

GETTING THERE
 Billabong Retreat is a 50-minute drive northwest of Sydney CBD.

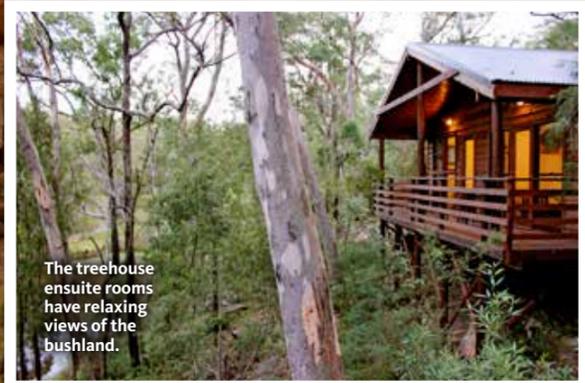
MORE INFO
 Two-night weekend retreats start at \$500 pp in a shared room. billabongretreat.com.au

Try a weekend of WELLNESS

No longer just for celebs, wellbeing breaks are more affordable and accessible than ever before
LUCY MANLY discovers



From the NT to SA, there's a wellness retreat to suit everybody.*



The treehouse ensuite rooms have relaxing views of the bushland.



There's lots of tasty organic food on offer.



You won't go hungry at this retreat.



Writer Lucy gets her zen on.



Billabong Retreat's magnesium aqua therapy pool.

70 Woman's Day

As an entertainment writer at *Woman's Day*, late nights and boozy parties are all part and parcel of the job – and I love it! But a particularly hectic few weeks and a niggling cough that's proving impossible to shake have left me feeling a bit burnt out. So when a friend suggests a wellness weekend could be just what I need to recharge, I'm all ears!

I'd always thought I'd need to pack my passport and spend a few thousand dollars to go to a trendy retreat, but it turns out they're more accessible than ever.

Billabong Retreat, nestled in the trees in Maraylya, is less than an hour's drive from Sydney, but it couldn't be further from the hustle and bustle I'm used to.

I'm greeted by the general manager Rachel, who promises the restorative weekend ahead

will leave me feeling relaxed, rejuvenated and pampered – it's music to my ears. Even better, there isn't a strict timetable to follow. Sure, there's plenty to do if you want to keep busy, including wellness workshops and yoga and meditation classes, but the vibe here is about doing as much or as little as you want. "We don't come knocking on your door if you don't come to classes or meals – go at your own pace," she assures me.

I do exactly that and make a beeline for the spa for two blissful hours of massage and a facial. In my three-day visit I also take in a few meditation and yoga classes, not to mention enjoying the delicious food on offer. All meals are organic, bio-dynamic and veggie-based, and they're filling too. The broccoli roasted with coconut, fennel and cumin with savoury cashew cheese sauce is

especially delicious. I make a mental note to try to recreate it when I get home.

Many of the guests I meet over the course of the weekend are returning for a second, third or fourth time, wowed by the tranquillity, not to mention the convenience and affordability. They are mostly women, and I quickly realise there's a common theme – everyone here just wants to switch off and focus on themselves for a few days.

It's like nothing I've experienced before and I wonder how I can take a slice of this zen back to the city with me. Thankfully the instructors are a step ahead, and show us how to apply and adapt what we've learnt in our classes into our everyday lives – even if they do include a few more late nights and indulgences than we've experienced this weekend.

For someone who always has their phone in hand, the lack of reception takes a bit of getting used to, but it's easy to forget about Instagram and Facebook when I'm relaxing in the bath on the balcony of my treehouse overlooking the forest. That's not to say I don't take a few snaps to post later, of course – you can take the girl out of the city...

Pictures: Getty Images; *Main picture: not Billabong Retreat. Breakout words: Lucy E Cousins



The large shared balcony is the perfect place to relax.

Best of the rest

Check out our pick of some of the most affordable wellbeing getaways around the country



PREMA SHANTI RETREAT, DAINTREE, QLD

In the heart of Far North Queensland, you'll wake up to the sounds of the rainforest before trying meditation and yoga in the yoga temple. During your stay, explore the surrounding tropical rainforest, relax in the retreat's well-stocked library or book extra classes and treatments. **Rates start at \$90 per person per night, all inclusive, premashanti.com.au.**



LIFEFLOW MEDITATION CENTRE, ADELAIDE HILLS, SA

Spend a weekend on 26ha of rolling countryside in the Adelaide Hills. LifeFlow runs themed retreats ranging from yoga to mindfulness to emotional resilience. Take a class, relax in the common room or go on a hike. **Two-day retreats start at \$486 per person, all inclusive, lifeflow.com.au**



DARWIN YOGA SPACE, DARWIN, NT

This yoga studio runs multi-day retreats throughout the year but Mt Bundy is their most popular. With a maximum of nine people, this four-day retreat offers a chance to get out into the wilderness to practise yoga and meditation at sunrise, and restorative yoga as the sun goes down. **Four-day/three-night retreats start at \$550 all inclusive, darwinyogospace.com**

