

24-hour room service

# Asian wellbeing arrives in Andalucia

**Shanti-Som**  
Málaga, Spain

You don't have to go all the way to Thailand, Bali or India to have your chakras realigned: the new Shanti-Som Wellbeing Retreat brings all the wisdom and atmosphere of an Asian health retreat to the hills of southern Spain. So there's no long-haul jet lag to disturb your pranayamas (that's yogic breathing to the uninitiated).

Opened in May, Shanti-Som is the fruition of a long-held personal ambition of its founder, Kezia Jacobson, who has more than 25 years' experience in health, beauty and holistic therapies. After her son was involved in a serious accident, she decided on a path of creating a haven of peace, harmony and balance.

Consequently, her heart and soul has gone into making this a special place. Guests are greeted on

arrival by a stone-carved Balinese reclining Buddha. The inspirational staff have been carefully chosen. They include yoga teacher Petra Lindros – who practises an energising, Anusara-inspired yoga – and a detox expert, Cristina Azcárate Hane. Kezia has also attracted high-profile instructors such as Maya Finnes, who is hosting a Kundalini yoga week at here from 16-23 July.

While the hotel is not part of a spa chain such as Banyan Tree or Six Senses, Kezia visited several for inspiration. She was particularly taken with the Four Seasons Resort Sayan and Como Shambhala Estate, both in Bali.

Set among the fragrant pine, almond, lemon and olive trees of the Sierra de las Nieves natural park (a world away from nearby Marbella), Shanti-Som offers yoga, detox or weight-loss programmes. Gentler treatments are also



And... relax: the Shanti-Som Wellbeing Retreat combines its Spanish setting with Asian traditions

offered in the spa, such as an hour-long Thai massage (€75) or lavender herbal repair facial (€60). More unusual treatments include a sound massage that uses Tibetan singing bowls.

You can also come for a relaxing break without a yoga mat in sight, instead treating the place as a five-star sanctuary.

Shanti-Som was previously a two-star rustic hotel. Now, the existing 10-year-old structure has an impressive, vaulted thatched roof and an overall style that is an eclectic mix of Balinese, Moroccan and Indian – though not overwhelmingly so.

Non-detoxers can also indulge in the top-notch food at the Amrita restaurant, whose name translates as "nectar for the soul". The head chef, Ben Hayes, was previously executive chef of a Spanish health food restaurant chain. He focuses on nutritionally balanced meals. If there was ever proof that healthy food can taste wonderful, it's in his Asian-Med fusion menus. My asparagus frittata starter was delicate and delicious. Mains include pan-roasted fillet of sea bream, and rib eye steak; Ben even manages to make tofu appetizing in a coconut milk-based yellow curry with green beans, pumpkin and coriander. He has also worked out the secret to a tasty wheat- and gluten-free chocolate cake.

**Location**  
Shanti-Som is a 40-minute drive from Málaga airport, past the intense sprawl of the Costa del Sol and up into the fresh air and tranquility of the Sierra de las Nieves.

Kezia is designing tranquil walks in the mountains.



She took me on a brief jaunt to La Mirador, a vantage point with dramatic views down to Marbella. She intends to offer a form of yoga called Raya (yoga for the mind) on these walks. Climb higher and you can see as far as North Africa. If you want to pick up the pace, Puerto Banús is a 20-minute drive away, with its wealth of designer shops, yachts, restaurants and bars.

**Comfort**  
The huge lobby is a fusion of styles. A baroque-inspired Parisian sofa sits next to Moroccan candleholders. A painting of a young Buddhist monk by local artist Alejandro Herrmann hangs above the vast fireplace. The 14 rooms are arranged in cloister formation around three sides of a central patio that is used for al fresco dining. There are 12 "premium rooms"

and two luxury suites. The rooms have names such as "Inspiration", "Peace" and "Happiness". They are snug and designed vaguely according their name, so you could find yourself in "Courage", a masculine room with muted browns, or "Friendship" with an old-fashioned lilac quilt on the bed. Depending on which side of the cloister you're on, you will have a balcony – with wonderful mountain views – or a small garden.

Suites are larger, with four-poster beds and extensive outdoor lounging space. I would opt for "Passion" for its corner balcony with loungers and orchids, overlooking the yoga pavilion and the hills. There is a television, but, this being a health retreat, you will only find the Body Balance Channel, BBC World and some movies. There is also a nice selection of herbal teas and a plate of fresh fruit; mobiles and laptops are discouraged.

**JANE ANDERSON**  
The writer flew with BA (0844 493 0787; ba.com) from London City to Málaga.

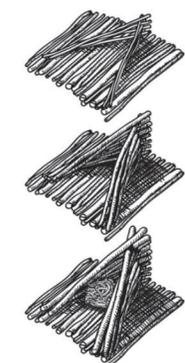


**Shanti-Som Wellbeing Retreat**  
Llanos de Purla km22, Monda, Marbella, Andalucia, Spain (00 34 9 5286 4455; shantisom.com).  
**Rooms**  
\*\*\*\*\*  
**Value**  
\*\*\*\*\*  
**Service**  
\*\*\*\*\*  
Double rooms start at €175, including breakfast. Two-and-a-half-hour spa packages start at €190 per person. One-week yoga programmes from €1,500 per person, half board.

Get Back Great Britain

# A warm glow in the woods

A monthly series following **Rob Cowen** and **Leo Critchley** as they reconnect with the simpler things in life



Part 4  
Making fire

Fire was once our "killer app", our greatest technology. It brought light, warmth, safety, new foods and the origins of society. Small wonder that, if done responsibly, nothing beats the joy of rekindling the spark that lit our evolution. English woodland burns like a damp sponge, so there is no shame in using a match or lighter – our ancestors would have jumped at the chance.

In a sheltered spot, create a 30cm square platform of even-length sticks at the centre of a 2m circle cleared down to the bare earth. The tinder must be dry and have plenty of surface area. Silver birch bark is often available, and it

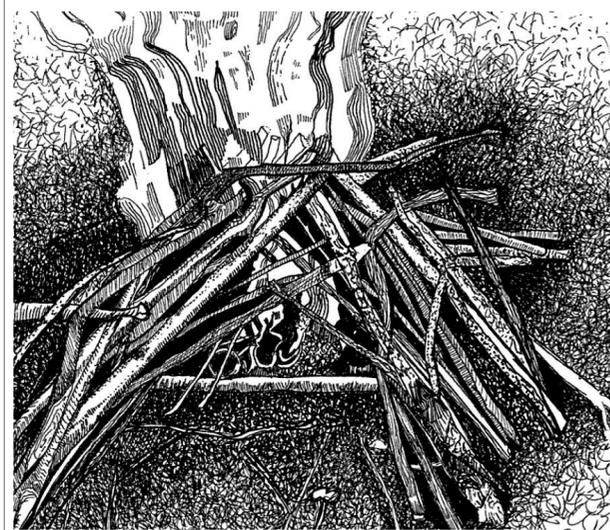
burns as well as any synthetic firelighter.

Once the platform is built, tear the bark into shreds and place a good couple of handfuls on to the platform. Add two handfuls of kindling to keep it in place. This should be matchstick-thick dry wood, around 30cm long. Interlock these twigs either side of the birch bark to create an arrowhead shape that points the same direction the breeze is blowing.

Progress to wood that is pencil-thickness and so on, doubling the width each time until your fuel is about half the span of your wrist and your arrowhead heap reaches a height of around 25cm. Work the point of the arrowhead back to shelter the tinder, but leave enough space to light it.

Done properly, it should only ever take one rasp of a lighter's wheel or a single matchstick. A more traditional approach, with flint and firesteel, will likely take longer as the sparks are much cooler. From the moment the birch bark ignites, the world stills. You should do the same. A young fire is like an eye; prod it and it will blink and close. Left alone, it will open and take in its surroundings.

It was fitting for this oldest of rituals that we were an arrow's shot from Arundel Castle in West Sussex. The ancient wood glowed as though smouldering; the orchids and violets were dappled with rays of late-afternoon sun that still had the



Up in smoke: there's no shame in using matches to get your fire going **ROB COWEN/LEO CRITCHLEY**

## Hot spots Campsites that allow fires

Always get the landowner's permission before lighting any fire. Alternatively, you can spend a night at one of Britain's many campsites that welcome a campfire:

■ **Red Squirrel Campsite, Glencoe, Scotland**  
Forage for wood and light your fire in a wide expanse of forested camping alongside the River Coe, with its own swimming hole and fishing rights: 01855 811256;

■ **Low Greenside Farm, Cumbria, England**  
Fire is prohibited in the Lake District National Park itself, but this quiet campsite on a sheep farm is close by and has cracking views of the Howgill Fells: 01539 623 217.  
■ **Tresseck Campsite, Herefordshire, England**  
This family campsite in the heart of the Wye Valley is perfect for canoeing, fishing and making campfires:

01432 840235; tresseckcampsite.co.uk.  
■ **Nantcol Campsite, Snowdonia, Wales**  
The seven acres of flat ground here are at the foot of the Rhinog Mountain range and only two miles from the sands of Shell Island: 01341 241 209; nantcolwaterfalls.co.uk/camping.html.

More campfire-friendly sites: www.thehappycampers.co.uk

energy to pierce the canopies of oak and lime. Before us, the flames of our little arrow fire were a busy quickstep within the light's gentle waltz, calming and entrancing us. Flickering and growing, they let out a hiss and crackle as the wood took and the smoke thickened. Suddenly, the breeze lifted and the arrow's tip was fully ablaze, igniting in us a similar whoosh of elation.

Fire was first and foremost a tool. We put ours to a multitude of uses. Flattening some ash and charcoal to one side created a rudimentary hob to boil a kettle. Over the livelier half of the fire, flames licked two stick-spear steaks, expertly forged from Tesco. We took turns to fetch wood, using the glow as a lighthouse as we swam back through the dark sea of trees. Under a canopy of stars, we rolled out sleeping bags and watched the flames.

By morning the fire was cold, but we poured water over it to make sure, scattered the ash and covered the bare earth with damp leaves. Through a simple campfire, we had drawn closer to nature and our own, primitive, natures. We left the wood as we had found it, but something in us had changed.

**Rob Cowen and Leo Critchley's** book describing their journeys around Britain will be published in spring 2012 by Hodder. For more information, follow them on their blog at getbackuk.com

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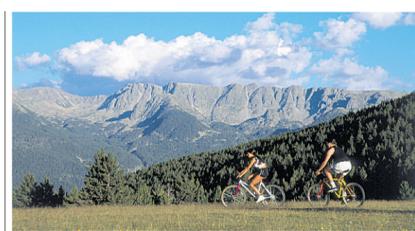
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## Travel challenge A summer break in Andorra

Each week we invite three competing companies to give us their best deal for a specific holiday in Andorra. Today: a week's holiday in Andorra. Prices are for two people, departing in mid-July.

**Expedia.co.uk**  
£700: Andorra La Vella Includes return easyJet flights on 17 July from Gatwick to Toulouse and a standard double room at the Zenit Diplomatic hotel, room only. Transfers are not included. "Located in the capital of Andorra, this hotel has an outdoor swimming pool and is close to the Plaça del Poble, the Saint Esteve Church and Caldea Spa," says Jill Lloyd of Expedia.co.uk



Spokes people: mountain biking in Andorra

(0330 123 1235; expedia.co.uk).

**Crystal Summer**  
£882: Arinsal Includes return easyJet flights from Gatwick to Barcelona on 16 July, transfers and apartment accommodation with

breakfast at the Aparthotel Poblado. "These modern, well-equipped and spacious apartments near the centre of Arinsal are ideal for exploring the area. The Quo Vadis bar on the ground floor serves Spanish and international food, or there are plenty of

restaurants nearby. Activities such as mountain biking, canyoning and climbing are all available in the region," says Prue Traynor, of Crystal Summer (0871 230 8180; crystalsummer.co.uk).

**Neilson**  
£960: Soldeu Includes return easyJet flights from Luton to Barcelona on 16 July, transfers and a self-catering apartment at the Aparthotel Popaire. "Soldeu is in the heart of the stunning Pyrenees with fantastic walking and biking opportunities," says Sonia Turner, of Neilson. "This offer includes complimentary drinks and tapas on arrival, and guided walks through the week." (0845 070 3460; neilson.co.uk/lakes).

## Travel Agenda

■ **TODAY** It's the start of Make Holidays Greener Week, the Travel Foundation's campaign to get holidaymakers to make three changes, from buying locally to turning off air-conditioning and using less water (makeholidaysgreener.org.uk). This is also the first weekend of the summer pavilion at London's Serpentine Gallery, a "garden within a garden" designed by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor (serpentingallery.org).

■ **THIS WEEK** Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn is reinventing itself as New York City's urban campground from Monday (nps.gov). Meanwhile, Trump Ocean Club International Hotel and Tower, pictured, opens in Panama City on Wednesday (trumpanamahotel.com).



■ **IN THE DIARY** Learn to drum, dance, sing or relax with wellbeing therapies at Tribe of Doris's Intercultural Summer School in Devon's

Blackdown Hills. The mini-festival, from 9-14 August, brings together teachers from across the world (tribeofdoris.co.uk).