

For Crying Out Loud

It's the upmarket spa treatment gripping the globe. **Christine Retschlag** braves sub-zero temperatures to experience cryotherapy at one of the world's most opulent wellness centres

The ultra-swish Thermes Marins Spa Monte-Carlo is, I'm told, where Monégasque madames go for cryotherapy – an icy treatment that is said to aid muscle repair, stimulate blood flow and restore mental balance, all in just three minutes. I decide to find out what all the fuss is about and, in the name of research, prepare to brave the Arctic conditions.

After completing a health questionnaire and having your blood pressure taken, you don your swimsuit, gloves, socks and crocs, a face mask and a headband for



Above: The spa's location offers breathtaking views of Monte Carlo and the Mediterranean. This photo: In the second chamber the dial is down to -110C

your ears. You can choose to play music (I selected The Black Eyed Peas' *I've Gotta Feeling*), which turned out to be an ironic choice as I had very little feeling left in any part of my body by the end of the treatment.

Under the watchful eye of your spa therapist, who peeks through a glass window and gives you the countdown, you enter the first chamber for a few seconds before

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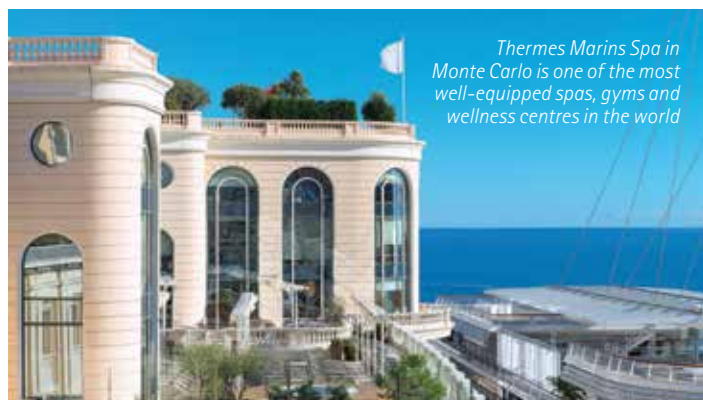
being directed into the second. Then, for three minutes, you're at the mercy of the icy blast (it kinds of feels like you're being pelted with hard hail). If you're clever, you'll keep moving.

Surprisingly, I survive the three minutes with relative ease, but my hands ache and some of my fingers are numb, a feeling that persists for more than a week after I arrive home. The skin on my arms and legs is pink from the extreme cold, which is said to divert the blood to your vital organs to reinvigorate.

This treatment is being used to help athletes recover and improve their performance; to prevent

recurrence of different illnesses; and to treat muscle and inflammatory disorders. It's also said to reduce stress and to improve sleep disorders.

Hollywood starlets such as Demi Moore, Lindsay Lohan, Mandy Moore and Minka Kelly are all proponents of cryotherapy. At €55 (around \$80) for three minutes, I'd rather pull up a perch at the nearby Wine Palace Monte-Carlo, order a fine French red, and watch the luxury yachts in the harbour. But then again, a Hollywood starlet, nor Monaco madame, I will never be. thermesmarinsmontecarlo.com **H**



Thermes Marins Spa in Monte Carlo is one of the most well-equipped spas, gyms and wellness centres in the world