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By Annemarie Oull

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Sohamsa Ocean Estate has been chosen Escape Haven as their retreat in Uluwatu. It sets in two multimillion-dollar clifftop villas overlooking the oceans of Bali's Bukit Peninsula.

By Annemarie Quill

Published October 22, 2017.



Kiwi's retreat empire is a global award winner, writes Annemarie Quill.

New Zealander Janine Hall has been helping women transform their lives for almost 10 years. It was in 2008 that she first opened Escape Haven, a Bali surf/yoga/wellness retreat, helping women reprioritise their lives and switch their focus back to themselves.

Her mission has paid off - as well as having seen more than 5000 women from all over the world pass through the doors, Escape Haven is soon to be recognised at the World Luxury Hotel Awards in St Moritz, Switzerland. The retreat entered two of the six retreat categories - Best Luxury

Wellness Retreat and Best Luxury Boutique Retreat. Hall knows they have won at least one of the two awards, but has to wait until next month to find out which one.

"It's wonderful to be recognised as one of the winners in these global awards, among such an esteemed group of industry peers," Hall says. "They are the most prestigious awards in the hotel industry. They attract the best of the best across hotels, resorts, villas and retreats globally."

It will be the perfect way to round out what has been a big year for Hall - in June she opened a new retreat in Uluwatu. It's the most luxe location yet, set in two multimillion-dollar clifftop villas overlooking the oceans of Bali's Bukit Peninsula, famed for its sparkling azure waters and 4m surf breaks.

The rooms, with four-poster beds, white leather upholstery and huge marble en suites are airy, luxurious and modern. The villas include a gym, sauna, spa room, infinity pools and gardens, and an attentive staff including a 24-hour butler.

Each morning starts with a session with yogini Lani, a Californian yoga goddess, who uses mindful and meditation tools. It's so much more than a yoga class; it's also a counselling session and there is often laughter and tears in each class. Lani is a wonderfully intuitive human who tunes into each woman's needs. At the same time as leading us to higher ground, she is also down to earth, teaching us "fancy breaths" to "let that shit go".

Yoga is followed by fitness with Finn, an Irish personal trainer who is highly skilled and knowledgeable, and - unbelievably - actually made fitness fun.

Transformational workshops include a nutrition session, in which we learn about gut health, the immune system and the connection between diet and wellbeing. Hall is a firm believer in food as medicine and the retreat has an organic gluten- and sugar-free menu designed by a nutritionist. There is a "no hunger policy", however, so you definitely won't starve. The menu is packed with delicious dishes sourced from local ingredients. A favourite are the smoochie bowls, and the beetroot kombucha, served in champagne glasses leaves us feeling a little giddy afterwards.



Lani leads a mindfulness workshop which includes practical techniques to move away from being locked in the busy chatter of our minds, to going with the flow, noticing the here and now, the colour of flowers or what our neighbour is wearing.

Hall runs a fear-busting session to help us move from a fixed mind-set of "I can't, I mustn't", to a growth mind-set of "I'll give it a go". It is a technique being used by big corporates to help people achieve their true potential.

This mind-set does not come naturally to most, it takes practice, and Hall gives enlightening tips to inspire a change of outlook, which she believes is the key to achieving what you want out of life.

Spa sessions are peppered throughout the week and are blissful - a traditional Balinese massage in my room to the sound of the ocean is one of the highlights.

The week also includes one-on-one personal training and yoga sessions and the options to access other gurus, handpicked by Hall.

I have a session with Sylvie, an intuitive Hungarian tarot reader, and a truly life changing Heller Bodywork session with Malcolm, a fellow Kiwi.

Hellerwork is a deep tissue bodywork and movement education designed to realign the body and release chronic tension and stress. Malcolm uses dialogue to help you discover emotional stresses that may be related to physical tension.

Previous guests spoke of his incredible healing aura - one burst into tears the moment she saw him. I was initially sceptical how a one-hour session could achieve so much but on meeting Malcolm, all layers were peeled back. A sort of counsellor, massage therapist, physiotherapist and healer combined into one, he has an amazing capacity to scrape away "the bullshit" that we tell ourselves.

As you stand there in your bikini, he deciphers what is "wrong" with your body in terms of alignment, and the dual approach of treating physical and emotional pain together really works.

I don't think I had breathed properly in my life before meeting Malcolm. After the session my mind feels lighter and my body heavy, as if I am feeling the weight of it for the first time. I vow to continue Hellerwork in New Zealand.

The week also includes trips to local hot spots, such as an Uluwatu temple, Finns Beach club - the place to watch the infamous Bali sunsets - and a day at Sunday's, a private beach club where you can swim, snorkel or just laze, sipping cocktails, practising your newfound mindfulness by doing nothing at all.

The week left me feeling re-energised and reminded that in the quest to be Ms Wonderful, you don't have to lose yourself.

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