

# All well and good

Holidaymakers are swapping hedonism for healthy travel



Gaia Retreat and Spa, Brooklet, NSW

**BEATING A RETREAT**  
Pre-pandemic, wellness tourism was booming anyway, and now it's taken centre stage.

**T**here was a time – not so long ago – when the quintessential holiday selfie was drinking beers at a Seminyak beach club or trawling Fifth Avenue for something affordable or a self-imposed food coma in San Sebastián.

Holidays were a hedonistic mix of alcohol, sore feet, maxed-out credit cards and loose pants (no guilt), and posting it all on social media. Heck, you'd deal with the hangover and depleted bank account and weight gain later, back home, when the post-holiday blues kicked in.

Then the pandemic arrived, overseas travel was upended and how quickly that all became dated Instagram brags.

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that care for self is important for our health. Yes, that pesky term "self-care" – simply meaning a deliberate activity to care for our mental, emotional and physical health – went from being woke wellness to mainstream wanderlust. Once associated with face masks, yoga poses and vagina-scented candles, self-care has not only entrenched itself in our daily lives, it's dictating how we holiday. While lockdown exacerbated mental-health struggles, it was also a powerful motivator to focus on our well-being, with many of us now more health conscious than ever. Rather than boozy trips to Bali or shopping tours of New York, we're seeking vacations that keep our mental health and physical body intact.

The Wellness Tourism Association surveyed 4000 people across 48 countries and found nearly 78 per cent listed wellness travel on their holiday wishlists. The reasons: to escape the stress of the pandemic, connect with nature and feel recharged and renewed.

Cashing-in on our new collective mindset, self-care trips are popping up – and filling up – faster than you

can say vaccination. Whether it's a fitness retreat, meditation hike, yoga weekend, or ditching digital to go bush, there are plenty of bespoke and tailored experiences offering up an escape from our mental chatter.

Up in Queensland, Eden Health Retreat, Australia's longest-running health retreat, announced in October their multimillion-dollar refurbishment by handing out \$500,000 worth of retreat packages to stressed-out Aussies who needed to relax, recharge and reconnect. If you want to escape the stampede to the wellness epicentre, Byron Bay, Gaia Retreat in the hinterland is the ultimate self-care stop. In the New South Wales Snowy Mountains, Thredbo is offering yoga, hiking and meditation retreats. Adventure group Women Want Adventure promises to "empower, inspire and connect" and has something for every woman from trekking the Walls of Jerusalem in Tasmania to sea kayaking around Ningaloo Reef. Its tours sell out super-fast. In Daylesford, you can submerge yourself in healing waters, or head up to Kakadu to reconnect with you while learning about Aboriginal culture. And the wellness list goes on.

Here's the thing: pre-pandemic, wellness tourism was booming anyway, and now it's taken centre stage. If a dedicated feel-good trip is not your holiday jam, self-care can easily be incorporated into any planning. Can we walk along the beach every morning? Can I connect with nature? Will this push my comfort zone? Let's do a digital detox. No Wi-Fi in that bush shack? Book it anyway!

Sure, a bush track is not as impressive as the Taj Mahal on your social-media feed, but really who cares? You'll return maxed-out on endorphins, rather than doing the same to your credit card, and no holiday selfie stacks up against that. *Felicity Harley is the author of Balance & Other BS: How to Hold It Together When You're Doing It All (Allen & Unwin, \$29.99).*



**Felicity Harley is a journalist and author. Her ultimate self-care holiday involves a beach, book and yoga mat – sans kids – but, really, any woke wellness trip will do the trick.**

## WANDERLUST



### Secret Tahiti

With its waterfall-laden mountains, Tiffany-blue lagoons and beautiful Polynesian culture, Tahiti and the 118 islands of French Polynesia are a destination to keep on your radar for 2021. While we patiently wait to jump on the first plane out of town, use this time to plan your perfect island getaway. To disconnect and experience a different kind of Polynesian holiday, the island of Rurutu, 570km south of Tahiti, is calling. There are no touristy beachfront hotels or crowded beaches – just laid-back guest houses run by locals and pristine swimming spots perfect for snorkelling. [tahititourisme.com.au](http://tahititourisme.com.au)



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## NEWS

What's on the horizon in the world of travel



### STARRY, STARRY NIGHTS

Set on 17 hectares in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, glamping retreat Starry Nights has two spacious safari-style tents fitted with all the amenities for a comfortable stay beside Petrie Creek. Features include a king-size bed, lounge area, kitchenette, fireplace for cool winter nights and a freestanding bathtub. [starrynightsluxurycamping.com.au](http://starrynightsluxurycamping.com.au)



### VIEW FROM THE TOP

Sydney Tower Eye and SkyFeast Restaurant have joined forces to design a top-notch outing above the city. The Sydney Tower VIP Experience kicks off on the observation deck, then an outdoor walk to the glass platform 268m above ground. This is followed by lunch at the SkyFeast Restaurant, with a 360-degree rotating view of Sydney. [sydneytowereye.com.au](http://sydneytowereye.com.au)



### CRUISING AHOY

Cruise line Coral Expeditions' flagship Coral Adventurer resumes operating this month after a 10-month hiatus in its home port of Cairns. With Covid-safe protocols in place, new itineraries, capped at 100 people per voyage, include the coastlines of SA, the Great Australian Bight, and the coral reefs and islands of WA and Queensland. [coralexpeditions.com](http://coralexpeditions.com)



### THE LOWDOWN ON VIC

Travellers in Victoria are in for a revolutionary road trip this summer. Podcast Storytowns has created the Country to Coast Trail, a series exploring 13 locations in the state's west, meeting locals like Mortlake publican Jodie Beck (above) and Shane Howard, frontman of '80s rock band Goanna. The podcasts automatically play as you enter each town. [storytowns.com.au](http://storytowns.com.au)

Words: Samantha Stewart