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MARCH 2012 - £3.50

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Retreat yourself

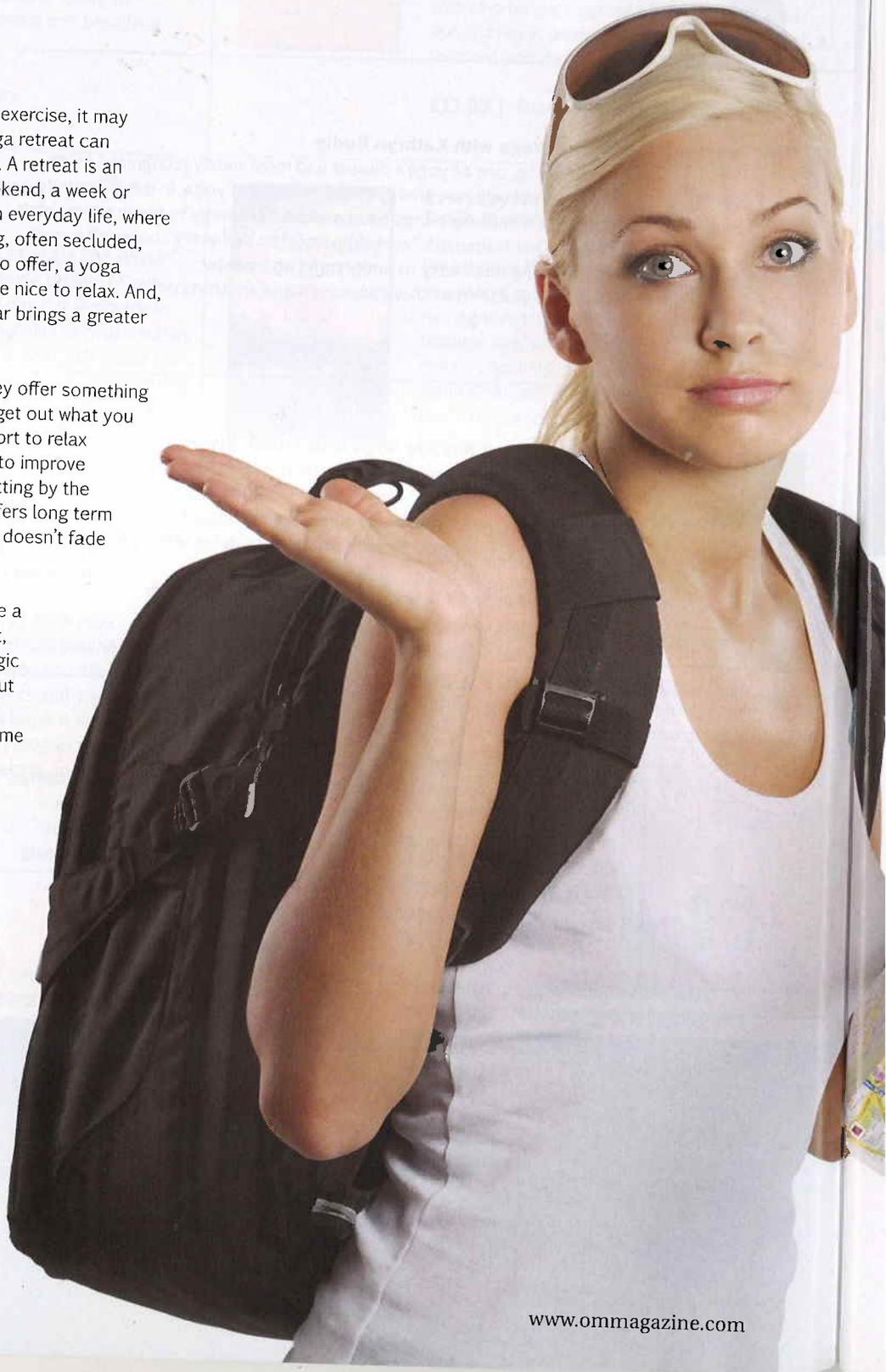
Should you stay or should you go? Tammy Jones guides you through the maze of booking your first yoga retreat

With early morning starts, detox diets and lots of exercise, it may not sound like a relaxing holiday choice, but a yoga retreat can be a transformative experience you'll never forget. A retreat is an opportunity to immerse yourself in yoga for a weekend, a week or even a month at a time. It's a sanctuary away from everyday life, where you can totally unwind or recharge. Set in stunning, often secluded, locations that make the most of what nature has to offer, a yoga retreat is so much more than just going some place nice to relax. And, as yoga becomes ever more mainstream, each year brings a greater variety of retreats, catering for all types.

Yoga retreats are gaining in popularity because they offer something unique: active relaxation. Like anything in life, you get out what you put in - and it actually requires the right kind of effort to relax properly. Yoga is that effort. The experience seeks to improve wellbeing far and beyond the temporary relief of sitting by the pool sipping cocktails for a week. A yoga retreat offers long term benefits so any peace and tranquillity you cultivate doesn't fade as quickly as your tan.

But making the investment to go on a retreat can be a daunting prospect for someone new to yoga. In fact, it's the ideal way to start. Being immersed in the yogic lifestyle with a chance to learn techniques, and about the philosophy, is a great way to establish a regular yoga practice. Retreats allow a beginner sufficient time to tune in to their body and their personal needs. It could make for an unusual and exciting holiday with a chance to try something totally new. It can also provide a fun personal challenge and learning experience, where you gain new perspectives, meet new people from all walks of life, all with a shared interest.

And for those already familiar with their downward facing dog, they offer the chance to go deeper into their practice, to learn more about the principles and techniques of yoga, as well as experience more time on the mat. For the adept yogi, of course, a retreat is an annual pilgrimage, a necessary occurrence to sharpen their focus on cultivating inner stillness, strength and balance. Go on, you deserve it.



Picking the right retreat

With so many retreats to choose from it's difficult to know which one is right for you. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

What's your intention?

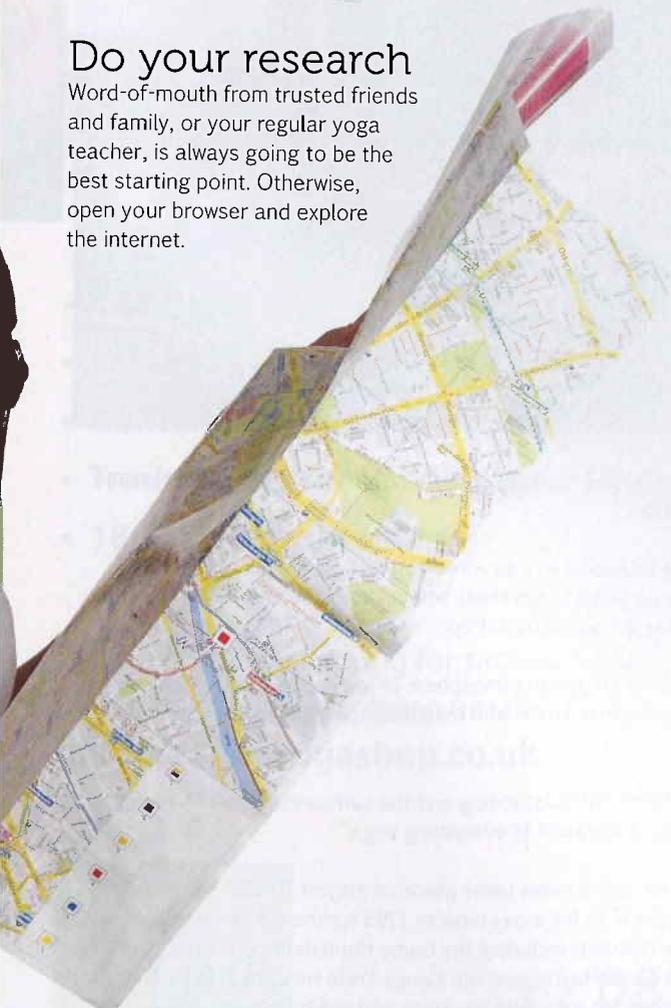
Identify what's important to you. What would you like to get out of the retreat? Are you feeling run down and you just need some rest, or are you looking to challenge and push yourself physically? Perhaps you're interested in learning to quieten the chatter of your mind and explore meditation.

How full on?

Seriously spiritual or laid-back enough so that you can still drink coffee or even go to the bar for some cocktails? Typically, a yoga ashram, or shala, provides a more intensive spiritual experience that would immerse you in yogic philosophy; at the other end of the spectrum, there are yoga spa holidays that allow plenty of free-time plus casual yoga sessions to boot.

Do your research

Word-of-mouth from trusted friends and family, or your regular yoga teacher, is always going to be the best starting point. Otherwise, open your browser and explore the internet.



Personal service

Could there be a better way to indulge than a personalised, one-to-one yoga retreat in some jaw-dropping destination? Not just the stuff of celebrities, a personalised break allows for a more flexible approach as well as plenty of individual attention, so you can really make the most of your time.

Inner Harmony Cyprus is offering a rejuvenating personalised retreat in the tranquil surroundings of the traditional stone-built Cypriot village of Tochni. It's designed for individuals or small groups of up to five people, so you'll always get maximum attention from your instructor.

innerharmony-cyprus.com



Super chic



A yoga bound travel adventure is the perfect way to peak your curiosity, expand your knowledge of the world and introduce you to the exotic cultures and breath-taking scenery of foreign lands. No matter where your travels lead you, rest assured that transporting your yoga essentials will be convenient and stylish with a Kantha Yoga Bag from US-based Krickette. Imported cotton quilted kantha exterior with adjustable strap, this bag simply oozes style. Drawstring closure with cord, the bag also includes an exterior zipper pocket large enough to hold wallet, keys and phone - and passport and toothbrush. What else do you need this summer?

krickette.com