



Harald Kitz at the Hochschober spa

The latest squeeze

A new massage technique from an Austrian spa is causing a stir. **Belinda Archer** checks in to see if it can hit the spot

Mission To find out about Haki, the new, all-Austrian spa treatment that is all the rage in Central Europe. Next stop, the UK.

USP Haki Stretch & Relax is a massage therapy designed specifically for the jammed-up head, neck and shoulder area of stressed-out workaholics and strung-out mothers. It is the invention of a therapist called Harald Kitz (hence Haki, geddit?), who is based at Hotel Hochschober, one of Austria's smartest spa hotels, in the lush southern Austrian Alps of Carinthia. Go there and you can experience the treatment at the capable hands of Harald, a rather gorgeous 33-year-old Mark Owen look-alike, with blond streaks and eyes the colour of Fired Earth's Duck Egg Blue wall paint.

Ambience A charming, if traditional, inside-of-a-cuckoo-

clock establishment that prides itself on good, solid Austrian hospitality (roaring fire, staff in Heidi costumes, musical singalongs, etc). The spa itself is huge and incorporates one of Austria's most extensive range of facilities, from an authentic hamam to a four-floor Chinese pagoda, Nordic

THE HAKI PLAYS YOUR BODY LIKE AN INSTRUMENT

saunas and a heated outdoor lake pool.

Quality of experience Being given any form of treatment by the person who invented it is a rare treat. Harald, or Haki, as Harald likes to be known, uses an unusual combination of vibrations and rhythmic movements — sort of playing your body like a musical instrument — to relieve upper back

tension. At times it felt that there was more than one pair of hands working on me.

Unusually, too, I lay on my back, because Harald believes it is more comfortable for clients and easier for him to work his magic. Which he did, magnificently. A stubborn glitch in my neck was manfully squeezed into oblivion and all surrounding tension dissolved away.

Food You won't go hungry here. A have-as-much-as-you-can-eat breakfast buffet and salad bar in the evenings, plus excellent, hearty variations on traditional Austrian dishes, fish, pasta and risottos.

In-crowd Preserved German ladies of a certain age, loved-up Austrian couples, the occasional Austrian or German family with children in tow. Less than 1 per cent of the guests are Brits.

Wallet watch Bumper good value. Austrian spa hotels have a tradition of not charging for treatments, hence the room rate includes not only all meals but also access to the spa. The Haki Stretch and Relax treatment, however, is one of the few that costs extra. Even so, €52 (£35) for the full 50-minute session is still a bargain to we overcharged British spa junkies.

Need to know Hotel Hochschober (00 43 042 75 82 13; www.hochschober.at) offers a Haki short break, including three nights full board, a 50-minute Haki treatment and airport transfers from Klagenfurt for £369. The offer is valid until November 29.



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