

PARENTS' retreat



WF's Brooke Lyons heads to Sydney's zen hideaway for some R&R... with her husband in tow

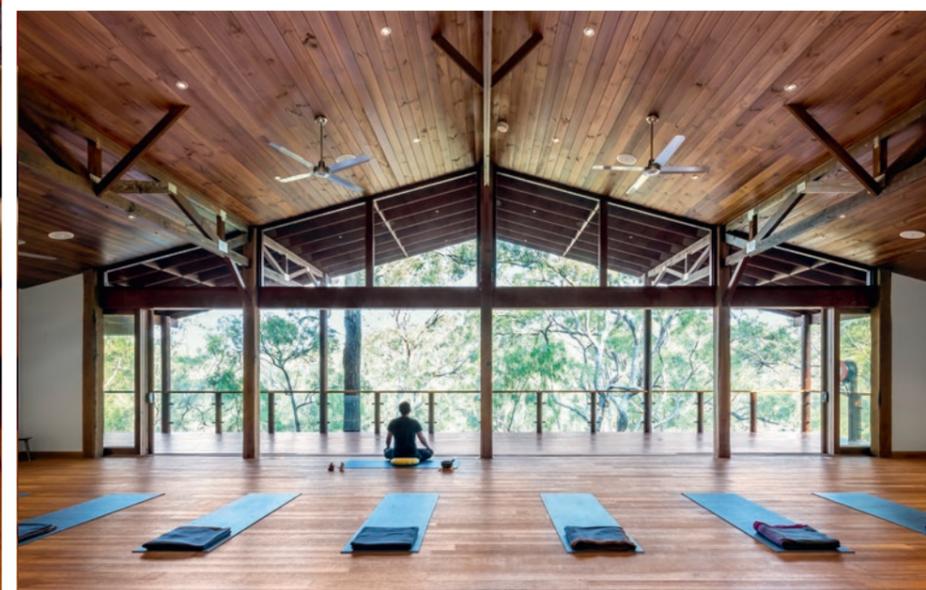
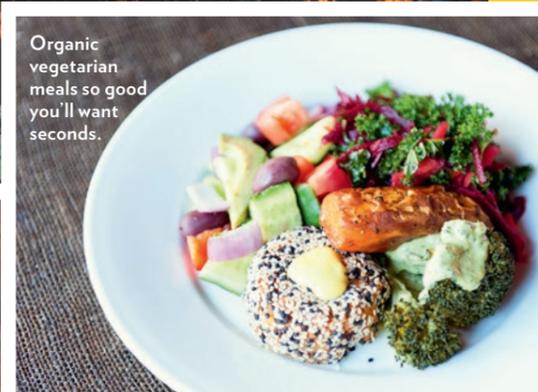


The incredibly picturesque and serene billabong.



TravelFIT

Organic vegetarian meals so good you'll want seconds.



back bend for an hour and you'll be stuck choking on your boobs in pigeon pose." This, of course, is never actually the case. It certainly wasn't the case in this class; there were people from all walks of life, all with their own strengths and weaknesses – from a middle-aged married couple, to an Italian backpacker and older hippie chick. I realised yoga is never as intimidating as you build it up to be. Nobody cares where you're at. It is your own practice and you do what feels good for your body in that moment. And your tights are fine, I promise.



MY HUSBAND, JIMMY, AND I WERE ABOUT TO CELEBRATE

our 10-year wedding anniversary. We have two young kids whose enthusiasm never wanes and, more often than not, overwhelms us. It had been a long time since we'd gone away together, and an even longer time since we had a conversation that was seen through to its conclusion without being interrupted by a mini-human. So we decided that, after an extremely successful test-run sleepover at Grandma's, we would sneak off for a weekend away. Two. Whole. Nights.

Billabong Retreat is as blissful as the name insinuates. An eco yoga and meditation retreat that's tucked into bushland in Maraylya (just 45 minutes from the Sydney CBD), it offers up weekend, midweek and day programs catering to everyone from newbies through to advanced yogis. My choice? 'Yoga essentials'. Jimmy's reaction? He didn't care, so long as we were getting away from the noise...

Settle in

We arrived on a Friday afternoon. And it was proper hot (remember those February days that were smashing records?). It was so stinking hot, in fact, that upon check-in we were greeted with cool, damp washcloths smelling of lavender. *Sigh*

We would be spending the next two nights in the lodge – a large guesthouse with a wrap-around verandah on the other side of the billabong. (Spoiler alert: Billabong Retreat has an *actual* billabong!) Our new catchphrase became "How's the serenity?" (we thought ourselves very amusing dropping the line at every opportunity) because it was so beautiful and peaceful. And alive with wildlife. And not a *Sesame Street* Muppet in sight.

Peeling ourselves away from the serenity of our child-free room – and the three-legged frog taking up residency in our bathroom – we ventured into the great-outdoors-serenity. Walking around

the billabong, we stumbled upon the property's super-cute gazebo and promptly plonked ourselves down on a couple of papoose chairs for a rest before... well, all the other rest that was to come.

Oh, and the eating! According to the timetable, dinnertime had rolled around soon after our walk and, as non-meat eaters, the all-vegetarian dinner menu was heaven to our eyes – a flavour-packed red lentil dahl, crunchy apple slaw and a raw chocolate slice to top it off.

Taking our full bellies into the yoga studio, the smell of oiled timber, a bushland outlook and the perfect room temp (that is, every so slightly cool but not cold) was quite the setting. Resting atop our mats, armed with blankies and bolsters, we began scanning our bodies in preparation for our 90-minute guided meditation.

While I'm a daily meditator back at home (yep, even with bickering children...), this was Jimmy's first crack at it. He'd watched me do it a hundred times (so

therefore is practically a bodhisattva), but was worried about how he'd go sitting for that long with his chronic back pain. Natalie, our guide, suggested he sit in a chair rather than on the floor, and to lean into what was uncomfortable or painful rather than running from it. He did as he was told (I wonder how she did that?), and although he found it hard, he loved it – he'd discovered a surprising new way to help manage his pain.

I, on the other hand, was so relaxed I accidentally drifted off to sleep three quarters of the way through, at a time when I'd normally be wrangling the kids to bed.

After a scorching hot day, big fat drops of rain and thunder caught us by surprise as we made our way back to the lodge, and I couldn't help but think about how very self-indulgent the whole thing felt. Suddenly, I was overcome with a sense of guilt. Until I melted into the soft bedsheets and savoured the deafening silence of the lodge, that is...

Home stretch

Waking to the delightful sound of birds at 6am was a sleep-in for me. So, come yoga time at 7am, I was raring to go (unlike the rest of our sleepy class) with an organic plunger coffee in hand.

I've dabbled in yoga on and off over the years, and while I love it, I'm most certainly not a yogi. So an hour of basic postures – cat/cows, warrior poses and downward dogs – seemed perfect, and not a bad way to wake up to the day.

I also had a pretty great realisation during the session: Life is not an Instagram feed. My brain is frequently guilty of the following thoughts: "You should go to yoga. That would be nice. You'd enjoy that. Except, you know, it will be full of hot Insta-yogi girls who can hold a perfect

Want to get this zen? Head to billabongretreat.com.au to book in for your own relaxing getaway.