

Eden Health Retreat,  
Currumbin Valley, Qld.  
Below: Ormiston Pound,  
NT, on the Larapinta Trail.

# RESTORE, RECONNECT & RENEW

Transformational travel is just what the doctor ordered as a cure for the Covid blues, writes Felicity Harley



## DISCONNECT TO RECONNECT

EDEN HEALTH  
RETREAT,  
CURRUMBIN  
VALLEY, QLD

American novelist Anne Lamott famously wrote “Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.” Well, at Eden you do just that and more. Set in the Gold Coast hinterland, this five-star luxury retreat offers individually tailored programs. “We conduct a 15-minute wellness consultation before guests arrive to engineer the experience based on their well-being needs,” says general manager Chris Van Hoof. “Your stay encompasses health rituals around everything from HITT, like boxing and fitness, to painting and pottery or bushwalking, meditation and yoga.” [edenhealthretreat.com.au](https://edenhealthretreat.com.au)

## HIKE AND HEAL THE LARAPINTA TRAIL, NT

Nature – it’s a powerful healer for mental health, as decades of research has proven. Throw in physical exercise, like an adventurous hike along the 231km Larapinta Trail (well, a portion of it), and you’ll embark on “a personal journey of discovery”.

Yes, that’s the promise of World Expeditions, which is offering a smattering of tours such as Michael Herron Artists Larapinta, where painting enthusiasts can capture the rugged wilderness (September 12-18, 2022), and women-only getaways like the Larapinta Goddess Walk (dates throughout 2022), combining yoga, meditation and, you guessed it, walking.

[worldexpeditions.com](https://worldexpeditions.com)



Healing, therapy, spirituality, growth, renewal – it’s not the usual description you’d give a week or two of holiday, but after another tumultuous year, travellers are seeking all of the above to push past life’s stresses and return home transformed.

Whatever your pandemic story (be it lockdowns, job loss, illness or divorce), health and wellness destinations are tailoring their programs to offer emotionally driven experiences of self-reflection, self-discovery and renewal.

“Transformational travel is essentially travel experiences that intentionally stretch and teach, and help you grow in new ways – getting out of your comfort zone to shift something in you as a result of that experience,” says Katherine Droga, founder of Well Traveller and chair of the Global Wellness Institute’s Tourism Initiative.

The purpose of transformation travel is not just the experience, of course, but enhanced well-being back home as you apply the positive lessons to your daily life. Want to try this goodness for yourself? Here are the top places to tap into for transformation of body, mind and soul.

## EMBRACE CHANGE KAMALAYA, KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

There’s something magical about holistic health retreat Kamalaya. From the moment you set foot in the oasis, built around a former Buddhist monks’ cave, you immediately feel calm. Like kick-off-your-Birkenstocks, open-your-arms-to-the-sky and yell, “See you later stress!” calm. Kamalaya has responded to pandemic anxiety and grief with a new wellness program called Embracing

Change, which includes massage, traditional Chinese medicine, therapist sessions and wholefood cuisine.

“Embracing Change is a gentle inward journey of discovery in order to embrace who you are, what makes you uniquely you, and in so doing break free of old habits and perceptions,” Kamalaya founder and “chief wellness officer”, Karina Stewart tells *Escape*. “Embracing Change nurtures and inspires true life change from within.” (I speak from experience here, having once arrived at Kamalaya burnt-out and returning home restored.)

[kamalaya.com](http://kamalaya.com)

## SIT IN TOTAL SILENCE BILLABONG RETREAT, MARAYLYA, NSW

Why not consider a short getaway as therapy? Just a 45-minute drive from Sydney, Billabong Resort offers a smorgasbord of stays for stressed-out individuals. Its Mindfulness Essentials retreat, which runs from 2pm Sunday to 1pm Wednesday every 12 weeks, is led by founder Paul von Bergen and gets into the nitty gritty – history, theory and practice – of using mindfulness to improve decision making, decrease stress and increase focus. It includes twice-daily yoga, three-hour silent periods, mindful-eating workshops and meditation.

[billabongretreat.com.au](http://billabongretreat.com.au)



## HEALTH REBOOT THE RANCH, MALIBU, US

The Ranch’s past guest list reads like a Hollywood roll call – Jessica Alba, Alison Brie and Rebel Wilson to name a few – but don’t let that colour your view. This 80-hectare luxurious resort in Santa Monica’s mountains is perfect for the outdoor-obsessed wanting to “recalibrate mind and body” (no Wi-Fi or phone service). It offers daily four-hour hikes, organic plant-based food, cholesterol testing and body-fat analysis, a weekly sound bath, acupuncture, chiropractic treatments, cryotherapy and IV therapy. Alas, health transformation often doesn’t come cheap – The Ranch is nearly \$US8600 a week.

[theranchmalibu.com](http://theranchmalibu.com)

## REVIVE & THRIVE ARO HA RETREAT, GLENORCHY, NZ

Just looking at pictures of this retreat in the Southern Alps of New Zealand, about 40 minutes from Queenstown, brings a sense of tranquillity. Founder Damian Chaparro describes its holistic health offering, Revive and Thrive, as a “multi-tool for the world’s weary – a program that meets our guests where they are, and lifts all aspects of their well-being. Our programs elevate the natural function of our biological, psychological and social aspects.” Sunrise yoga sessions, hiking subalpine trails, feasting on vegetarian cuisine and daily massages – and when guests return home? “Words like transformation are used,” Chaparro tells *Escape*, “but I like the idea of coming home to our true selves.” [aro-ha.com](http://aro-ha.com)



## LUXURY DETOX LANSERHOF, TEGERNSEE, GERMANY

Victoria Beckham put this luxury medical spa on the wellness map when she famously drank “moon water” (that is, water infused with energy from a full moon, albeit at a hefty price) and posted it on social media.

This super-chic resort uses modern science and integrated medicine – dubbed the “Lanserhof Concept” – for total body regeneration. The spa has a two-week program for long-Covid sufferers that offers diagnostics, fasting, nutrition and “CellGym metabolic activation” to try to fight ongoing effects from the virus. Lanserhof is in the spectacular Bavarian Alps, an hour from Munich, which no doubt works a treat on the mind, too. [lanserhof.com/en](http://lanserhof.com/en)



**Clockwise from left:**  
Wim Hof therapy with Leah Scott in the Snowy Mountains, NSW; yoga at Aro Ha, NZ; Lanserhof in Germany’s Bavarian Alps; hiking at The Ranch in California.

## BREATHE DIFFERENTLY

### WIM HOF RETREATS, SNOWY MOUNTAINS, NSW

To overcome post-divorce anxiety, Leah Scott would plunge into Lake Jindabyne and follow the breathing techniques of Wim Hof, aka The Iceman, a Dutch extreme athlete. Today, Scott is a certified Wim Hof Method instructor and inspires others to experience the “profound transformation of consciousness” from cold-water immersion. Her year-round, multi-day retreats offer guided breathing work, cold exposure (swims and hikes), meditation and group sessions.

[leahscott.net](http://leahscott.net)

## INDIGENOUS HEALING

### WARIDA WHOLISTIC WELLNESS, LOWER HERMITAGE, SA

Adelaide Hills might be famous for its wine, but nowadays it’s also a thriving wellness hub. The best place to stop-off for a dose of Aboriginal healing is Warida Wholistic Wellness. “They offer bush therapy, equine-assisted therapy and wellness retreats,” Katherine Droga says. “(Owner) Bianca teaches about the value of nature in healing, honouring country and embracing the ethos of gudu-guduwa (coming together).” An hour-long transformational coaching session costs \$340, and bush therapy and animal-assisted psychotherapy is \$200 an hour (NDIS subsidies are offered).

[warida.com.au](http://warida.com.au)

## PSYCHEDELIC CEREMONIES

### SOLTARA HEALING CENTRE, COSTA RICA

The use of psychedelic medicine to treat mental-health disorders is nothing new, but in 2021 it kicked into another gear. Nicole Kidman brought “micro-dosing” into our living rooms in *Nine Perfect Strangers*, CBD oil officially became available over the counter in pharmacies, and the federal government announced it will pour millions into clinical trials using the likes of magic mushrooms for treatments. So why not try it while you’re travelling to treat mental fragility?

Costa Rica is home to one such place, called Soltara Healing Centre and offering five- to 12-night retreats – hallucinogen ceremonies included – to access the depths of consciousness for clarity and renewal. Beware: psychedelic use can also trigger mental health issues and cause psychosis.

[soltara.co](http://soltara.co)



Scan the code to discover Australia’s best spa retreats.