

GET STUFFED

Losing weight at a Swiss spa is as easy as pie (and chocolate and cheese and wine).
 By Sandra Ballentine

I was intrigued (make that wildly excited) when I heard there was a fancy hotel in Switzerland where I'd be forced to eat meat, frites, cheese and chocolate and drink red wine and Champagne in order to lose weight.

Was this a publicity ploy or a miracle?

Whatever the case, the timing was exquisite. I'd had just about all the juice cleanses, freaky fasts and detox diets I could stomach, and was ready to bite off something I could actually chew. So, armed with an appetite and a copy of Gabrielle Hamilton's "Blood, Bones & Butter," I set off for the sleepy city of Lausanne, which has stunning views of Lake Geneva and the Swiss Alps and one of Europe's grandest grande dame hotels — the Beau-Rivage Palace.

Since opening in 1861, the hotel has hosted the likes of Charlie Chaplin, Gary Cooper, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and Coco Chanel, who reportedly buried her pampered pooch in its doggie cemetery. These days, its biggest draw is Cinq Mondes, a sprawling, state-of-the-art spa, complete with indoor and outdoor pools, a hammam and an arsenal of exotically named treatments and "slimming rituals" like "Gommage Aromatique aux Épices" (an aromatic scrub with spices) and "Crème Minceur Udvartana" (a blissful anti-cellulite massage and body wrap).

Sybaritic slenderizing treatments aside, the spa's real weight-loss weapon

is Patrick Leconte, a respected Geneva-based nutritionist who extols the virtues of chrono-nutrition, that most French of diet plans. Conceived in 1986 by Dr. Alain Delabos, a well-known Gallic diet guru (his best-selling book, "Mincir Sur Mesure," is in its second printing), chrono-nutrition is a carefully calibrated system of weight and shape management that allows you to eat and drink virtually anything you want as long as you do it at exactly the right time. The timing is pegged to when your body

secretes hormones and enzymes like insulin, lipases and proteases.

My own experiment didn't get off to a very auspicious start. I arrived at the Beau-Rivage late on a Friday night, starving and in dire need of a cocktail. The restaurants and bar had stopped serving, so I went up to my room and ordered a large cheese plate from room service and devoured the whole thing, as well as a crusty baguette. Oh, and two glasses of a local Swiss red, which was quite good. Then I smugly polished off

Eat to win

Fatty foods and sugary snacks are essential parts of chrono-nutrition, a diet plan offered at the spa at the Beau-Rivage Palace.



the chocolate on my pillow. All on the plan, I assured myself.

Well, not exactly, as it turns out. During our morning consultation, Leconte informed me that I had committed a cardinal chrono-nutrition sin. Cheese, bread and chocolate are forbidden at night. Instead, you should have the cheese and

bread in the morning and the chocolate as an afternoon snack. We wake up secreting plenty of the enzymes that handle fats and protein, he explained, so breakfast can be a hearty, greasy affair. (Think full English fry-up: eggs, cheese, whole-grain bread, butter, bacon, ham, sausage, sautéed mushrooms, etc.) Lunch should include meat or fish (or fatty vegetarian options like avocados and olives) and eight tablespoons of pasta, rice, potato or legumes. The most important part of the diet is the late afternoon "gôuter," or snack, which consists of 30 grams of dark chocolate, or a small bowl of dried fruit, unsalted seeds or nuts, or two glasses of

unsweetened fruit juice. The gôuter is critical, as it satiates you in advance of a light dinner of fish, shellfish, lean poultry or rabbit and eight tablespoons of green vegetables sprinkled with a little rapeseed oil (for its omega-3 content).

Cakes, cookies, pies and pastries are chrono-nutrition no-nos, but you do get two "joker" (splurge) meals per week.

Oh, and the best part (for me, anyway) — you can have a glass or two of red wine or Champagne per day. White wine, rosé and spirits are off-limits, as they contain too much sugar. "It's about a balanced diet, not dieting," Leconte said. "I give you what your body needs, not what it wants. But you still get pleasure. There is no deprivation. You feel good." Did I mention *j'adore* the French?

According to the nutritionist, the regimen not only helps people shed unwanted pounds, but it also transforms your physique by targeting problem areas and cellulite. If you have, say, an overly ample *derrière*, that's what will melt away first. "I also advise my clients with cellulite not to eat vegetable soup," he said. "So many women eat 'lightly' — yogurt, fruit, soups and salads, and don't understand why they have cellulite, and why they don't lose weight." (I didn't understand his explanation of the soup-cellulite connection — something to do with salts, sugars and water — but I now eye minestrone with deep mistrust.)

Armed with calipers, tape and scale, Leconte took my measurements and calculated my body-mass and body-fat indexes. "You're *monastique*," he announced. I assured him that I leaned more toward decadence. "No, your body morphology," he said. "You tend to gain weight in your tummy because you eat too many carbohydrates, like a monk. But your hips, arms, buttocks and breasts are well proportioned. You have a very good morphology." Then the bad news: he said I was dehydrated and about 10 pounds over my ideal weight. "But if you follow the eating

“
It's about a balanced
diet, not dieting. I
give you what your
body needs, not what
it wants. But you
still get pleasure. There
is no deprivation.
You feel good.”

”



deep in the heart of a vast open country,

Swiss precision The pool at the Cinque Mondes spa, a modernist addition to the Beau-Rivage.

plan I will give you for six to eight weeks, you will be perfect.”

Since my deadline couldn't wait so long for perfection, I decided to ask a Parisian acquaintance about her experience with the diet. Adrienne Bornstein, a 30-year-old art director, lost seven pounds of summer holiday weight in two weeks of chrono-eating. “It seems very logical at the end of the day,” she said. “It's taught me how the body works in the most basic, animal way.” For breakfast she alternates between a baguette with cheese (“Easy in France!”) and scrambled eggs with ham. She takes a homemade lunch to work every day. “I try to vary them as much as possible — petit salé aux lentilles, blanquette de veau, steak frites.” A sugar fiend, Bornstein found that the most difficult part is waiting until late afternoon for chocolate. But it's worth it, she said. After a month on the plan, she said, her body shape began to change, and her weight redistributed itself more evenly. “My stomach is much slimmer.”


If only I could have stayed at the Beau-Rivage Palace for a month of ministrations by Monsieur Leconte (not to mention the hotel's haute chrono-cuisine), but instead I returned home with a battery of instructions, which I followed to the gram of cheese (and glass of Champagne). I lost four pounds in one week, surprising even myself. It's the most pleasant diet I've ever tried, but I still might go back to my *monastique* ways. I need to save a few pounds for the next story. ■



ESSENTIALS • LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND

Beyond the **Beau-Rivage Palace** (Place du Port 17-19; 011-41-21-613-3333; brp.ch; doubles from about \$580; chrono-nutrition consultations from \$450), plenty of attractions in Lausanne dovetail nicely with a weekend of chrono-nutrition. For authentic French cuisine (read: meat), go to **Au Chat Noir** (Rue Beau-Séjour 27; 011-41-21-312-9585), and for traditional Swiss fondue and raclette, **Café Romand** is the spot (Place Saint-François 2; 011-41-21-312-6375; cafe-romand.ch). The best gruyères are at **La Ferme Vaudoise**, which also sells handmade yogurt, sweets,

spirits and produce from the Vaud region (Place de la Palud 5; 011-41-21-351-3555; lafermevaudoise.ch). In a country practically synonymous with chocolate, **Durig** is known for organic truffles (Avenue d'Ouchy 15; 011-41-21-601-2435; durig.ch) and **Blondel** for old-school confections like nut barks, dipped truffles and candied fruit (Rue de Bourg 5; 011-41-21-323-4474; chocolatsblondel.ch). Get your red-wine fix with a tasting at the Lavaux vineyard **Domaine du Daley**, which produces wines from Swiss varieties like gamaret and pinot noir (Chemin des Moines; 011-41-21-791-1594; daley.ch).



Call 800 823 0711 or your travel professional
abercrombiekent.com

our private safari guide showed us that wonders came in all shapes and sizes.

Abercrombie & Kent