

CITY BREAK

Paul Gogarty recovers from sightseeing fatigue in five European cities, staying at top, resort hotels, each of which offers restorative facilities and treatments for guests

This view of Florence at night is just one of the many reasons why a city break there is a good idea



travel

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BERLIN

Berlin is possibly Europe's hottest city at the moment, with a handful of attractions from the starkly moving Jewish Museum to urban beaches and the Hamburger Bahnhof museum of modern art. The sites, however, are scattered wide. Fortunately, the central Hotel Adlon Kempinski does a commendable job of reviving its guests between sight-seeing sorties.

For the sportif, there is a small gym and – located handily on the hotel's doorstep – a running track through the Tiergarten park. The star leisure attraction, however, is a vast, new day spa – opened in autumn 2007 – providing treatments for the body and mind, from massage to yoga, weight-loss regimes to stress management. Dental bleaching, Botox and collagen injections are also options, as well as cosmetic-surgery consultations, if you're that way inclined.

The current building is just a decade old (the original was destroyed by fire) and has the modern style we've come to expect from the latest generation of hotels. It also has two excellent restaurants: the Quarré leans towards Mediterranean fare, while the Lorenz Adlon serves Michelin-starred French food. Both have views of the Brandenburg Gate.

FLORENCE

Florence is so crammed with beautiful buildings and art to see – not to mention shopping opportunities – that it can seem exhausting work; but the Villa San Michele, just a 10-minute drive into the densely wooded hills, provides a classically elegant oasis. Originally a monastery, the San Michele provides a mood of quiet pleasure, from breakfast in the atrium cloister to daytime lazing by the pool or in the jasmine- and rosemary-scented, terraced gardens. The day, fittingly, ends looking dreamily across Florence from the loggia restaurant.

The hotel may have only a small gym, but who needs a gym when you can hike up through wooded hills to a medieval church and mirador? And who needs a spa when private yoga and aerobic lessons can be arranged in the garden, and beauty treatments in your room? >