

"Tuck your tail bone under," instructs the yoga teacher. "Drop lower into your front knee. Lower... Lower..." And you sink a little deeper into your pose. Further than you've been before. For the rest of this class, you're totally in tune with your body.

A quick "yoga retreat" search on Google yields 219 000 results – from a detox retreat and a beginner's version that includes a spa treatment, to an advanced Ashtanga retreat in India. "There are many different

types of retreats as yoga has so many expressions," says Jessika Munnell, co-owner of Yoga Life studio in Cape Town. "There are light-hearted retreats that offer yoga and surfing; there are serious raja retreats – the meditation side of yoga – where you may do a lot of meditating, studying and very little asana practice." (Asana practice, by the way, is called Hatha yoga and is a tiny part of the discipline, but has been perceived by the Western world as what yoga is.)

"A retreat is a great way to recharge and reconnect with your true self," says teacher-

trainer Tracey Rohan-Irwin from Shades of Yoga, who runs retreats around Southern Africa. "It's an opportunity to immerse yourself in the pure indulgence of eating healthy food, and to move stress out of your body through movement and breathing exercises."

But this being my first yoga holiday, I was initially apprehensive, until the promise of a French cooking class, game drive, massage and a bush walk made it seem both enticing and accessible. Being relatively new to yoga, I was concerned about being able to keep up. If I can't touch my toes or remember what "trikonasana" is – how on earth would I cope with four classes in one long weekend? These yoga-newbie insecurities, coupled with an insane diary and that task list at work, meant I almost cancelled – but for those very reasons, it turns out, this weekend is just what I needed.

## Spirited away

And the good news is you don't have to be a seasoned yogi to reap the chill-out benefits of a weekend retreat. The beauty for everyone, explains Munnell, is that you are out of your everyday routine and can be free to experience yoga with more presence. A retreat is not just about the poses, so if spending a weekend pretzelling yourself on a mat sounds too intense, consider this: if it makes you feel twitchy, it's probably just what you need. Although yoga is a 5 000-year-old discipline,

**"On a yoga retreat,  
the focus is *balance*  
and *real relaxation*"**

Stretch  
your  
ability.

Practice  
makes  
perfect.

## BALANCING ACT

How to get the most from your yoga weekend...

- > Stop drinking coffee and alcohol a week before you go. "Yoga postures work to detox and purify the body, and you will achieve far greater results if your body doesn't have to struggle with removing toxins," says Megan Medina, who teaches the retreats at Thula Thula.
- > Turn your phone off for the duration of your retreat. You'll survive without it. Promise.
- > Consider going alone. "It's an opportunity for quality 'me' time. You'll never be lonely, as you'll meet amazing, like-minded people," says Tracey Rohan-Irwin of Shades of Yoga. "That said, it's also a very special experience to share with a friend or partner."
- > Drink lots of water to help flush out toxins.
- > Take your own yoga mat. "It's a more personal journey to work out on your own mat every day," says Medina. "Plus you won't have to worry about sharing other peoples' sweat!"
- > Ask the instructor plenty of questions – this is your opportunity to really improve your practice.