

# Retreat

Time to

BY THETA PAVIS

A retreat can be like a spring cleaning for the soul, and I felt more than ready. A busy schedule, a death in the family, and a to-do list longer than my arm found me eager to sign up for my first-ever yoga retreat.

Retreats come in all sizes and shapes—you can do a quick, weekend jaunt in New England or an exotic, week-long getaway in the Caribbean or Europe. There's a range of options, too. If yoga isn't your thing, you can find a retreat focused on strengthening your relationship or starting that novel you've always dreamed about writing.

I had an inkling my weekend was going to be something different before my friends and I even arrived at the Race Brook Lodge ([www.rblodge.com](http://www.rblodge.com)) in Connecticut's Berkshire Mountains. On the way we passed through rolling green hills and charming little towns, until we got stuck in a traffic jam. Sitting in the back seat I closed my eyes and tried not to get frustrated. When I opened them, I saw the delay wasn't due to cars, but to cows. A long line of bovines was ambling across the road, bringing everything to a halt. I was carpooling with some equally stressed-out city types, but the sight of the cows made us laugh. Some things you just can't control, which would be—it turns out—part of the lesson I was about to learn.

When we got there, we saw that the setting was gorgeous. The leaves were just turning and the grounds were filled with trails to explore and hammocks to rest in. After stashing our stuff in the lodge's simple rooms, we carried our mats into a beautiful restored 200-year-old post-and-beam barn and began stretching both our bodies and our minds.

Yoga teacher Jillian Pransky organized "The Perfect Autumn Yoga Weekend Retreat." About 38 of us (all women, except for one brave man) were soon sitting on our mats, chanting the primal "Om," and stretching muscles some of us had forgotten we had. Pransky ([www.yogajillian.com](http://www.yogajillian.com)), who teaches at Devotion Yoga in Hoboken and at Yoga Works in Manhattan, leads several retreats, including an annual one to Mexico. She also teaches at Omega and Kripalu. (See below.) She gave up a 10-year career in the corporate world to become a full-time yoga teacher and infuses her classes with a sense of joy.



Mist over the lake at the Omega Institute

COURTESY OMEGA

A person is shown in silhouette, performing a yoga pose (Warrior II) on a beach at sunset. The person's arms are extended horizontally, and they are holding a glowing, golden orb in their right hand. The background features a large, bright sun low on the horizon, with its light reflecting on the water. The sky is a deep purple and blue, and the silhouettes of trees are visible in the distance.

By leaving  
everything  
behind, you can find  
yourself.

During our time together, she focused on the autumn equinox, the change in the seasons and the renewal that it brings. The retreat stressed being present, thankful for what we have, and letting go of what we didn't want to carry into the new season. At dinner I sat next to people from Massachusetts, Chicago, Atlanta, Manhattan, Cliffside Park, Jersey City, and Hoboken. All of our meals were included in the price and were hearty and delicious. In the afternoons we had time to ourselves. Some people explored nearby Lenox and Great Barrington, some got massages, and a few intrepid souls like me ventured out on the local trails. I was delighted to find that a path right off the grounds led directly to a portion of the Appalachian Trail. I hiked, alone, in the woods for about an hour. All I could hear were the rustling of leaves and tree branches swaying in the wind. The area, which sits at the base of the Taconic Range, is known as a "hiker's heaven."

That night we wrote down things we wanted to let go of and then burned them in a fire outside the barn. But it wasn't all hard emotional work—after that we roasted marshmallows and made s'mores.

On the second day Pransky asked us to write down a one-word mantra to help us focus. I wrote "replenished," which is exactly how I felt by the time I left.

## Down the Shore, or Overseas

Pransky has seen the retreat business change since she started offering packages in 1999. It wasn't hard to fill her retreats back then, "but I was the only kid on the block," she says. "Now it's a regular kind of a trip for people."

She's also seen more interest in exotic locations, more retreats offering adventure sports, and more centers catering to yoga teachers looking to organize a retreat.

"My retreats have been consistently about yoga and the natural environment," Pransky says, "but what I see popping up a lot are things like 'yoga and surfing' or 'yoga and hiking'—that is a trend—people are looking for things that incorporate yoga. And now more resorts are inviting



COURTESY OMEGA

Meditating outside the Sanctuary at Omega

teachers to bring their groups and they'll take care of the back end. The businesses themselves are catering to this."

The trend to go farther away, to more exotic locations, also seems to be growing. Jocelyn Krasner ([www.yourwholelife.net](http://www.yourwholelife.net)), another Devotion Yoga teacher, has led retreats in the Hamptons, but this year she will offer the "Costa Rica Yoga Getaway" at the Pura Vida Wellness Retreat & Spa (from March 29 – April 5). She has another one planned in October for Tulum, Mexico.

Krasner, who has assisted Pransky on some of her retreats, says "people get really excited about places like Costa Rica ... because there's lots of adventure sports" that can be added on.

Devotion Yoga in Hoboken, owned by Liza Bertini, offers retreats both close and far. At her "seaside sanctuary" in Long Beach Island, N.J., she will offer a weekend "Women's Spring Renewal Retreat" from May 2 to May 5.

Farther from home, she also runs annual retreats to Italy, in lush countryside less than an hour from Rome. The retreats are all-inclusive except for airfare and offer two excursions during the week. Participants do yoga on a one-of-a-kind outdoor "yoga deck" set in the valley among the olive groves and fruit trees.



PHOTO LIZA BERTINI

The "yoga deck" in Italy



Meditating at Kripalu

"It's almost more like a vacation," says Bertini. "We do have wine with dinner and last year had a wine tasting event—it's not like a detox yoga retreat." Many participants also add extra solo travel either before or after the retreat. This year's retreat is set for Sept. 27 through Oct. 4.

## City Escape, Country Refuge

Based in Rhinebeck, N.Y., the Omega Institute ([www.omega.org](http://www.omega.org)) was founded in 1977 and offers an enormous range of workshops and retreats. This holistic center has been a pioneering force in health and wellness and spiritual growth. Its "campus" in upstate New York covers nearly 200 acres and offers a peaceful oasis in a hurried world. The lake, beautiful gardens, and a sense of community are hard to duplicate.

I was lucky enough to visit Omega a few years ago while attending a conference. One of my favorite things was the "sanctuary." Set up on a little hill, near a reflecting pool, the sanctuary welcomes anyone who wants to meditate or just spend time in quiet contemplation. I am not an early morning person, but I got up at 6 one day so I could experience meditating in this special place. After waking up in my small, unadorned room, I walked through the countryside to sit in the sanctuary. A small group of us were led through a simple, morning meditation. A feeling of calmness lasted long after the conference ended and I'd hopped a bus back to the city.

Omega offers three wonderful vegetarian meals a day. You can even take a workshop on the "Secrets of Omega Cooking." It has classes and retreats for everything: Buddhist meditation, "Finding Your Long Lost Musician," "Being Together - The Art of Intimacy & Relationship," "How to Write a Memoir" and an "Organic Juice Purification Retreat."

If you're not sure what you want to do, try an "Introduction to Omega Weekend" at which you can sample the best of what the institute has to offer. The campus is open from April through October.

Farther north, Kripalu is the largest and most established retreat center for yoga and holistic living in North America. Located in Lenox, Mass., not far from the Race Brook Lodge, Kripalu—like Omega—also offers a wide range of classes. The instructors work at creating "a sanc-

tuary for the spirit." There's no smoking, no television, radios, or in-room phones. Guests stay in simple rooms. Like Omega, Kripalu also offers massage, facials, nutritional counseling, and a variety of other health and wellness services.

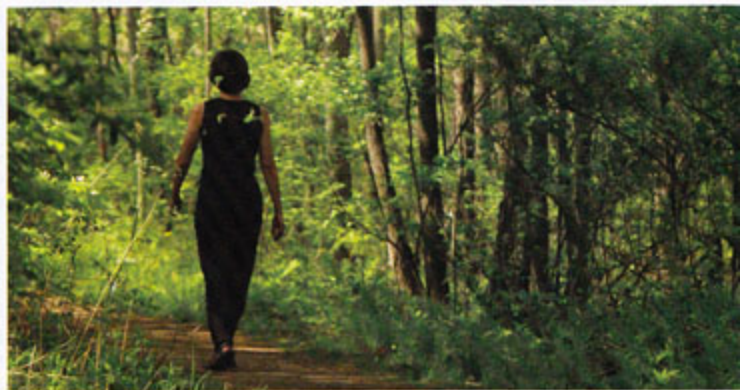
Marcia Wholf, a physical therapist who lives and works in Hoboken, has been going to Kripalu for the past eight years. What keeps her coming back are the quality of the classes and the body work. "Obviously I'm picky about that. I have found it better than any other spa that I have been to. The people are really serious about it. And the location—their property and surroundings—is just beautiful. It's a very unpretentious atmosphere."

Kripalu has an enormous catalog of classes. In May, for example, it offers a weekend with Julia Cameron who wrote *The Artist's Way*. From the 16th to the 18th she will lead a workshop in "Finding Water: Continuing on the Artist's Way Journey." Later in the month (23–26) Kripalu offers "Creating Joy and Passion Together: A Retreat for Couples." Kripalu also has a unique "Health for Life Program," a 19-day medically supervised plan aimed at improving health and transforming lives. A range of special events includes programs for families, all of which can be found at [www.kripalu.org](http://www.kripalu.org).

So, whatever your taste or time frame, there's probably a retreat out there that can combine your interests with a chance to escape to a beautiful place. Get packing. ♦



Race Brook Lodge



Kripalu