

Turning 50

– and feeling younger

An invigorating retreat to Sparkling Hill

By Diana Ballon

I arrived at Sparkling Hill Resort on a dark starless January night but inside everything glittered and shone. With 3.5 million Swarovski crystals throughout this resort, owned by Gernot Langes-Swarovski, the patriarch of the Swarovski empire, glitter was everywhere.

I had come to Vernon in B.C.'s Okanagan Valley because of the mountains and beauty of this area. And I had chosen Sparkling Hill because of its reputation as a wellness resort and European-style spa, where the focus is not simply on pampering, but on health.

With only a few days at Sparkling Hill in celebration of my 50th, I knew that I couldn't

transform my life. But I could step out of the frenetic pace of my day-to-day routine in Toronto, and return with a different perspective. At Sparkling Hill I ate incredible healthy and delicious meals at PeakFine restaurant (sometimes in a white bathrobe), met with the spa's kinesiologist and naturopath to make some health goals, and took their early morning stretch and strength class and more rigorous ski fit class. I also had their awesome volcanic ash mud wrap and massage.

Throughout my stay, I moved between hot and cold treatments, purported to provide many health benefits – both to mind and body. I made a daily ritual of frequenting several saunas (the round-shaped panorama and the rustic chalet-like herbal one being

my favourites); and steam rooms (I love the rose steam room, with rose petals embedded in heated wall tiles and rose scent). I also swam in the outdoor infinity pool and soaked in the indoor hot and salt water pools.

In between, I cooled down in the igloo (a 10 degree Celsius room with ice chips and chilled walls, and the scent of peppermint and eucalyptus), and a thunder shower: that meant not only a frigid downpour but the rumble of thunder, and the scent of orange. I also did the healing Kneipp walk, in which you walk through a knee-deep channel of water that alternates between hot and cold.

As well, I tried their cryotherapy treatment, which involves spending up to three minutes in a minus 110 degree chamber





turning in circles while listening to “Don’t worry, be happy,” wearing a bathing suit, sneakers, ear band and surgical face mask.

While the happiest point of that treatment was when I was no longer in it. I had stepped

out of my comfort zone and survived it!

Afterwards, I took a break with a tea in their Serenity Room. Like most of the rest of the property, there is no artwork on the walls; instead, floor-to-ceiling windows throughout

frame the natural beauty outside.

On our last day, we went to SilverStar Mountain Resort, about a half-hour drive away, which—together with neighbouring Sovereign Lake—has 105 kilometres of groomed cross-country trails, the most extensive trail system in Canada. SilverStar’s quaint mid-mountain village looks like a grouping of gingerbread houses - all buildings are required to have five colours. And with cross-country and downhill ski trails, snowshoeing, snowboarding, ice skating, fat biking, tubing and bowling all radiating from it—it’s easy for groups to reconnect for meals or lodging regardless of their activity preferences.

The next time I visit Sparkling Hill, I plan to try their week-long Stay Young and Healthy for 55+ package. But even without this, I had been able to let go of stress, exercise, eat delicious healthy food and appreciate my husband and kids that much more with the distance. I could now return to urban life with a sense of calm, reminded of what my body and mind can feel like when it’s in nature and in peace. **31**

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