that footwear was optional, siestas were mandatory and doors were never locked.

The new Teranka hotel, between the crystal-clear waters of the Playa de Migjorn and a fragrant pine forest, captures this simplicity. It’s the perfect hideaway to reconnect with nature and with yourself.

Yoga classes are taught on an outdoor wooden deck. Our teacher encourages us to breathe in the spirit of the island. Practising amid the aroma of pine trees and the sunshine on the deck’s panelling has a profound effect – even more so when it’s followed by a dip in the sea and dinner in the garden. The rooftop bar offers sunset views and chilled cocktails. “We believe in balance and giving you space to enjoy your life,” says the hotel’s Alejandra García Farfán.

The spa treatments target both body and mind. We opt for the signature Teranka ritual, melding massage with aromatherapy and sound meditation. It’s an inherently feminine approach to wellbeing and a nod to history: in the 1960s, most businesses in Formentera were run by women. And the laid-back practices are transformative. “It’s all about the notion of being anchored to a safe harbour,” Farfan says. — **NT** [teranka.com](https://teranka.com)

### 3. Passalacqua Lake Como

**BEST FOR: RESPLENDENT SWIMS AND OLD-WORLD INDULGENCE**

Passalacqua, a relative newcomer to the cluster of five-star hotels on Lake Como in northern Italy, was crowned the best hotel in the world in 2023, just a year after it opened. The 18th-century former home of Count Andrea Lucini Passalacqua has been transformed by the De Santis family into an intimate 24-room property, complete with a jewel of an outdoor pool on the terrace.

This season it has opened the doors to a new indoor pool that completes the hotel’s spa area, making the idea of a sojourn here in autumn and winter very appealing. “Our idea of a complete hotel always included a spa,” says Valentina de Santis, the member of the family at the helm. As the heritage building is protected, the hotel makes the most of the property’s pre-existing structure, setting treatment rooms, saunas and steam rooms seamlessly in its former stables, as well as in a warren of underground stone tunnels that were once used to transport provisions on horseback up to the residence. “It’s a very evocative space that wasn’t easy to adapt,” says De Santis.

The bottom of the pool – a kaleidoscope of hand-cut green stones that include beola marble and Brazilian quartzite – gives the space a soothing resplendence that will tempt you to stay for hours looking over the lake, even in the colder months. — **CHR** *passalacqua.it*



### 4. Lassalle-Haus Menzingen



**BEST FOR: THE SOUND OF SILENCE**

In the lush green moraine above Lake Zug, three 160-year-old sequoia trees stand near the modernist structure of Lassalle-Haus. As you pass through the concrete gate in the late afternoon, the ringing of a church bell reminds you that this is a religious institution. It is run by the Swiss Jesuit order, which commissioned architect André M Studer to design the building in 1970.

“The architecture of the house is based on a footprint,” says Toni Kurmann, director of Lassalle-Haus, as we sit among a group of newcomers who have enrolled on his weekend meditation course. “Studer built it according to the principles of harmonic architecture: mathematical similarities between architecture, music, religion and even astrology are incorporated into a comprehensive overall system.”

Kurmann has been a member of the order since 1996 and was president of the Jesuits Worldwide foundation before taking over the management of Lassalle-Haus in 2023. His passion for both his faith and the modernist building is evident in the way that he enthusiastically points out every detail. The floor tiles in the atmospherically lit Red Chapel come from the Jura mountains and feature fossilised plants and animals. “This is how we feel connected to evolution here,” Kurmann says, before leading the



group into the high-ceilinged meeting room. Lassalle-Haus has been an interfaith centre since 1993 and the path to silence has since broadened: Zen meditation, yoga, retreats and fasting are just a small part of what the facility offers.

All of these spiritual paths are taught in parallel and the world views behind them are allowed to exist side by side. The weekend meditation courses include spiritual exercises and contemplation as an introduction to various meditation techniques. Zen meditation and yoga form important bridges to Asian traditions. Other courses include t’ai chi and qigong. All of this helps participants to decide which spiritual path suits them best. During this weekend, theoretical introductions alternate with meditation. “We offer about 200 courses throughout the year. Yoga breathing and one-week therapeutic fasting are just as much a part of our programme as pilgrimages to Jerusalem,” says Kurmann.

Guests stay in one of the minimalist rooms and adapt to the routine. The days start early at about 07.00, with meditation sessions before breakfast. The communal meals are mostly vegetable-based and are generally eaten without conversation. “We believe in the power of silence,” Kurmann says. Those who enter Lassalle-Haus are immersed in it to experience the full effects of Studer’s spiritually charged architecture. — **IMA** *lassalle-haus.org*

### 5. Oyu Zürich

**BEST FOR: URBAN HEALING**

In the heart of Zürich, Oyu is a hub of healthy living that combines traditional Chinese and conventional medicine with Ayurveda under one roof. “Our guests want treatments and preventative rituals that can be integrated into everyday life, so our central location is ideal,” says its CEO, Nicole Muret. Numerous patient surveys informed the concept, which comprises consultation and treatment rooms, and a restaurant – a combination that Muret says is unique in Europe. Oyu’s parent company, the Stiftung Gesundheitsförderung Bad Zurzach + Baden, has about 60 years of experience in the healthcare sector.

*Konfekt* is welcomed at the reception on the first floor at Sihlstrasse 3, just a few steps away from Bahnhofstrasse. Walking into the warmly lit, spacious series of rooms with lots of wood and plants, we are struck by the calming atmosphere, which feels miles from the bustle of the city. The restaurant, which has a plant-based menu,

has an inner courtyard terrace where you can discover Ayurvedic and other wholesome delicacies from morning to evening and is open to all. There’s congee with seasonal compote and toasted almonds for breakfast, charred cauliflower with a herb-lemon bean purée for lunch and lentil pancakes for snacks.

For a *padabhyanga*, an Ayurvedic foot massage, *Konfekt* is accompanied to the second floor to the relaxation and course rooms. Here, the atmosphere is even more soothing. Oak wood dominates a light-flooded room for qigong, meditation and several types of yoga. In the relaxation room is an ingenious light installation that’s reminiscent of a calmly flowing river. The interiors were designed and furnished by Swiss studio Enea Outside In, working with Marc Lüllmann, a Vastu architect. Vastu is a traditional Indian form of architecture and living doctrine based on the natural laws of the five elements of earth, fire, sky, water and air. With round, cosy armchairs covered in tactile textiles, small tables and designer lamps in light colours, the

orientation and location of the rooms follow Vastu principles. “An interior close to nature was particularly important to us,” says Muret, summarising the effect. “You feel comfortable and at ease here. You feel like you’re in a protected space.”

The higher the floor, the more intimate the purpose. On the third level, *Konfekt* meets Dr Bettina Kneip, the head doctor and expert in Ayurvedic medicine, who has been involved in the conceptualisation of Oyu almost since the start. She sees medicine as a co-operation between conventional and complementary medicine, and also between doctor and patient. Kneip believes that nutrition is the basis of a healthy lifestyle. “When digestion is good, the immune system functions much better, among many other things,” she says.

An individual consultation is the first step towards optimising your daily eating habits. How can such a change be achieved as part of work and family life? “We offer personalised digital support with meal plans and our restaurant has the appropriate food,” says Kneip. Increasing your wellbeing is obviously the best motivation. “When you feel better, you stick to a healthy diet.” Her team currently comprises about 30 naturopaths, therapists and course instructors, with more doctors soon to come on board. All are dedicated to one mission: restoring and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. — **MAP** *oyu.ch*

1. Passalacqua’s indoor pool
2. Inside Lassalle-Haus
3. Modernist exterior
4. Serene spaces for meditation
5. Herbal infusions at Oyu
6. Time for a lie down
7. Corridor in Oyu



## 6. Ästad Vingård Sweden

### BEST FOR: FOREST IMMERSION

In the hilly landscape of western Sweden, vineyard and spa Ästad Vingård has all the elements of a charming Scandinavian village: light wooden cabins by a soothing lake, red barns in green fields, log huts with mossy turf roofs. The only difference is that you'll see guests in white bathrobes strolling between their hotel rooms and the spa, then plunging into freezing water before dining at one of the two restaurants.

The family-owned business started as a small farm in 1946 and evolved into one of the country's first establishments dedicated to organic dairy production. When the founders' grandchildren took over in 2010, they transformed the property into a vineyard, focusing on solaris grapes, a variety suited to northern climates that yields a sweet, refreshing, fizzy white wine.

The spa is designed to engage the senses, incorporating soothing ambient sounds, custom fragrances and tactile natural materials to harmonise with the surrounding nature reserve. "We have recorded the sounds of birds chirping and wind blowing through the trees and developed earthy scents that make guests feel immersed in the forest," says the spa's co-owner Daniel Carlsson.

Those wishing to experience the real thing can head out on one of the spa's recommended day hikes through 60km of trails that wind through dense beech woods and past calm lakes.

For dinner, there are two options. Restaurant Äng, housed in a glass house, recently earned its first Michelin star. It offers a tasting menu served over four hours and showcasing locally sourced ingredients alongside the vineyard's organic wines. Then there's Restaurant Logen, a more casual option in a traditional barn. It specialises in fish and meats, accompanied by a premium selection of wine, including a bold Spanish Albariño that has been submerged in cold seawater for six months.

The spa's new Sjöparken hotel rooms are a collection of wooden huts that appear to float on a lake, connected by long glass corridors. Designed with Copenhagen firm Norm Architects, every room has a private sauna with direct access to the water. The natural palette of light wood and stone creates a relaxing atmosphere. "We designed the structures to blend seamlessly with their surroundings," says Norm's founder, Jonas Bjerre-Poulsen. "Here, it's all about promoting wellness through a deep connection with nature." — **GDE** [astadvingard.se](http://astadvingard.se)



1. Ästad Vingård's waterside cabins  
2. Textured custom furniture  
3. Wooden walls and floor in a guest room

4. Das Kranzbach  
5. Lily of the Valley's pool with a view of the Côte d'Azur

The structures blend with their surroundings, promoting wellness through a deep connection with nature



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## 7. Das Kranzbach Bavaria

### BEST FOR: BREATHING DEEPLY

Sinking into a swing in a fragrant meadow surrounded by a chorus of birdsong, *Konfekt's* first afternoon at Das Kranzbach sets the tone for what's to come. Everything at this castle in the Bavarian Alps invites guests to take a deep breath. From dips in freshwater pools to a cuisine infused with mountain herbs, it takes only a few hours before newcomers begin to relax and connect with the landscape. The interior was created by UK designer Ilse Crawford. Its light-filled rooms have an enveloping warmth that cocoons and reassures.

The hotel springs to life at dawn when guests walk through a dewy field to



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breakfast before making a splash in pools with views of the Wetterstein mountains. The rest of the day is occupied by carefully planned therapies. Dr Christine Müller has developed a holistic health concept that focuses on deep relaxation. Therapists carry out herbal stamp massages and alpine herb peeling with plants grown by the hotel.

In the nearby conifer forest, a pavilion designed by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma serves as a meditation space. "It's built like life: nothing is straight," says Axel Zeman, Zen teacher at Kranzbach. "The wooden planks are arranged in such a way that in the morning the bright, pristine light shines into the temple and illuminates it. Kuma traces the arc of life's path with the light."

As we make our way to afternoon tea with homemade plum strudel, Zeman tells us, "Breathing is just another name for prayer. My aim is to guide guests to slow their breath and to find power and peace within their body amid nervousness, to experience contentment, serenity and ultimately more joie de vivre." — **MZ** [daskranzbach.de](http://daskranzbach.de)

IMAGES: Kristian Sahlborg



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## 8. Lily of the Valley Côte d'Azur

### BEST FOR: ENERGISING EXERCISE

Built into the hillside overlooking a sloping valley of pine trees alive with birdsong, fruit groves and vineyards, Lily of the Valley is a low-slung campus of concrete and timber buildings that offers a slice of Côte d'Azur lifestyle alongside a demanding schedule of exercise and treatments. While visitors to the hotel's terrace will notice coterie of elegant guests sipping crisp rosé, the hotel is steeped in sports science and home to a team of health specialists who promise to resculpt and reboot your body.

For its fitness-performance programme, the team doesn't waste any time bouncing its clients into action. New guests complete a series of balance and fitness tests with a personal coach before launching into a tailor-made routine that feels as though it has been plucked from the schedule of a holidaying Olympian.

*Konfekt's* morning begins with a two-hour mountain biking trip through the nature reserve of the Cap Lardier, scaling steep, dusty tracks on an e-assisted bike (the

electric kick doesn't stop you breaking a sweat). This is followed by a deep tissue massage and a session of stretching in a class led by one of the team's tough-but-Zen coaches. "Our approach isn't meant to be punishing – this is France, after all," says manager Laura Durozey, who meets us next to the sauna and wood-lined hammam. "You can have a glass of wine in the evening and sit on the terrace. At the same time, I wouldn't play down the effect that our programmes can have on the body. It's a combination of movement, diet and treatments, and we find that it can have profound benefits."

The next morning begins with a session of sea-wading: walking waist-deep in the shallows alongside the shore. "Guests can do up to five hours' exercise a day but they won't feel it," says Yoann Berger, *Konfekt's* coach. "We're seeing a lot of people on the edge of burnout who need to reset completely so a lot of our work is not just physical – it's emotional and personal."

The bucolic setting and natural materials add to that sense of healing. The buildings are enveloped in greenery; rustic, sculptural wood and natural stone define the interior by Philippe Starck. The balance of sea air, a Mediterranean diet, rigorous exercise and a touch of French indulgence leaves you feeling energised but inspired to keep it up once the blue skies are out of sight. — **SG** [lilyofthevalley.com](http://lilyofthevalley.com)