



HOW TO PLAN A SOLO RETREAT

CREATED WITH
LOVE BY
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WHY WE GO ON RETREAT

At the end of March 2022 I drove myself up to New Hampshire, to spend three nights alone in a funky little Airbnb for a solo quarterly planning retreat.

The first time I did this, six months prior at the end of September 2021, the experience was a revelation. I had been self-employed in some capacity for over 10 years by that point, and gifting myself spacious time in which to dream, vision, reflect, plot, plan, and tend to that which forms the root, the foundation, and the beating heart of my work is something I had long fantasized about, and yet never actually allowed myself to try.

And so, on that first retreat, *trying* was the point. Doing the emotional untangling that was required in order for me to even give myself the permission to book the Airbnb, to tell my partner, to clear my work schedule—to essentially spend what felt like a lot of money and time on what my inner critic was stubbornly calling “an overly indulgent selfish luxury” was in fact the whole purpose of that first retreat.

Showing up was all that mattered, sitting with myself as I was battered by waves of anxiety over whether or not I was “using the time well” or if I even “deserved” to be there in the first place, that was all that really mattered.

And it worked. Showing up worked. Taking myself to a new location and spending three days eating exactly what I wanted, not talking to anyone, and taking up as much space as possible in my own life, it woke me up.

"I am allowed to come back and do this again," I whispered to myself as I returned the key to the lockbox and prepared to drive home to Massachusetts. *I can do this whenever I want.*

Or rather, I can do it whenever the details of my life make it possible.

In December of that year it wasn't possible, but the following spring, at the very end of Q1, I packed a small bag full of comfy clothes, colorful pens, lots of candles and notebooks and various witchy items, and off I went.

I went because I wanted clarity on what the next phase of my life and business might look like. I went to focus my energy on taking care of no one other than my own sweet self. I went so that I could practice what Hadassah Damien calls "stretchy time," an experience of flow outside of linear time for which I covered all the clocks with sticky notes the moment I arrived, and didn't check the time again until the morning I needed to head home. I went because I wanted to go.

That is enough of a reason, you know. We can retreat simply because retreating calls to us. That's it, that's enough.

xo,
Nic

WHERE TO RETREAT

You do not need to go somewhere fancy. You do not need to spend tons of money.

What makes a retreat a retreat is the intention behind it. The care you bring to the time you have.

You can retreat in your own home, or at a motel a few miles away. You can retreat at the beach or in the park. You can swap apartments with a friend and retreat in each other's space. You can go camping and retreat in the woods. Possibilities abound!

My personal preference is to book an Airbnb that's located about 2-3 hours driving distance from my home. The drive itself acts as a transition period between my regular life and the special bubble of retreat time, and then again as a transition from retreat space back to regular life when I'm done. I love that.

I also love being in a different town from where I live, because part of what I enjoy most on retreat is taking myself on meandering afternoon walks, poking around in cute shops and bookstores, trying the local bakery, etc.

Choose a place that feels accessible for your budget, and that supports the reasons you are retreating. Why do you want to be with yourself on solo retreat? The answers to that will help you decide where to go.

HOW LONG TO RETREAT

You can retreat for two hours at your dining room table.

You can retreat every morning for a full week at the coffee shop near your house.

You can fly to another country for a month or stay in a local hotel for one night.

There are no rules!

The sweet spot for me seems to be three nights—checking into an Airbnb at 3pm, having that afternoon and evening to leisurely grocery shop at a nearby store, settle in, cook myself dinner, watch something fun, and then spend the following two full days with myself before checking out around 11am on the final day.

I feel like this pace gives me enough time to really dive deep into myself without feeling pressured, but I am also careful not to tell myself that I "must" have this much free time in order to retreat. Shorter retreats can be just as powerful!

The best retreat length is the one you are actually able to do in your real life.

WHEN TO RETREAT

Here are some of the times when a retreat might feel particularly nourishing:

- When you have just come out of a hectic season
- When you are about to enter a period of big responsibility
- When you crave your own company, when your relationship with yourself feels like it could use some care & tending
- When you are naturally inclined to reflect/vision/plan, such as the end of a quarter, mid-way through the year, the end of the year, close to your birthday, etc.
- When you have been inundated with other people's energy and demands, when you crave quiet and solitude
- When you have a decision to make that requires deeper thought
- When you are working on a creative project that's close to your heart but hasn't been getting enough of your time and energy lately
- When you feel (perhaps for no explicable reason) that a retreat is calling to you

YOU CANNOT DO IT WRONG

The tyranny of worrying whether or not I am "using my time well" is one of my biggest obstacles on retreat (and, to be honest, in my general life). It's something I am constantly trying to unlearn.

And so my solo retreat mantra has become: you cannot do it wrong.

Whatever I am supposed to get out of going on retreat is what I will get. If I do nothing other than watch Netflix and eat popcorn in bed, well then that's what I needed to do.

The point of solo retreat is to be with myself, and hopefully to feel good in my own company. Keeping that intention at the forefront of my mind really helps me to relax my expectations of myself.

I also find it useful to remember that watching Netflix and eating popcorn in bed could in fact be the *plan* for a retreat. Retreats are not just for getting things done, making decisions, setting goals, etc. Retreats are also for just... being.

Questions to ask yourself

- What is something I struggle to allow myself to do at home because I worry that it is a "waste" of my time?
- What are my fears about going on retreat?
- What will make this retreat feel worthwhile for me?
- How am I hoping to feel at the end of my retreat time? Is that realistic? Where might I be putting too much pressure on myself?

WHAT TO DO ON RETREAT

Anything you want!

Personally I like to do some pre-retreat journaling, just some simple list-making about what I might want to do on the upcoming retreat. The items on the list will depend on the deeper "why" for each retreat of course, since you'll likely spend your time differently if it's a self-pampering and deep relaxation retreat than if it's a 'no distractions finish writing the final two chapters of my book' retreat.

This simple list-making exercise helps me to get specific about which activities would feel best, and then I can pack whatever supplies I need accordingly.

(I always plan to overpack, because I'd prefer to give myself more options than necessary so that I can feel into what I most want to do once the retreat begins. Pack lots of things! And be totally okay with not touching/using all of them.)

Once I've made my list, I like to choose my favorite 6-8 things and write each one on a different index card. Then I keep my index cards out where I can see them while on retreat, and I use them as a sort of "choose your own adventure" guide whenever I am feeling stuck on what to do next.

Some things I like to do on retreat:

- Take long, hot showers or baths
- Dance in my underwear
- Light lots of candles
- Eat chocolate mousse
- Finally watch the recording of an online class or workshop I've been saving
- Go wild with big-picture dreaming & visioning (what do I *really* want?)
- Commit to my top 1-3 devotions for the coming month/quarter
- Go for walks
- Browse a local bookstore
- Check in on the ways that I have (and haven't) been living in integrity with my values; plot course-corrections as needed
- Write
- Read
- Stay off my phone almost 100% of the time
- Prioritize pleasure
- Do a "procrastination power hour" of important tasks I've been putting off
- Watch movies or TV shows that make me laugh, or that inspire me to be more devoted to the craft aspects of my work (writing, for example)
- Prepare fancy meals for myself and plate them beautifully just because I can
- Dress up for myself
- Stretch on my yoga mat many times throughout the day

HOW TO PREPARE

I have found that the most important part of retreating is setting myself up to be relaxed and present once the retreat begins.

This means:

- Communicating clearly with everyone who needs to know that I'll be unavailable (setting expectations in advance is key, since I prefer to stay off my phone during retreat)
- Putting up an autoresponder email
- Making sure there's a grocery store close to where I'm going, otherwise I bring food with me
- Doing a little research about what's in the area where I'll be staying (giving myself ideas about some fun outings I might like to have; although I usually wind up staying in the Airbnb most of the time)
- Doing laundry so my favorite comfy clothes are clean and ready to be packed
- Buying yummy car snacks for the drive up
- Doing any life or work admin tasks that would otherwise hang over me while on retreat (I like to close these kinds of open loops so that I don't have to think about them while I'm gone)
- Buying something fun to bring, like a face mask or a fancy candle (what are a few inexpensive treats that would make your retreat time feel extra special and different from your day-to-day life? do that!)

**THERE WILL
ALWAYS BE
A REASON
NOT TO GO ON
RETREAT**

GO ANYWAY

SOLO RETREAT PLAN

Where I'm retreating:

When I'm retreating:

Why I'm retreating:

How I'm going to prepare:

What I'll pack: