

The most expensive therapy retreats in the world

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There is a new breed of luxury therapy centre where only the one percent need apply. Kate Wills reports on the under the radar retreats for billionaires



You're met at the door to your private jet by a tall, impeccably dressed Swiss man who whisks you through security and into a blacked-out Bentley.

After a short drive, you arrive at a residence beside Lake Zurich, where your room comes complete with suede beds flanked by abstract expressionist paintings. There's an Apple TV, Bose speakers and a well-stocked kitchen ready to be used by your personal chef. A maid, butler and secretary will also be on call throughout your stay. There will be no other guests while you're here and, if you want, no one ever has to know you've been. Luxury getaway for the super-rich? Not quite. Welcome to Paracelsus Recovery, the £62,500-a-week Swiss therapy centre designed to cure the world's wealthiest of everything from eating disorders to addictions and OCD in an ultra-exclusive and discreet setting.

EveningStandard.

Once guests have settled in, they are driven to a top-of-the-range Swiss clinic for a comprehensive three-hour physical exam, that involves being hooked up to a Bicom machine for biochemical testing, a vitamin C drip and a full psychiatric assessment. Forget group therapy; here, a team of psychologists, nurses and addiction specialists tend to just a single patient at a time for 10 hours a day (one of them is available 24 hours a day, and sleeps next door to the client). Total privacy is the clinic's USP, though actors, supermodels and members of the world's royal families are said to have been treated here.

On average, they stay for four weeks, at a cost of £230,000. 'There's not a typical client, but what they all have in common is that they are looking for the very, very best treatment available and require 100 per cent confidentiality,' says managing director and co-founder Jan Gerber. 'It's a 360-degree approach with seven-star service, which is what our clients are used to. The luxury we have is not about spoiling someone. It's just their reality.'

Paracelsus, which also offers acupuncturists, yoga, a personal trainer and a nutritionist, is far from the only therapy centre boasting radical treatment programmes for the radically rich. Indeed, more and more centres are being opened to cater for the upper echelons in search of a private place to detox or reset (there's a reason Succession's Kendall Roy heads to a discreet clinic in Iceland to 'decompress').

Starting at £72,000 a week, real-life Roys can check in to The Kusnacht Practice, also on Lake Zurich, which calls itself the 'best luxury mental health treatment centre in the world'. It's also one of the most exclusive — only 30 people gain entry each year. George Michael was said to be one of them, spending £2 million over six months in 2015 to treat addiction and depression. Other high-flyers said to have passed through its luxury villas (complete with views over the Alps) include royals and heads of state, who come for the team of 18 world-class psychiatrists who treat everything from burnout to depression and co-dependency issues. Their methods include transcranial magnetic stimulation, in which electromagnetic pulses are delivered to the brain to treat low moods. Full-spectrum blood tests, electrocardiograms, renal, coronary and circulatory examinations and GI tests, as well as detoxes, are also available.



Simple pleasures: the modest pool at The Meadows

There's also the similarly exclusive Clinic Les Alpes, a £25,000-per-week centre housed in an old Swiss Alpine chateau, where treatment includes art and music therapy, adventure therapy, clinical psychology and sleep hygiene (a spa, high-end restaurant and 'serenity space' are also part of the package). Beyond Switzerland, the Sonoran Desert is also fast becoming a byword among billionaires who want to get help. The Meadows in Wickenburg, Arizona, is set on a 35-acre former dude ranch, and has become famous for its 'Gentle Path' sex addiction treatment programme (Tiger Woods, Kevin Spacey and Harvey Weinstein have all reportedly checked in), as well as treating anxiety and depression. Clients are given colour-coded name badges depending on the issue they're here to address (sex addiction is red), but the therapeutic timetable is similar for all, including carrying around rocks to symbolise the burden you've been holding on to for decades, hugging horses during 'equine therapy' and taking a walk through a 'serenity circle'.

The 45-day treatment programme costs £42,000, but the aesthetic at The Meadows is deliberately spartan, with shared bedrooms and bathrooms. Alcohol and narcotics are banned, as are caffeine and sugar. Tight or revealing clothing is also not permitted. 'The first night I was there, I was stuck in this tiny little room with two complete strangers,' Sean Brock, a highly successful American chef, has said. 'I was listening to my room-mates detoxing, and thinking, woah, this is not the luxury resort I was expecting.'



The Kusnacht Practice treatment room

A more pleasant experience may lie in alternative therapies, a route increasingly being favoured by one percenters. 'Many of my clients have anxiety, insomnia or depression, or they just feel that something is missing and they want a fast track to healing,' says Lucyne Pearson, who trained as a psychotherapist and worked at The Priory, before learning shamanism and energy medicine and setting up her own retreats in Europe and Central America. 'They live busy lives and they want to get to the root cause of why they're struggling.' She leads shamanic ceremonies of around 50 people at the Rythmia Life Advancement Center in Costa Rica, which is the only medically licensed ayahuasca facility in the world.

'You're opening yourself up to another level of consciousness, but you're around doctors and nurses in a luxurious spa setting with mud treatments,' adds Pearson. It costs around £5,000 a week, plus treatments. 'I've seen people try pharmaceuticals and years of therapy and have little progress, and then they use plant medicine and miracles happen overnight.' Pearson has just returned from a sold-out, four-day psychedelic-assisted therapy workshop in Amsterdam, where psilocybin truffles are given out 'with the support of sober healthcare professionals' as a tool for subconscious reprogramming.



Healing hands: a ceremony at the Rythmia Life Advancement Center

Things, however, might not have to be so far-out — or away. On a quiet street in Mayfair you'll find Addcounsel where, for £45,000-£150,000 a week, clients are treated by a personalised one-to-one treatment squad. Addcounsel deals with no more than three clients at a time, who will never see one another during treatment. They are each given large houses and apartments in Belgravia, Knightsbridge and Green Park and the fee covers 24-hour care from a crack team of specialists including a psychiatrist, a yoga teacher, a 'neuro-feedback practitioner' and a chef. These experts are at the top of their game, such as David Behrens, a mindfulness coach who spent 27 years living as a monk in India, and visits twice a week to teach the patients how to meditate.

To begin, you'll have a top-to-toe health check — CT scan, blood tests, ultrasounds, liver check, along with functional medical tests which assess nutrition, deficiencies and gut health. All treatment is overseen by your private GP who liaises with the best psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors in the world. Two nurses on a five-day rotating shift will be with you every waking moment, supervising your treatment. A recovery manager — companion, confidante, opera buddy, tennis partner, midnight Scrabble opponent, whatever you fancy — is also there to keep you on the straight and narrow.



Rythmia Life Advancement Center in Costa Rica

‘We’re a new concept in the UK,’ says Paul Flynn, co-founder and chief executive of Addcounsel. ‘Many of our clients come from the Middle East, but a lot live in London. For them the financial commitment isn’t the issue, it’s the personal commitment.’ Flynn says that 90 per cent of the people they work with have some kind of addiction — whether it’s Xanax, their jobs or the video game, Fortnite. Most enquiries come via word of mouth. Its youngest client is 16, but most are men over 35. ‘The people we treat tend to be incredibly demanding and specific,’ says Flynn. ‘So you have to be strong when you tell them there are no quick fixes.’

Indeed, the question will always remain: can money really buy you happiness? Hilda Burke, a Hammersmith-based psychotherapist is not so sure. ‘This kind of intense work wouldn’t be suitable for everyone,’ she says. ‘People who go on these retreats tend to be Type A — they want results and they want them fast. But then they go back into their high-powered existence where they have no time to reflect — where does it go? Has your life really changed? ‘Most of us need time to unfurl.’