

# Float away

Laura French takes a dip in the health-giving waters at The Retreat, a minimalist wellness sanctuary at Iceland's Blue Lagoon

I'm in another world. I float serenely as bath-warm water laps my skin and the sound of crackling silica soothes my mind. Above the water, my face feels the nip of an icy wind, and I open my eyes to see a crisp cobalt sky peeping through a layer of steam.

The therapist gently twirls me around as my body follows the lull of the water, before I'm given a calming foot massage and left to enjoy the silence.

I'm in Iceland's revered Blue Lagoon, experiencing 'Float Therapy' – a new treatment introduced earlier this year, which uses floatation, stretching and delicate massage to leave you feeling happily zen.

## EXCLUSIVE ESCAPE

I'm here on a wellness-themed break at The Retreat – the five-star spa resort built around the renowned geothermal spa Blue Lagoon, one of Iceland's most visited attractions, which has just celebrated its 30th anniversary.

The Retreat is a separate enclave for the health-conscious (and affluent) who come to escape the world. It has all the hallmarks of a luxury hideaway – with the added bonus of its own private lagoon tucked away from the bigger, better-known version.

It certainly plays on the health-boosting properties of these waters: later that ➤



Float Therapy at  
The Retreat at  
the Blue Lagoon



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: 'Lava mesh' wall at the spa; the subterranean spa; The Retreat's private section of the Blue Lagoon; bathers using silica paste

day at the spa's 'skincare circuit', I scrub myself shiny with local black volcanic salt, then cocoon myself in a thick, sloppy silica paste that dries on my skin like cake icing. Afterwards, I move onto a moisturising algae formula that leaves my skin feeling suppler than ever before, and finish it off with almond oil that has me smelling like a fresh macaroon.

### HEALTH-GIVING WATERS

It's not just The Retreat that has caught onto the health benefits of the Blue Lagoon, of course. Icelanders started noticing the soothing properties of this geothermal pool – originally created by excess water from the Svartsengi geothermal power plant – in the early 1980s, when a local from the nearby town of Kevlavik tried treating his psoriasis with a dip. He found the high concentration of

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silica (1%-2%) and algae eased his symptoms, and others soon started following suit. The Blue Lagoon Limited company was founded in 1992, and the current facility was built in 1999.

Scientists have come in droves ever since, developing skincare products that use silica and algae for anti-ageing and other purposes (with products sold in the on-site shop). We visited the research and

development centre to learn more about the wellness benefits and the production process – glimpsing pools where silica is filtered out and brightly lit tubes of algae where photosynthesis takes place. We learn that silica stimulates collagen, which is great for skin firmness, and it can help eczema too.

Geothermal energy from the water (heated from tectonic activity 2,000 metres underground) is used to generate electricity and hot water for the Blue Lagoon and its properties as well as the local area. It's harnessed at the on-site Svartsengi Resource Park – one of several sustainability efforts that run through the heart of the company.

### WELLNESS DAY

It's not only guests at The Retreat who get to benefit from all this. The Blue Lagoon welcomes day visitors in their droves, with a ➤

## top tip

For alternative accommodation at the Blue Lagoon, suggest the 35-room Silica Hotel next door. It boasts a private lagoon and offers access to the Blue Lagoon, The Retreat's restaurants and (for an extra fee) the Retreat Spa. Rooms start at £480 per night.

**bluelagoon.com/  
accommodation/  
silica-hotel**

## DESTINATIONS

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ABOVE: Yoga with a view across the wild Icelandic landscape at The Retreat

main public pool where travellers come to bathe in the milky-blue waters against a backdrop of black volcanic rock.

Bathers can lather themselves up with silica and algae face masks at the Mask Bar, or book in for float therapy to ease away their stresses in this unique environment (entry from £51, including a free drink; the float therapy costs £150).

Those wanting to take it up a notch can book a day pass for The Retreat that gives them entry to the spa and its skincare circuit, as well as access to its private lagoon – a series of secluded, steaming pools and waterways that cut through lava canyons in a scene I can only describe as otherworldly (from £359 for five hours of unlimited access).

Overnight guests get access to the private section until 10pm, and it's something of a selling point. I spent several evenings in this secluded, private paradise, bathing in the dark as a full moon shone

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above, steam glowing in a misty haze beneath a starry sky, and it was nothing short of magical.

### LAVA LANDSCAPES

Iceland isn't only about the Blue Lagoon. The Retreat offers various experiences exploring the surrounding Reykjanes Peninsula (a Unesco Global Geopark), from horse riding and hiking to sea kayaking and snowmobiling.

We opted for an ATV tour: think speeding up and down jagged rocks and arid dirt tracks to reach

a craggy volcano. There a tableau opened out bordering on the apocalyptic – all copper-brown rocks, marble-swirled landscapes and stark grey lava fields, empty but for the odd puff of steam exploding from the rocks.

It was an extraordinary, if eerie, scene that had me feeling like I was in another world entirely, which is a feeling I'd got rather used to after a few days spent bathing, preening and floating my way around this unique, enchanting place. **TW**

### BOOK IT

A Lava View Junior Suite at The Retreat starts at £1,247 per night in autumn and winter. [bluelagoon.com/travel-professionals](https://www.bluelagoon.com/travel-professionals)

Return flights from Heathrow to Keflavik airport with Icelandair start from £190. [icelandair.com](https://www.icelandair.com)



## THE RETREAT



Built into the volcanic rock, The Retreat is all about Scandi chic – with charcoal tones and minimalist features. From the 62 suites to the subterranean spa, home to a sauna, steam room, cold plunge pool and various underground lounges – it's all clean-cut lines, huge comfortable beds and terraces overlooking lava fields. On the culinary front, there's an underground wine cave built into the rock (*below*), and three impressive restaurants: among them Moss, a fine-dining spot whose Icelandic chef Agnar Sverrisson trained by Raymond Blanc. It's laid-back luxury, rather than in-your-face extravagance, but I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to clients looking to push the boat out for a few days of pure, therapeutic escapism.

[bluelagoon.com/accommodation/retreat-hotel](https://www.bluelagoon.com/accommodation/retreat-hotel)

