



# RELAX, REVIVE, RETREAT

Head to yoga camp to awaken your mind and move your body

**M**adonna and Gwyneth Paltrow swear by it. It gives strength, flexibility, fitness, weight loss, good posture and increased energy and health. It helps concentration and memory

and promotes a sense of calm and peace. It lowers stress, blood pressure and cholesterol, boosts the immune system and aids sleep.

Yoga has been practised for centuries, and today there are many different types and ways to do it. There are books, videos and classes – and, to really get inspired, there's yoga camp. Determined to improve, I decided to really commit myself, so I ran away to a place where there's no way to procrastinate, skip class or be too busy to go.

Radiance Retreats run yoga retreats in Australia and Bali. This one was at the beautiful Peppers Casuarina Lodge, in the hinterland near Byron Bay. Yoga instructor Jessie Chapman made us sweat from the minute we arrived for our first afternoon session. On our complimentary yoga mat, we got down to the serious business of contorting ourselves into strange shapes.

Over the five days I discovered muscles I never knew I had, revealed by the subtle ache that became a characteristic of the retreat. We ranged from amazingly fit and flexible – a girl who practises every day and can stand on her head indefinitely – to a woman in her late 50s who had never done yoga before (she loved it, and was a constant source of inspiration). I was somewhere in between.

That night we listened to Jessie, author of books including *Partner Yoga for Your Body, Mind & Soul* and *Yoga for Inner Strength*, talk about the physical aspects, the value of meditation and her studies around the world. She also guided us through meditations.

Inspired, we all trudged off to bed – and to the challenge of getting up in the dark for the early morning class. Wake-up calls at 5am are not my favourite things, but Jessie led us gently into each day, starting with meditation, breathing techniques and gentle stretches.

Then we got to the hardcore bit – and before we knew it, we'd done two hours, the birds had awoken, the sky was colouring and breakfast was baking in the kitchen.

Before the afternoon session there was time for a walk, massage, swim – or a nap.

It was certainly exhausting at times, but the beauty of such an intense experience is that your practice does improve rapidly. Personal attention, a one-on-one session with Jessie, sheer repetition and a lot of theory inspire you to become better at yoga and to want to keep working at it.

'It gives time to rest and renew,' Jessie says. 'Through twice-daily yoga you step into a new body, clear the head with meditation, establish new goals, restore with healthy meals and are inspired in the stunning natural surrounds.'

Jessie and her sister Judy, author of *Spa*, hold regular yoga and spa retreats. The next one is in Bali in June. They also run retreats in Byron Bay, NSW, and will organise individual ones elsewhere in Australia.

If you ever need to recharge your batteries, get away for a few days or give yourself a healthy boost, this is the perfect way. Yes, there were moments where it was hard, where I wondered what I was doing getting up in the dark to sweat, strain and compete with myself.

And yes, my body ached, but it was the kind of pain that makes you realise you're doing something good for yourself. My muscles began to remember how to do it. And the clarity that came from the meditation is something I've tried to hold on to since.



TO FIND OUT MORE

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