

T+L | Trip Ideas

17 Life-Changing Spiritual Retreats Around the World

by Teresa Bergen



Courtesy of Song Saa

No matter your religious leanings, there's something undeniably therapeutic about breaking away from normal life and looking inward. Here are some of the world's most rewarding places to do just that.

Lots of people escape the doldrums of everyday life by going on an island vacation, but soaking up vitamin D and sipping on a fruity cocktail on the beach isn't the only way to de-stress. Here are some of the most noteworthy spiritual retreats across the globe.

Galgorm Resort and Spa in Northern Ireland

Galgorm Resort & Spa puts luxury first. The 163-acre estate has 122 bedrooms, many with a view of the River Maine. Families and groups can opt for cottages and log cabins scattered about the grounds, too. The Thermal Spa Village is designed around the four basic natural elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Guests combine physical activity with the spiritual engagement in Celtic sauna rituals, yoga classes, and Ireland's first "snow paradise," a Finnish-inspired room cooled to 5 degrees and covered in snow and ice.

Vana Malsi Estate in Uttarakhand, India

Mango and lychee orchards shade this 21-acre wellness center that combines Ayurveda, Tibetan healing, yoga, and other therapies. Upon arrival, a doctor designs a personalized retreat for each guest. A meditation cave, shrine room, and spiritual study library serve visitors' spirits. The sand-colored buildings are sleek, modern, filled with artwork, and are certified LEED Platinum. Food is organic and locally sourced with vegetarian, non-vegetarian, and vegan options.

Isha in McMinnville, Tennessee

For an Indian retreat experience closer to home, Americans need look no further than rural Tennessee. The Isha Institute of Inner Sciences offers both personal wellness retreats and organized meditation or yoga programs inside an enormous golden dome. Try their signature "Inner Engineering" program devised by leader Jaggi Vasudev. There are seven waterfalls and beautiful trails on the premises, so you'll want to bring hiking shoes (mountain bike if you can swing it).

Song Saa in Cambodia

If your idea of spiritual development requires a lot of creature comforts, book one of 27 villas on Song Saa Private Island, where one can relish Buddhist teachings and meditations surrounded by rainforest. You can arrange your own wellness program through Song Saa, or through the boutique travel agency Full Circle, which offers a special five-day mindfulness package on the island. Expect massage, bio-rhythms, bath rituals, and blessings from Buddhist monks.

Monastere des Augustines in Quebec, Canada



Courtesy of Monastere

This 17th-century monastery-turned-wellness-center in Quebec's old walled city once housed 225 nuns. Now people come here to relax, unplug, take yoga and movement classes, and eat wholesome organic meals. The rooms feature original doors and antique furniture from the monastery. Guests can do a self-guided retreat, take a yoga or sleep rejuvenation program, or come as pilgrims to request spiritual guidance from the last nine nuns in residence.

MesaStila in Indonesia

Set within a working coffee plantation, MesaStila's property includes a colonial railway station, tropical gardens, and plenty of fresh mountain air. Guests can experience *tabib*, Javanese healers who use herbs to treat body and spirit. Start your day with a dose of a local herbal medicine called *jamu*, and end it tucked into a canopied bed in your sumptuous Javanese villa.

Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giravaaru

This resort features 103 thatched bungalows and lots of beach. You can relax in your villa's private pool or swim with whale sharks and manta rays in the Indian Ocean. Or sign up for Panchakarma, an intensive detox program based on Ayurvedic principles. For 14 or 21 days, Ayurvedic physicians prescribe a combination of purgative therapies. The resort also offers "reconnection rituals" involving sound, massage, chakra healing, essential oils, bathing, and body therapies.

Springwater Center in Finger Lakes, New York

Springwater Center in Finger Lakes, New York, offers a silent retreat without a rigid schedule. Plan your own stay, or join one of the four annual Quiet Weeks. Guests can participate in a daily schedule of meditations—if desired. All that is required is to stay silent during silent times, and to contribute an hour of work per day. The rest of the time is open to wander through forests and meadows, eat vegetarian meals, meditate, or meet with the spiritual advisors in residence. The retreat is open to all faith and meditation traditions.

The Clearing Folk School in Door County, Wisconsin

Landscape architect Jens Jensen built [this retreat](#) for people to clear their minds by reconnecting to nature and each other. A good place for people who describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious," students revive their spirits through wandering in the forest, gazing out at the Green Bay shoreline, taking classes in yoga, knitting, or bonsai planting, and socializing over family style meals.

Etnikas Ayahuasca Retreats in Peru

For those looking to chemically jumpstart their spiritual development, Etnikas offers ayahuasca retreats in the Sacred Valley of the Incas. A combination of nature, Peruvian shamanism, and, of course, the hallucinogenic and purgative ayahuasca plant, are sure to make for a memorable stay. Etnikas has hosted ayahuasca ceremonies for 30 years, has medical backup, and a very high Trip Advisor rating.

Temenos Retreat Center in McGregor, South Africa

Named for an ancient Greek healing temple, Temenos offers self-guided retreats or dedicated wellness weeks, mindfulness retreats, and silent retreats. Depending on your chosen program, your stay could include yoga, meditation, walks in the center's renowned gardens, aromatherapy, South African flower essence readings, and vegetarian meals. Emotional transformation therapies and other therapeutic tools help guests release emotions, old beliefs, and patterns. Don't miss the lemon meringue pie.

Sunrise Springs Integrative Wellness Resort in Santa Fe, New Mexico

This 70-acre resort combines nature-based activities, Eastern and Western healing modalities, and Native American teachings to help guests find deeper meaning in their lives. Sunrise Springs emphasizes medicine more than many retreat centers, with doctors, nurses, and psychiatrists on staff. Even better, this may be the only resort that emphasizes the mental health benefits of animal interaction by letting guests care for soft and adorable silkie chickens. Choose from one of 32 guest rooms or 20 private casitas.

Holy Mount of Grabarka in Poland

Ever since the Holy Hill was reported to have saved people from an 18th-century cholera epidemic, people have come to Poland's Holy Mount of Grabarka to pray for miracles. Pilgrims shuffle around the hill on their knees, bearing offerings of votive candles and crosses with prayers scribbled on them. High season is in August, when thousands of people come for the Transfiguration of Christ festival. Pilgrims arrange agritourism stays with local families or rent a bed in the pilgrim house. For something a bit more upscale, try the Eternite Spa and Wellness Center, about 15 miles from Grabarka.

Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, Connecticut

Two hours from [New York City](#), urban denizens find respite in these 400 forested acres. This is the perfect place to experience a Jewish holiday, hike, pray, attend a Torah Yoga workshop or a meditation retreat, and eat farm-to-table kosher meals. A glass-walled synagogue overlooks mountains and a lake.

Quarr Abbey in Isle of Wight, England

People come to [Quarr Abbey](#) for silent retreat and to receive spiritual guidance. This active monastery invites guests to participate in community life, which centers on Catholic church services. The abbey is known for its peaceful grounds, farm with pigs, and delicious cakes in the café. Guests occupy 10 single rooms on a by-donation basis. Visitors should prepare for some gender separation; men and women eating in separate areas, for example.

Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico

Amid the colorful cliffs and canyons of [Ghost Ranch](#), guests attend a vast number of spiritual retreats. Spiritual memoir, sacred Tibetan art, women's leadership, and soulful marriage are just a few of the retreat topics at this Presbyterian-run center. Expect basic rooms and lots of nature. You may recognize the landscape from the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe, Ghost Ranch's most well-known former occupant.

Shakti 360° Leti in India

From Delhi, you take an overnight train to Kathgodam, where resort staff meets you for an eight-hour car ride, followed by an hour-long hike on a mountain trail. Located at 8,000 feet elevation in the northern hill state of Uttarakhand, [Shakti 360° Leti](#) offers outdoors activities like trekking and picnicking, as well as spacious rooms, private fireplaces, and white tablecloths.

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