



# The many benefits of taking a healing holiday

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Whether you have undergone different types of emotional or physical trauma, or simply need a break from a stressful busy life, 'healing holidays' – also referred to as wellbeing holidays or wellness retreats – can be hugely beneficial.



With myriad varieties available, ranging from detox and weight loss programmes to holistic healing, wellness for couples and even anti-ageing, there's something for everyone who needs so relax and recharge. According to Stella Photi, founder of travel agency **Wellbeing Escapes**, the demand for healing holidays is growing. She launched her company in 2005 with a view to making wellness travel more accessible and put together a wide range of extensively researched holidays.

"I started Wellbeing Escapes almost 15 years ago and many people didn't know what the word 'wellbeing' meant, and how a wellbeing escape differed to a spa break with a manicure and a glass of Champagne - not that there is anything wrong with that type of break," she says.

"A wellbeing holiday is more than a bit of relaxation but one that addresses how to maximise your state of health and happiness. It is an opportunity to take some time out from your day to day life to reset and more importantly learn how to adjust your lifestyle so that you can maintain the state when you return."

As people are learning and becoming more proactive and intentional about leading a healthy and happy life, they also seek to learn and experience more of what they can do to get them there when they are on holiday.



### **Tailored healing**

According to Photi, yoga, fitness and detox holidays have always been popular, but she has seen an increase in demand for ones that include a bit of everything, as well as retreats that offer a range of classes, lectures and treatments in a natural setting. That way, guests can tailor their holiday to suit their needs.

Over the last couple of years, she's witnessed a rise in demand for 'emotional healing', to address anxiety, high levels of stress and help in making big decisions in life.

When it comes to the most popular destinations, Photi says that unsurprisingly, India and Thailand rank highly as these are places where there is abundant sunshine and where wellness is embedded into the culture.

In Europe, Portugal, Spain and Greece are favoured choices because of the climate and because some wonderful retreats are housed there.

### **Some time out**

Taking time out of life to focus on herself and resetting her batteries were on Jackie Thomas' agenda when she first approached Wellbeing Escapes to find her ideal healing holiday. She discovered her dream getaway at a retreat in Koh Samui in Thailand, a place she returns to for two weeks every year.

"I was looking for a yoga-centric break where there was a community table to meet like-minded souls. I also wanted peace, calm and healthy food," the 58-year-old from Kent explains. Her day in Koh Samui typically begins with a swim and yoga, followed by a huge breakfast. She then takes time to read, relax, sleep and look at the beautiful views.

Every day she has one treatment, often a massage to one part of the body, and usually visits the steam room. "I try hard not to be too busy, that's part of the treatment. The day always ends with a healthy supper with no booze and a very early night," she says.

Outlining the benefits her wellness break brings her, she adds: "It's hard to describe how giving your body and mind the time to totally relax and unwind has the most long-lasting incredible feeling. The parasympathetic nervous system kicks in for true relaxation" and adds that "finding my well-being break has enhanced my life. I'm so glad I was brave enough to do it."



### **Preparing for recovery**

Thomas recommends healing holidays for anyone wanting let something different into their lives.

However, she stresses that there is no point in going if you want to use your phone all day. Should you decide to book some healing time away for yourself, the expert advice is you need to start the prep work even before your getaway.

“Try not to get yourself in a frenzy with everything that needs to be done before you go as your cortisol levels will spike,” suggests Stella Photi. “What this means is that you may crash from exhaustion when you arrive at your destination or even get sick.”

She also advises people to try and eat a clean diet before they go, by gradually reducing or cutting out sugar, alcohol and coffee and increasing their intake of fresh vegetables and fruit. Most wellbeing holidays have very healthy menus, so if travellers are not used to eating well they may suffer from the dreaded ‘detox crash’.

Although it sounds expensive, Photi states that you don’t have to have similarly deep pockets to book a wellness holiday. “There is a growing number of super luxe wellness retreats that get a lot of media attention and I think this gives sticker shock to people who then get the impression that all wellness holidays are at this price point. My guiding vision is to make this type of holiday accessible and we strive to do that and have options for all budgets,” she says.