

# Explore Australia, discover yourself

By Kate Tapping

**A** quick quiz: are you feeling stressed? Too busy? Experiencing anxiety? Fed up with the grinding relentlessness of city life? Trying to fit way too many things into 24 hours? Not sure how to balance the competing demands of your life? If your reply was a vehement yes to one or more of these questions, a yoga retreat could be the answer for you.

Combining stunning surroundings, a return to nature, a healthy vegetarian diet, a break from your routine and - of course - yoga, many participants return from yoga retreats with a renewed sense of calm and a clearer perspective on the way they want to live their lives.

Tom Schroeter from Australian Yoga Retreats says the retreats he runs with Nicole Kelly, his wife, inspire life changes. "Sometimes these changes are subtle, sometimes more apparent. We hear back from participants with everything from 'I'm really getting into my yoga practice' to 'I walked back into the office and handed them my resignation... thank you for helping me realise there's so

much more to life than a great paying job I don't enjoy'."

While you may not want to make such radical changes, the chance to explore the unique Australian landscape, as well as your inner self, can provide an opportunity to return from holiday far more relaxed and renewed than when you left. It's something that doesn't always happen with our normal holidays, and worth pursuing when we can.

Participants from the retreats agree, crediting the powerful beauty of the landscapes, combined with the focus on yoga and self-awareness, for the attractiveness of such a holiday.

Janis from Melbourne attended a yoga retreat held at the Eco Beach Wilderness Resort, in Broome, Western Australia, in July. "Serene blue seas, cloudless blue skies and a dramatic expanse of beach... greeted us on arrival at Eco Beach. The feeling of well-being was instant, and only deepened as the week went on."

For Tom and Nicole, hosting yoga retreats is a natural extension of their yoga school, Yoga Path, in Melbourne's inner west. "Our yoga school allows us to connect with

our neighbourhood; it gives us the opportunity to contribute something meaningful to the community," says Tom. "Leading retreats across Australia means we can give more people access to experiences that give them space to breathe, space to awaken their own potential. Now we just do it in more places than we used to."

And the places chosen for the retreats are some of the most stunning Australia has to offer. From the beaches of Broome, to camel trekking through the Flinders Ranges, to bushwalking through Victoria's alpine forests, to surfing at Bells Beach, the retreats are designed to provide access to truly unique Australian landscapes.

Eddie, a friend of Tom's, inspired an Australian Yoga Retreat that combined camel trekking in the outback of the Flinders Ranges - one of the world's greatest desert mountain ranges - with yoga and the opportunity to meditate under



Practice yoga in inspiring surrounds: feel the warm sand between your toes and cool breeze in your hair

Photo: Australian Yoga Retreats

the desert stars. "Journeying with camels, unplugged from modernity... the blur of modern life comes into focus. Slowing down, walking across the land, nurtures gratitude for the earth beneath your feet and the time spent with friends."

The benefits of practising yoga regularly are well-documented. It helps to generate physical, mental and emotional balance. People who regularly practise yoga often experience a better sense of health through greater body awareness, their strength and flexibility improve,

and their stress is reduced.

When yoga is combined with a breakaway from the normal routine - especially to a location that allows participants to embrace and establish a connection with the earth and the natural world, as opposed to our often too modern world of computers, concrete and 24/7 demands - it allows for an opportunity to reflect and view life from an unique perspective, both physical and mental.

With retreats often booked to capacity, the increasing in-

terest Australians are finding in this type of holiday and experience is clear. "I think there's a renewed interest in Australians discovering Australia, discovering their own country, their own backyard. In Australia you can travel to embrace what it means to be part of the earth, part of something bigger, to realise your place within the infinite, realise you are part of something much bigger than anything man has achieved independently," says Tom. "It's much like yoga - waking up to your own potential."

## Australian Yoga retreats - Fast facts

Where and when are the retreats held?

Australian Yoga Retreats are held throughout the year. Locations of the retreats, the activities offered in addition to yoga, and the duration of each retreat, vary. Upcoming retreats include:

Retreat	Location	Duration	Date	Activities
Alpine Mountain Spring Retreat	Mt Kosciuszko, Snowy Mountains, NSW	Three nights	29 October to 1 November	Alpine hiking - yoga, meditation, bushwalking
Yoga Surf Weekend	Bells Beach, Victoria	One night	26 and 27 November	Surf weekend - yoga, pranayama, surfing lessons
Otway Ranges Retreat	Pennyroyal, Victoria	Two nights	9 to 11 December	Deep forest retreat - yoga asana, pranayama and meditation

How experienced do you have to be at yoga to attend a yoga retreat?

All the teachers on retreat are highly experienced with professional accreditation - they teach yoga daily, for a living and work readily with a broad range of people and students at different levels of proficiency. Far more important than your level of proficiency is your level of openness and enthusiasm for yoga and interest in discovery, says Tom. "Coming on retreat with us sows the seed of inquiry in the beginner and nourishes the root of inquiry in the experienced yogi."

Is food provided?

Most of the retreats offered by Australian Yoga Retreats are fully catered. The food provided caters to a vegetarian, cruelty-free, diet. "For people who are not accustomed to a vegetarian diet it can be challenging, and equally rewarding, to explore this approach to food," says Tom. "We also run specific yoga 'foodie' retreats - Learn, Cook, Eat, Yoga! - aimed at helping people explore and become familiar with a yogic approach to food. These are full on great learning experiences - you're gonna get your hands dirty in the garden and in the kitchen on our yoga foodie retreats."



Nicole Kelly (pictured) and husband Tom Schroeter, teach and lead yoga retreats in some of the most stunning locations Australia has to offer



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