



Stress-free stay stops the clock

She failed the thumb test, but **Sharon Labi** soon found a totally relaxing solution.

IT was a typically hectic Friday at the office when this little gem of a card showed up from the Westin Sydney hotel.

You had to place your thumb in the black centre, and it would change colour depending on your mood: red for tense, green for alert, blue for relaxed and black for frazzled.

Welcoming the distraction from work, I tried it out and it remained black. Convinced it didn't work, I passed it around my colleagues, who were all either relaxed or alert. I tried again, but was still apparently frazzled.

So I seemed the perfect candidate to sample the hotel's new Unwind ritual — an experience that was designed to, at the very least, get some colour on my thumb chart.

With my 38-week pregnancy, a hospital bag just in case and my husband (in no particular order), I checked into the historic Martin Place address for a night

of relaxation.

The lobby area, adorned with candles and black-and-white photographs depicting the building's history (it was previously Sydney's General Post Office), was transformed into a meeting spot. Host Michael, dressed as a postmaster, explained the significance of the photos while we sipped cocktails (mocktails in my case) from a specially designed menu.

My "replenish" mix of red berry ice tea, lemon shy tea and chamomile tea (\$7), served with an upmarket nut mix that contained soy crisps and rice crackers, was indeed refreshing.

The two-hour "ritual", which runs from 5.30pm to 7.30pm from Tuesday to Saturday, aims to encourage single travellers who might be feeling lonely to gather in the lobby and mingle with others.

A specially formulated menu of canapés including harissa

roasted beef and wild rocket roulade, seared tuna tataki with seaweed and sesame salad, and Pacific rock oysters with shaved fennel and orange salad could be ordered (\$12 for four).

Our room, overlooking the Martin Place clock, with king-size bed and just the right number of pillows came with gifts, also designed to relax and unwind.

A gorgeous scented candle and wooden hand-held massagers sat alongside a fruit plate whose pieces were so perfect and bruise-free they almost looked plastic.

One of the most relaxing aspects of the evening was the shower. Were we not in the worst drought in 100 years, I could have slept standing up under that shower head. Its dozens of mini jets had a wonderful massaging effect.

It was hard to reconcile that use of water with the green credentials the hotel spruiked. In the



interests of the environment, linen and towels were changed only on request, and the morning newspaper delivered to the room only to those who asked.

I woke up thinking again about that shower, but once we made our way to breakfast, I could have swapped my dreamy hours under that shower head for a table closest to the buffet.

There the whole relaxation theme continued, with a nice assortment of fresh juices. Organic fruit and vegetable shots designed to cleanse, rehydrate and rejuvenate were delicious, along with other specially formulated fruit drinks.

There was an "after eight" mix of kiwi, pear and mint, but my favourite turned out to be the watermelon splash: watermelon, rockmelon, pineapple and beetroot — which supposedly boosted my digestive system.

It must have worked, because I was able to sample many courses that morning.

While my other half went for a traditional omelet with bacon and toast breakfast, I set about sampling the French toast with real maple syrup, pastry assortment and fruit, having to return for a second, melt-in-your-mouth mini almond croissant.

This was a breakfast that

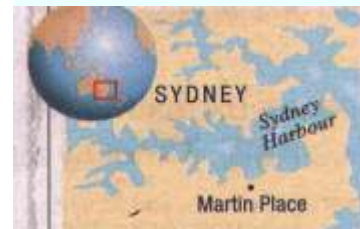
catered to everyone, even the allergy prone, with gluten-free breads and crackers. It was undoubtedly the best hotel breakfast I have ever had in terms of quality and variety.

Forgetting we were just kilometres from home and relishing the mini-escape, a bath using the hotel's delightful jojoba bath oil capped off a restful stay.

And, most important, when I pulled out my thumb test immediately after checking out, the result was blue. I was officially relaxed.

■ The writer stayed as a guest of The Westin, Sydney.

DESTINATION >>



The Westin Sydney

Getting there: 1 Martin Place, Sydney; 1800 656 535, www.westin.com/sydney

Relax: Unwind, a Westin Evening Ritual, runs 5.30pm-7.30pm, Tues-Sat.

Deal: Rekindle Package from \$305 a night; includes Tower Superior King Room, breakfast for two, hot chocolate delivered to room, in-room movie. Valid Friday to Sunday.



Dream stay: A trio of luscious desserts, and the 'Postmaster' delivers canapés and cocktails in the foyer, and (facing page) a Tower Superior King Room, looking out on the Martin Place clock, and the Westin's stress measurer

