



Retreats are like this - mixing an ambience of naturalness with gentleness and providing a resource for practical advice about diet, exercise, life coaching, natural therapies and your health. This is the healing holiday experience that you often feel that you need to take after a family holiday or ill fated overseas jaunt with a partner.

Retreats and spas are fast becoming the new holiday of choice, as an antidote to the pressured life of the mind that we all seem to be corralled into these days. So what are the defining differences between spas and retreats and what are some of the features you may encounter on your new holiday of the physical senses? Well a spa is defined in real terms as the kind of place where you will find a

# *Retreats and Spa*

## *The New Holiday*

*By Sudha Hamilton*

**A**s we live in an increasingly demanding high tech world, where our downtime is rapidly disappearing into the Ether(net) – where it is trapped by Microsoft and Google in an endlessly informative embrace. Work never seems to finish, as it follows us home via cunningly invisible wireless cables and our living spaces are filled with screens, which never sleep, and phones that go beep, beep, beep. We used to go on holidays for the sun, surf and beach - but our blackberries accompanied us, and nestled there beside us on the towel began to wink a message or two or three about work. No island resort was ever far enough away from a colleague on the phone or an email from the boss.

Stress was mounting up like the Himalayas in June, and alcoholic relief was just a drink away but in the morning it was worse. Where can we get away to escape the maddening ring of technologies echoing? A monastery or nunnery? Perhaps a touch too austere; but retreat we must or face the curdling of the milk beneath the full white moon.

A retreat indeed, to a place where there are trees and grass, where nature walks tall and the life is not so fast. To a place which is all about us; about the fleshy bits that change as we age and seasons pass, rather than the synapses drawn tight by modern life. Where expert hands can rub relief into bodies running on adrenal fatigue and quiet vegetarian food beckons a good night's sleep. A spa that smells so pure, that it must be made of milk and honey. The sensual joy of a natural scrub, ridding your skin of grime and the cities' dub. Where exercise is something that happens when walking to and from your cabin - and fun is to be found outside running about with others. A return to the childlike pleasures of mucking about in nature, and seeing the pure experience reflected in the eyes of another, who is likewise having a good time just being themselves.

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variety of treatments that relate to your skin and body. Many establishments qualify themselves as a beauty spa or day spa and they specialize in a wonderful cornucopia of aromatising, massaging, bathing, skin conditioning therapies which will make you feel cleaner, fresher, revitalised and more beautiful. Many of these spas will have a special relationship with a resort providing accommodation in their locale – so that you can make your holiday special. Many new skin care companies, who have developed unique ranges of organic skin care products, have relationships with these spa operators to bring you a treatment experience that you just don't have access to in your own bathroom cabinet.

A retreat will usually involve accommodation specifically chosen for its naturally soothing character, either in its surrounds or on the property itself. It may indeed offer access to day spa facilities as well or it may not. The soul of the retreat experience is in its program of healthy activities - or non-activities in the case of a meditation retreat. The retreat is, by its very name, a retreat from the demands of modern life into a program defined by a philosophy, which focuses on reconnecting the individual with their elemental selves. Their body – fitness, heart rate, muscle tone, unwanted tension, health of the skin, weight issues, and groundedness. Their dependencies – so often we find ourselves self-medicating with alcohol, nicotine, drugs, sugar, work, parenting and various addictive behaviours, which we use to avoid periods of self-reflection that may initially lead to feelings of despair. When we stop; and arrive at a place,

which, by design, does not have the stuff with which we distract ourselves from our real issues; things like TV, computers, trashy magazines and the idle chatter of co-dependents (like minded folk who are also avoiding their issues), we face the overwhelming emptiness of our lives and often freak out for awhile. This however passes and slowly with the help of the retreat staff, who are trained in positively assisting you through this phase, you come out the other side. Where you find the inner peace to enjoy stillness of the lake or the wind whistling through the trees above you, and all the myriad unimportant junk of your day to day life withdraws to give you the space to feel again. To feel your connection with yourself, to laugh again as you jump and skip and make a lovely fool of yourself attempting some physical pursuit that you have not tried for umpteen numbers of years. You can find your heart again, not in the embrace of anyone else but in the enjoyment of simply being with yourself. All these things are available and more when you surrender to the retreat experience.

### GOOD RETREATS AND BAD RETREATS

OK so the ideal retreat experience can deliver us to a state where healing can take place but how do we spot the bad retreat or the retreat that is not up to the mark. Tension - if you can feel tension in the air or insecurity among the staff, beyond encountering someone on their first day at work, then this is a sure sign that perhaps things are not all that they are cracked up to be. Health retreat staff have a duty, like all healers, to be aware that they are stewards to individuals who have made a commitment to the healing process. Everybody from the cleaner to the retreat coordinator needs to be on

the same conscious page and if they are not, then it is not supporting your journey to heal. How to discover this before you actually book and are on the property? Well, ask some pertinent questions, like how long has the establishment been operating and what is the average length of employment and what appropriate qualifications are held among the staff? Ask to speak with the coordinator and perhaps a therapist or even a guest – it is quite within your rights to make thorough enquiries before you make your investment of time and money.

Every retreat has its own particular philosophy, and has been uniquely created in response to this set of ideals or life lessons – you can usually get a fair idea from their website. Being open to the full retreat experience involves vulnerability on your part, so you want to feel a certain trust in the people who are interacting with you - therapists, practitioners and staff. Retreats have a certain mystique about them in our psyches – Avalon like places where the mists part to reveal holy grounds where transformations and miracles take place –this is can be a powerful help to fully letting go to the healing experience, but it is also wise to tether your camel before the journey.



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## HPH Hopewood advert

# Retreats

# in review



## \* HOPEWOOD HEALTH RETREAT

One of Australia's longest established health retreats, Hopewood has been operating for 46 years – located just one hour's drive from Sydney and surrounded by beautiful bush land. Hopewood is the epitome of a well run health retreat, with dedicated, professional staff who have been working there for many years. Renowned for its natural health philosophy, which advocates a diet rich in fresh fruit and vegetables, gentle exercise, plenty of water, fresh air and rest; Hopewood Health Retreat is the perfect place to relax by the river, revitalize and revive your mojo and zest for life. Specialising in natural healing, stress control, weight management, as well as massage and beauty pampering, Hopewood has long been helping Australian's to rediscover their equilibrium.

Good food is a cornerstone of their successful approach to healing and transformation – passionate chefs, who love plying their trade at a fantastic health retreat, and presenting you with knock out combinations of delicious healthy ingredients. Utilising the smart and simple dietary technique of food combining - which serves particular vegetarian food groups together and avoids combining starch and protein - you will feel lighter and more vital. Of course you get to take home these secrets with you and the great feelings come with you. Hopewood even has its own cookbook, full of yummy healthy recipes and tips for detoxing diets. Hopewood's juice therapy pointers are:

- Drink a small glass or two of freshly prepared juice every day.
- Avoid mixing fruits and vegetables as it can cause fermentation in your stomach.
- Top up with carrot and ginger instead of coffee when you need a lift.
- Juices are a great addition to your diet but remember to also eat whole fruit and veggies for the added fibre.

There is a full range of exercise and fitness activities available and you can tailor your own program to suit your desires and aspirations. Inspiring guided bush walks, yoga classes, aqua aerobics and personal training

assessments are just some of the options from which you can choose to make your stay both enjoyable and transformational. After the exercise you can unwind with the de-stressing massage therapies like myofascial release; reflexology; shiatsu and hot stone therapy to name a few. Feel beautiful with organic facials, body wraps and other divine skin treatments all available on site at Hopewood. This is a total retreat experience where you can put aside the pressures of your day to day life to give something back to yourself. All Hopewood's retreat packages include accommodation – ranging from balcony rooms with ensuite to budget rooms in single or twin with shared bathrooms; full use of all facilities; smorgasbord vegetarian meals and the daily activities program.

*Ph: 02 4773 8401 [www.hopewood.com.au](http://www.hopewood.com.au)*



## \* DARGAN SPRINGS MOUNTAIN LODGE WELLNESS RETREAT

Looking for a natural high? Where the air is cleaner and a little more rarified? Dargan Springs is the Blue Mountains health retreat par excellence, surrounded by breath taking views, peace and tranquility. Located 2 hours from Sydney, it is nestled in the trees and looks out upon the majestic vistas of Australia's greatest mountain range. Each retreat has its own unique slice of natural magic and Dargan Springs is a beauty to behold and experience. Mountain lodge accommodation finds you ensconced in the light and airy luxury of those who live in the clouds, with each room having private ensuites, valley or garden views, and king sized or twin beds. Central heating keeps you warm inside, with soft linen, natural bedding, thick towels and down doonas to ensure a good night's sleep.

Outdoor activities are conducted by host and owner Mike Corkin, who trained in climbing, abseiling and mountaineering in New Zealand at Otago University. Happy to instruct and guide small groups and individuals at all levels of proficiency, Mike is passionate about sharing the special magic inherent in the mountaineering experience and the exhilaration it can produce. One of the special advantages Dargan Springs' guests have is the lodge's direct access to amazing walks, climbs

and abseiling trips, meaning more time in the natural wilderness. All the Dargan Springs outdoor trips are certified with Advanced Eco-Accreditation, which recognises their commitment to ecologically sustainable eco tourism. Whether you wish to enjoy the mountains with an expert, or prefer to go it alone, the experience of this incredible wildlife resource is an inspiring life choice and will have you feeling more alive than you have before. Wildflowers in brilliant colours, dramatic rock formations, wallabies and a host of native birds freewheeling before your eyes, it is a rich pageant of life and of course you need to stay alert up here. Like on a Zen meditation walk your awareness is keen and the witness state allows life to flow through him/her.

All this mountain air activity provokes an appetite for sure, in addition to burning off calories; you want and get to eat fantastic fresh food at Dargan Springs. Being in the pure mountain climes somehow stimulates you to appreciate the pure flavours in good healthy food, it's delicious and Dargan Springs offers you a range of quality meat, fish and vegetarian meals that are all low fat and bursting with freshness. Food never tasted so good and your body never felt so good. Plus certified mountain spring water flows from all the taps, freshly made juices are available and hot drinks too.

Massage therapies, yoga, aromatherapy facials, wellness consultations, meditations, hot spa's and tai chi are all on the menu at Dargan Springs. Plus you have the choice of experiencing it at what level you wish to, from the wonderfully restorative Healthy Escape package to the bed and breakfast option. Dargan Springs can be a sensational place for a healthy group conference, a longer stay healing program or a divine place to explore the Blue Mountains from. It is welcoming and life enhancing without being too fanatical.

**Ph: 02 6355 2939 [www.dargansprings.com.au](http://www.dargansprings.com.au)**



## FOUNTAINHEAD ORGANIC HEALTH RETREAT

The Fountainhead Organic Health Retreat is, according to founder Wayne Parrott, the only certified organic health retreat in the world. Established five years ago on an avocado orchard, it combines the stunning beauty of its chalets and lake setting with the natural order of a working organic farm. Utilising permaculture principles it is not a place of manufactured beauty like some resorts but a truly tranquil and magical locale for a healing retreat. Based in Maleny, in the Blackall ranges on the Sunshine Coast hinterland in Queensland,

Fountainhead is a vision of rolling pastures, bubbling creeks and pristine lakes. Fountainhead runs a range of exceptional life changing programs focusing on Helping Overcoming Depressive and Anxiety Illnesses; Fit for Life and Cancer Education retreats. It is also a great place to pamper yourself, with the help of some wonderful massage therapists, life coaches and their attentive staff.

Organic juices flow at Fountainhead three days a week, in conjunction with some seriously delicious meals, which utilise the organic farm's veggie output and also bring in some quality local organic produce from around the hinterland. Cooking schools demonstrate the best way to get the maximum amount of live nutrition from your food at home. Detox programs are available with expert input and guidance.

The Fountainhead Maleny Baths utilise natural spring water in the pools and there are saunas, a steam room and a fantastic area for relaxing by the pools. The brilliant blue of the bath centre's walls contrasts with the green natural foliage all around and you have this sneaking suspicion that you might be in paradise after all. I remember during my last visit the chef bringing me over a fantastic warm salad of grilled king prawns, avocado and organic mixed leaves as I relaxed on a sun lounge by the pool. There are usually guests playing games in the pool or doing languid laps on their path to fitness and health. Choose from yoga, bush walking, aqua aerobics, personal training assessments, beach visits and daily excursions. Accommodation is in a variety of architecturally designed chalets and you can choose from premium or deluxe levels.

**Ph: 07 5494 3494 [www.fountainhead.com.au](http://www.fountainhead.com.au)**




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**Dargan Springs**  
mountain · lodge



*pure relaxation*

- Gourmet healthy cuisine
- Natural therapies, massages, hot spa
- Lifestyle & wellbeing consultations
- Bushwalking, tai chi, meditation
- Eco-tours, rockclimbing, abseiling

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