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YOGA AND WELLNESS RETREATS PROMISE REST AND RELAXATION, JUST IN TIME FOR SPRING.

They're popping up like daisies: yoga and wellness retreats that promise rest, relaxation and a renewed sense of self. Of course, get-in-shape getaways are nothing new. But unlike many spas and fitness resorts you may have encountered, these newfangled retreats are offering something different – an East meets West holistic approach that promises to align your chakras, deepen your downward dog and maybe even help you reach that elusive Nirvana you've always been searching for.

Among this new crop are regimes that cater to the hard-core enthusiast and may include on-site medical staff, sunrise to sunset yoga and meditation instruction, enforced vows of silence and the strictest of dietary menus. Others are decidedly more relaxed: do what you want, when you want schedules. Yet others present intriguing couplings. How about yoga and hiking or yoga and surfing? And for those whose definition of Nirvana might run in a completely different direction, there is even something called yoga and chocolate!

What this vast array of offerings illustrates is just how popular the wellness retreat has become. There's something for everyone: all fitness levels, every degree of intensity. And what's clear is that there's more than one road (or resort) that leads to inner peace and outer beauty. Featured here are three worth considering.

1. COMO PROPERTIES

Exotic locals and lush landscapes are the backdrop for Como properties, which bill themselves as residential health retreats combining holistic wellness with state-of-the-art facilities. Indeed, three of their most popular locations are situated in geographical gem spots: Uma Paro in Bhutan, Como Shambhala Estate in Bali and Parrot Cay in the Turks & Caicos. All three resorts

offer yoga and Pilates retreats, occurring regularly throughout the year and hosted by visiting yoga and Pilates gurus such as Rodney Yee, Erich Schiffman and Lynda Lippin. When you're not busy striking a pose, the resorts feature a dizzying selection of treatments to indulge in, ranging from Ayurvedic detoxification therapies, massage, hydrotherapy and even hypnosis.

www.cse.coma.bz



THE LAST WORD

by Avis Cardella

2. CHIVA-SOM

If you desire a comprehensive introduction to yoga, or to take your practice to a new level, then Thailand-based Chiva-Som's Yoga For Life Retreat is the place to go. Introduced in January of 2009, the year-old retreat has already won praise from the international press.

Running from three, five, seven or fourteen days and offering both group and private sessions, each Yoga For Life retreat

begins with a complete health assessment conducted by a qualified member of Chiva-Som's staff. After that, guests are recommended a personalised regime that may include relaxing Hatha or Bosu style Yoga or the more high-charged and intense Ashtanga. Supplementing the yoga sessions are meditation classes, Jala Neti nasal passage cleansing and Pranayama breathing exercises to help achieve mindfulness, self-awareness and clear breathing.

According to Chiva-Som, the desired result is more energy, peacefulness, a toned body and the ability to better handle stressful situations. Who can argue with that?

www.chivasom.com

3. HAREM

According to Dutch ex-pat and longtime Marrakech resident Sandra Zwollo, women need a sanctuary, a place to relax, guilt free, a place to not only pamper themselves, but to regenerate both their bodies and minds.

Harem, Zwollo's recently opened women-only wellness retreat, is just such a place. Situated on a 12-acre estate on the outskirts of Marrakech, and set amidst lush olive and palm groves, Harem offers weeklong retreats, accommodating up to 14 guests. The setting, says Zwollo, allows guests to feel they're cut off from the outside world, thereby freeing them to slow down, reflect and recharge.

Aiding this endeavor are daily yoga classes, two-hours of daily meditation and myriad treatments, including facials, pedicures, massages, hammans and scented footbaths. Healthy, expertly prepared locally grown fare rounds off the offerings, and an on-site nutritionist is available for unlimited consultations. Added feel-good bonus: 80 per cent of Harem's profits are donated to a local orphanage.

www.harem-escape.com

