



A wild way to get well

Our intrepid reporter found a host of benefits at a retreat focused on breathing, journaling and plunging into icy waters

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It's 4.30am on a Monday morning. I stand in my warm shower and take a few deep breaths as I turn off the hot and turn up the cold.

My pre-work ritual usually involved some International Roast brewed hastily through half-shut eyes and more often than not a couple of Nurofen, but I have needed none of that since returning from my stay at the Wild Wellness Retreat. Just give me a hot and cold tap and I'm sorted.

On a sunny weekend in early October, my partner and I were among 14 strangers who met on the green slopes of The Cove – a seaside stay in Don with panoramic views across the

Bass Strait and beaches lined by volcanic rock outcrops that played host to the Wild Wellness retreat.

Those seeking a weekend of wellness at the retreat were a mixed bag of inquisitive souls: medical professionals, a yoga instructor, a professional mixed martial arts fighter and me, a man in his late 20s who for a few years now has lived the opposite to a wholesome or healthy lifestyle.

Founder Alice Hansen describes it perfectly on the retreat's website and who am I to alter perfection?

"(The retreat is) the antidote to modern life stress; for anyone ... needing a lasting life recalibration. Our Cove retreat is for

those looking to optimise their wellness through a science-backed, holistic approach."

It sounds good and it is good.

Admittedly, this is not my idea of a weekend away but I brought with me an open mind and a willingness to submit to the experience.

Driving down the hill towards The Cove through the lush farmland it is nestled within, any reservations I had soon left. My partner and I checked in and set ourselves up in our "Cliffside" cabin – one of a handful of accommodation types on offer. As was the case with the rest of the accommodation on site, its



Clockwise from main: The outlook from the Cove, at the Don, on the North-West Coast, with the Dial Range in the distance, where a recent Wild Wellness retreat was held; guests enjoy the view of a sparkling Bass Strait; a guest takes a refreshing ocean plunge at the bottom of the property; one of the healthy meals offered at the retreat; guests take part in some breathing and meditation exercises; and guests enjoy a long-table dinner.



large glass facade faced directly out to sea and remained illuminated all day by the sun and the sparkle of the ocean glare.

It was day one of three and all of the guests met in the communal lounge. This is where we met each other and our Wim Hof Method instructor Piet Blokker for the first time. Piet was our guide through one of the major learning pathways for the weekend and our first step towards wellness using the Wim Hof Method.

Once a builder by trade, he moulded his life around the Wim Hof Method after a devastating dual diagnosis of lymphoma and rheumatoid arthritis. The method involves three pillars – meditation, breathing exercises, and exposure to cold – and is said to remedy mental and physical stresses by elevating one’s oxygen levels. According to Piet, his devotion to the method eliminated the inflammation associated with his arthritis, kept his cancer at bay, and going off his calm and friendly demeanour it has done wonders for his mental wellbeing as well.

Before we began, Piet, who attributed his ailments to not taking care of his body, said: “Your car needs a service and your body needs a service.”

Of his many lines of wisdom that hit home that weekend, this one stuck out.

“My body is probably a few thousand kms overdue,” I remember thinking.

Piet had us all lay on our backs with one hand on our stomach and the other on our chest. Then the breathing began. Those able did eight repetitions of 30 controlled breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth, with some brief breath retention at the end of each set.

Once the reps were complete and our cells were all charged up with oxygen, we moved into the exposure phase. We took a short stroll down to the beach, and like the little penguins that inhabit the hillside, we plunged into the ocean – first one at a time, then eventually as a collective.

Laughter bounced around the natural amphitheatre as we walked back to our little settlement with an extra pep in our step after our swim.

After a quick dry off, we took our place around the communal table for our first nutritionist-cooked dinner of the stay.

Over the three days, “The Sophies” from Eating in Tasmania

treated us to a bounty of nutritious vegetarian meals like sweet lentil curries for dinner, falafel wraps for lunch and smashed avocado on sourdough for breaky – with kombucha and turmeric lattes to wash it all down.

While the food was an experience in itself, so too was the bonding time over meals. The table was not dissimilar to one found in a large family’s house and conversations over the table often lasted far longer than the delightful meals.

During the evenings, we grabbed our rugs and journals for nightly fireside journaling workshops ran by Tasmanian journalist and daily journal-keeper, Amanda Ducker. Her sessions were aimed at promoting the benefits of daily journaling for one’s well being. She summed it up wonderfully during the final session when she said something to the effect of “these journal entries you write today will be your portal back to this beautiful place”.

From conversations with fellow retreaters towards the end of the weekend, the popular standout was Piet’s sessions, which over the course of the weekend progressed from an ocean swim, to an ice bath, ending in a plunge in the Forth River fed by the run-off from recent snowfalls in the Cradle Valley.

In the days since, I feel energised and clear of mind in a way I have not for some time now. Piet also said the icy dips are great for speeding up your metabolism (fingers crossed).

I simply do not have the paper to describe all of the tools the retreat allowed us to take back to our lives. The experience left everyone there with new ways to bring wellness and declutter the busiest and most stressful of lives. Whether it’s a 20-minute guided Essential Personal Training session with no equipment needed, 30 minutes before bed jotting down the day’s happenings and feelings, or some new yoga moves – everything learned at the retreat is entirely applicable to life beyond the weekend at The Cove.

I couldn’t shut up about it to my colleagues when I returned to work the next day and I could only fault the fact that I couldn’t stay there for a whole week or two.

For me, a weekend off the grog and franchise fried chicken was just what the doctor ordered and it will hopefully become the new normal with the simple turn of the cold tap. ●

The author was a guest of the Wild Wellness Retreat

MAKE A NOTE

- The Wild Wellness Method features a merging of medical professionals, decades of experience and global thought leaders and is delivered through a series of online courses, retreats and Tasmanian Walking Company partnered adventures.
 - The retreats and experiences include Wim Hof Method ocean plunges, doctor-led sessions beneath the stars, PT-instructed movement, journaling and guided breathwork. The Wild Wellness team includes a doctor (Dr Chris Davis, a leader in GP alcohol withdrawal management and founder of the Clean Slate Clinic), a psychologist, personal trainer, nutritionist and more.
 - Prices for the retreats start from \$200 for the Wild Wellness Fire and Ice Walk on kunanyi/Mt Wellington which aims to connect participants to the mountain through guided breathwork, journaling, icy plunges and storytelling.
 - The top price for Wild Wellness retreats is \$4765 for the Three Capes (Alcohol-Free) Wild Wellness Walk with Dr Chris. The Three Capes retreat involves four days on the Three Capes Track, trekking along some of the Southern Hemisphere’s highest sea cliffs, writing, walking, Wim Hof plunging and relaxed chats with a global addiction expert.
 - The Cove retreat, featured in this article, is run over three days and held at the Don, near Devonport, on the North-West Coast, and costs between \$1140 and \$1660 per person. A discount of 20 per cent off the full retreat price applies to those sharing a chalet, cabin or glamping tent. The Butter Shed is for individuals.
 - The next Wild Wellness experiences coming up include the Fire and Ice Walk on kunanyi/Mt Wellington on November 28; Wild Wellness @ The Cove on March 25, 2022; The Twelve Apostles Lodge Wild Wellness Walk on June 4, 2022; and the Three Capes Walk on June 30, 2022.
 - For all inquiries and bookings alice@tailoredtasmania.com
- *Please note, these experiences and retreats are not a medical detox.

