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In the rush and hustle of everyday life, we've forgotten a basic human need that's central to our wellbeing and longevity. There's no better time to retreat to rest.

WORDS / SHANNON DUNN

Retreat to rest

"We live longer than our forefathers; but we suffer more from a thousand artificial anxieties and cares. They fatigued only the muscles. We exhaust the finer strength of the nerves."

~ Edward George Bulwer-Lytton

It's our growing inability to consciously take time out for rest that has created a booming business trend: sanctuaries and retreats where simply being is paramount and rejuvenating is the goal.

The laidback Aussie of yesterday is quickly becoming an adrenalin junkie, say some health experts, fuelled by

caffeine, sugary snacks and alcohol to ward off energy slumps — the body's signals that it's time to rest and recover. If rest is ignored for prolonged periods, the body kicks into overdrive, depleting adrenals, damaging cells and using up important vitamins and minerals required for optimal functioning.

"In Western society our lives are so full and busy that many of us do not find enough hours in the day," says naturopath and nutritionist Kate Reardon, who runs her Natural Instinct Healing retreats in Australia and Bali, where clients learn to rest and rejuvenate while mastering calming

techniques they'll be able to use once they return home.

"When we are pushing ourselves to the limit mentally, emotionally and physically, a biochemical reaction happens within our bodies that increases our level of cortisol, the stress hormone, which puts us into a fight-or-flight response," says Reardon.

"This means we are constantly in a state of stress, no matter what we are doing, and our minds and bodies never get the chance to rest and rejuvenate when this program is activated. When someone has been running on a flight-or-fight nervous system response for

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too long their body will start to break down: their mind will be overactive and they will eventually get to the point of complete exhaustion where they have no energy reserves left. This is burnout."

Reardon says rest is just as important as a healthy diet and regular exercise, each keeping the body in harmony and holding disease at bay.

"Disease doesn't just happen overnight," she says. "By the time we show signs and symptoms of a problem, it's been quietly building for some time. Taking time out therefore becomes a preventive measure for optimal healthcare and wellness."

Sue Hawkins, founder and director of Yoga Health Retreats, agrees: "When we allow the space and time to come into our lives on a more regular basis, we find we become more productive in so many ways. As the mind becomes uncluttered and quiet, the body's energy levels elevate again and we feel inspired, energised, happy and content."

Our ability to stress more and rest less has created a new local tourism boom, according to Tourism Australia. "While Asian and European destinations are well known for spa and wellness retreats, Australia also has its fair share of unique indulgence getaways," a spokesperson from the nation's peak tourism body says.

"Many hotels and resorts along our coastline have spas and there are any number of lifestyle retreats offering special holistic and natural therapies with all manner of [treatments], including Aboriginal herbs and lotions.

"You can indulge in a beachside spa at a hotel or resort, a day spa in a beachside location or an island spa at one of our Great Barrier Reef islands. Or you may just want to escape to a peaceful beach retreat in a remote or secluded location where you can take long walks along the beach or in the surrounding bush."

HIDDEN GEMS LIVING SYNERGY, WA livingsynergy.com.au

Intimate with a focus on one-on-one sessions, Living Synergy is nestled in Dunsborough in the pristine southwest of Western Australia. The retreat is owned and operated by Jenny Keenan, a former pilot who cured herself of chronic fatigue syndrome through dedicated rest and a lifestyle focused on natural healing techniques, from meditation to juice and water fasting. "Out of all the things I tried to improve my health with, the ones

that felt the most real to me, like they touched the depth of the dis-ease in me, were deep-tissue massages, meditation, including some retreats, and a seven-day fresh juice cleanse," Keenan says.

■ **What to expect:** Be introduced to raw food, massage, meditation, yoga, juices, smoothies and walks in nature. Sink your toes into untouched beaches along WA's picturesque coast and be gently guided on how to let go and relax into the flow.

■ **Retreat treat:** Sign up for the Lifestyle Realignment Guidance and Support package, a series of one-on-one sessions with Keenan, held in person, or via phone or Skype, over three months. If you want a little more, enquire about the Dig a Little Deeper package.

HARMONY HILL WELLNESS & ORGANIC SPA RETREAT, TAS organicspa-retreat.com

A synergistic blend of East meets West, Harmony Hill Wellness and Organic Spa

"As the mind becomes uncluttered and quiet, the body's energy levels elevate again and we feel inspired, energised, happy and content."

Retreat in Hobart is a haven for those who have become all too familiar with stress and its health implications. It was founded by Japanese healer Ami Nakamura, who works with a talented team of Asian therapists to restore calm and wellbeing. In her signature treatments, Nakamura will energetically scan a client's body then, through shiatsu point therapy, she'll remove energy blockages. In this way, she says, she has healed such conditions as frosted shoulder, slipped disc, lower-back pain, chronic fatigue syndrome and organ-related issues.

■ **What to expect:** From Ayurvedic therapies and Tasmanian hot stone massage to organic facials and energy healing techniques, you can experience as little, or as much, as it takes for you to return to balance. Book in for an hourly treatment or stay for a weekend.

■ **Retreat treat:** If it's alone time you seek, opt for the two-night retreat for singles, with meals included, where you can take part in daily classes of yoga, tai chi, belly dancing and breathing techniques. Unwind with an Ayurvedic massage and facial, reflexology and a

deep-tissue massage, while making use of the infrared sauna, spa bath, herbal teas and bushwalks in nature.

HOLISTIC ICONS GAIA RETREAT & SPA, NSW gaiaretreat.com.au

Byron Bay (and its hinterland) has become a magnet for tourists who are seeking time out, thanks to its reputation as a healing hub, with retreats and organic produce readily available. Yet none has acquired the reputation of Gaia, a sanctuary founded eight years ago by entertainer and holistic entrepreneur Olivia Newton-John. Inspired by its surroundings, it's a place where the work-weary come to let go of stresses, return to nature and learn to care for themselves. If the thought of complete rest doesn't appeal, Gaia specialises in retreats-by-choice: active and energetic, tranquil and serene or a "clever combination of both".

■ **What to expect:** With 25 acres of Byron Bay hinterland on your doorstep, this is a getaway perfect for those who long to get out of the concrete jungle, albeit just for a weekend. Stay in one of 19 bungalows, set among subtropical gardens, choose from myriad retreat activities or unwind in the award-winning spa and sauna with pool, gym and yoga room.

■ **Retreat treat:** Take a long weekend to release, relax and unwind. The three-night Renew package comes with all gourmet meals and snacks, a complimentary half-hour massage (AU\$195/US\$173 value), a half-hour wellness consultation, spa gift pack on arrival, daily yoga, all retreat activities and full use of Gaia facilities. Return airport airfares from Ballina or Coolangatta are also included.

THE GOLDEN DOOR ELYSIA, NSW goldendoor.com.au/health-retreats/elysia/introduction

Amid the rolling hills of the Hunter Valley, just over two hours from Sydney, sits The Golden Door Elysia, where people go not only to rest but also to learn how to elevate their lifestyles once they arrive home. From celebrities to mums, and couples to businesspeople, Elysia is the go-to sanctuary for anyone who is no longer willing to burn the candle at both ends. They return home refreshed, with new goals set and the knowledge needed to experience more health, happiness and motivation.

■ **What to expect:** Caring, genuine staff has always been the hallmark of The Golden Door, with clients leaving with



BEAUTY

HOLISTIC BEAUTY RETREATS

a sense they were part of something deeper than just a weekend getaway. Healthy gourmet food awaits, as does a holistic blend of exercise, health education, relaxation and spa treatments — each helping you tap into your energy and vitality. Stay in one of 74 luxury villas and soak up the vineyard and Brokenback Mountain Range views.

■ **Retreat treat:** For lasting change, the seven-day Health Enhancement program will guide you to spiritual and physical wellness, balance and vitality. Expect a tailored wellness consultation, exercise, relaxation, spa therapies, nutritious cuisine and health education. You'll also have the use of all Elisia facilities, including a 25-metre indoor heated pool, outside pool, tennis courts, gym, activity studios and outdoor relaxation areas.

FOR DAYTRIPPERS

NOURISH AT SASSAFRAS, VIC nourishatsassafra.com.au

A favourite of Melbourne city dwellers who want to refresh but not travel great distances to do so, Nourish is just a 45-minute drive from the Victorian capital in Sassafras, a township in the Mount Dandenong Ranges. Specialising in couples' packages, Nourish is the place to go if you want to relax, replenish and heal with your partner. The day packages are great for daytrippers who want to relax during the day and return to the city for dinner at night.

■ **What to expect:** A prime view of local attraction Miss Marple's Tea Room greets clients here, as do warm, friendly staff who make it their priority to listen to individual needs and offer treatments to suit. If you'd like to extend your pamper session with an overnight stay, choose from one of many luxury B&Bs dotted around the township, many of which come recommended on the Nourish website. The spa is also ideal for hens' pamper parties and other special events.

■ **Retreat treat:** The Exclusive Indulgence package (for couples or a single) is three hours of guided relaxation, with an aromatherapy footbath and a coconut milk honey scrub pedicure, with massage. Then it's off to a 1.5-hour full-body massage before a one-hour facial that includes a shoulder, hand and foot massage. Take home a box of homemade truffles, complimentary scrub and a blossoming tea.

ADELAIDE HEALING ENERGY CENTRE, SA

adelaidehealingenergy.com.au

Much more than a retreat or day spa,



Adelaide Healing Energy Centre goes beyond treating the physical, with most treatments focused on the energetic. Their holistic approach to beauty and wellbeing means each therapist is trained in energy healing techniques, allowing them to facilitate healing and relaxation on a physical and spiritual level. All beauty treatment products are made from pure, natural ingredients.

■ **What to expect:** From meditation and yoga classes to courses in energetic healing and self-love, this is a wonderland for relaxation and self-growth. You can choose from therapies such as chakra clearing, life mapping, crystal and past life therapies and more.

■ **Retreat treat:** Try the De-stress Deluxe Body package: an infrared sauna for deep cellular detoxification, followed by a chakra balancing massage and foot and hand treatment. Top it all off with a warm spa bath and a fresh organic fruit juice.

NURTURED IN NATURE

THE NATURAL BEAUTY RETREAT, QLD thenaturalbeautyretreat.com.au

The Sunshine Coast hinterland is home to this authentic retreat founded by therapist Tina Rossiter, who uses her own range of natural and organic products, Ajala Natural Beauty, in all her treatments. People come for tranquil, nature-filled surroundings as well as the one-on-one attention for which this retreat is renowned. This is a place where "one size fits all" doesn't apply, with spa pamper packages tailored to suit each client and their changing needs.

■ **What to expect:** Individual attention, handmade products infused with nature, and loving intention. "We are on a very private 2.5 tropical acres where all you hear are the birds chirping merrily in the trees," says Rossiter. Choose from massages, pedicures, facials, body treatments and more.

■ **Retreat treat:** Start with a full-body

Sink your toes into untouched beaches along Western Australia's picturesque coast and be gently guided on how to let go and relax into the flow.

massage and 1.5-hour pick-me-up facial: deep cleanse, exfoliation and serum facial with décolletage, neck, face and head massage. Finish with a facial sauna mask.

GWINGANNA LIFESTYLE RETREAT, QLD gwinganna.com

Gwinganna is Australia's only Eco Tourism certified health retreat, where staff teach you how to better handle the stresses of modern living. Here, you can choose how much, or little, you'd like to do, from nature walks to luxurious spa indulgences. But regardless of schedule, the aim of this Queensland getaway is to nourish the body and nurture the spirit. From certified organic cuisine to upmarket accommodation, there are many reasons why people return to what was recently named The Best Health/Spa Resort 2013 in *Australian Gourmet Traveller's* annual awards.

■ **What to expect:** Sitting high on a plateau overlooking 500 acres of Tallebudgera Valley, Gwinganna is surrounded by ocean and valley views. Expect stillness and silence, with longer stays gently coaching you back to balance, infusing you with a sense of calm and wellbeing. You can choose from activities such as tennis, hiking and yoga, or cosy up in the areas dedicated to ultimate relaxation. The Spa Sanctuary is home to 33 treatment rooms that overlook an elevated outdoor deck. Let it all go in the Whisper Lounge, crystal steam room and outdoor rain shower.

■ **Retreat treat:** Discover the Gwinganna magic with a two-night Wellness Weekend package, which boasts organic spa treatments, movement classes and plenty of relaxation, plus organic meals, all enjoyed in a low-tech environment. 🍷

Shannon Dunn is an eco beauty editor and wellness writer. Sign up to her newsletter at ecobeautyeditor.com/newsletter and contact her at shannon@ecobeautyeditor.com.

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