

38 WEEKEND

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SWITCH OFF AND SAVOUR THE SERENITY

STEPPING INTO THE GARDENS OF EDEN HEALTH RETREAT IN CURRUMBIN VALLEY YOU'LL DISCOVER WHY HEALTH RETREATS CAN BE LIFE-CHANGING.

KATE WEBSTER

I had never been to a health retreat before. I thought they were more for the health cult fanatics who live in lycra and never indulge in tasty treats, so when I found myself driving up into the Gold Coast Hinterland to stay a week in Currumbin Valley at Eden Health Retreat, I was hesitant.

Frankly, the thought of no caffeine, no alcohol, no phone reception and no wi-fi for a week terrified me. I had never really been a fan of forced exercise and conscious health routines. What would I do with myself for a whole week? I was sure I would go insane, so I packed three books and my laptop to do some writing, just in case.

The laptop was never opened and those books remained unread. Little did I know that I was about to stumble across one of the Gold Coast's best-kept secrets. A place where I learnt how to disconnect from the pressures and stress of work. A place where I reconnected with myself and the self-care I didn't realise I was missing. A place that was healing beyond my wildest imagination.

EXPERIENCE

The name for Eden Health Retreat isn't biblical, although guests described their stay "as if being re-born". The valley and surrounding areas were home to the Yugambeh people, before the land was cleared in the 1860s by Henry Eden, who called his new dairy farm the Garden of Eden.

In 1985 Camp Eden was born, resembling more of a personal development bootcamp

with strict rules of participation. Fast forward to now, and the camp has morphed into a more luxurious retreat with a more flexible approach.

The location alone at Eden Health Retreat was healing in itself. Surrounded by nature's amphitheatre of mountains, this part of Currumbin Valley had a certain magic to it. Lush rainforest blankets the hills, and the chorus of songbirds filled the air. Even in the cooler months, the daylight peaking over the treetops filters through with a glowing warmth. In the morning, low lying clouds floated by wistfully before disintegrating in the sun's rays.

The creek that runs through the property offered the constant white noise of flowing water. A large bamboo garden would chime in occasionally with her swooshes as the wind moved through and made her dance. It was peaceful yet energetic at the same time.

Exploring beyond the retreat will take you to waterfalls, the rainforest, up to mountain peaks and lookouts with views to the stunning coastline. There are many hiking tracks and walks ranging from easy to extreme for those who want to challenge themselves. These can be done as part of the Eden program or in your own time.

STAY

The retreat has two sections of accommodation. My stay was in the newer suites that sit on the hillside adjacent to the main section of the retreat with the pool and



spa, treatment rooms, gymnasium and Eden Pavilion.

The modern, stylish suites have dark timbers and neutral tones that blend in with the surrounding vegetation. Sliding glass doors open to a private balcony facing out over the valley. There is an enormous deep bath and a jar of Epsom salts, replenished daily. I later discovered this is much needed. There's no TV, enhancing the feeling of disconnection. I was particularly a fan of the essential oils burner that I lit every time I was in the room.

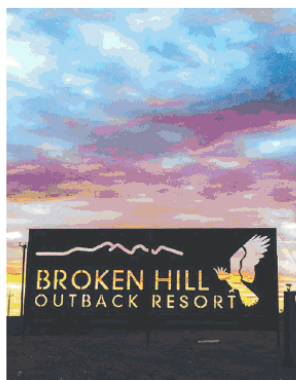
The original retreat rooms are perched high on the hill overlooking the valley. Here is where the repeat guests like to call "the village" as it was the hub for the original camp. Suites here face out to the rainforest

and are set in a more communal area. Wherever you stay at Eden, the walk to your room is part of the daily exercise, so be prepared to get those steps up.

CARE

Days at Eden began with the chimes of a bell that echoed down the valley in the early hours of the morning. Each day had a different itinerary. There were yoga classes, fitness activities, information sessions and meditations to name a few. While the schedule was set, you can participate in as much or as little as you please.

A spring water pool offered a refreshing cleanse after strenuous activities, or a soak in the heated spa soothed aching muscles. The sauna and steam room proved popular with



END OF WINTER SPECIALS IN OUTBACK NSW

AUSTRALIANS free to travel now, including those in many regional areas, and others planning a post-lockdown getaway to the open horizons of outback NSW can take advantage of end-of-winter specials offered by Out of the Ordinary Outback.

Out of the Ordinary Outback owns seven properties in far west NSW.

This time of the year is perfect for a road trip with mild sunny days ideal to explore the raw, wildlife-filled landscapes, vast, open spaces and character-filled towns of far west NSW including Broken Hill, White Cliffs, Cobar and Wilcannia.

New specials released by Out of the Ordinary Outback for stays before August 31:

* Live it up at Broken Hill Outback Resort from \$175 per couple with a free upgrade to a deluxe spa cabin overlooking the desert, a \$30 restaurant voucher at the resort and an extended check-out. Enjoy a dining special at the resort offering two wood-fired pizzas for only \$45 including free garlic bread.

* Sleep under the earth in the famous White Cliffs Underground Motel from \$140 a night per couple with a free continental breakfast.

* Enjoy free-range adventure at Out of the Ordinary Outback's billabong-fringing Warrawong on the Darling property in Wilcannia from \$140 a night in a cabin per couple, with free continental breakfast.

* Break your outback journey with a rest at Copper City Motel in Cobar from \$105 a night with free continental breakfast.

To help plan roadtrips to outback NSW, Out of the Ordinary Outback is also offering an additional 10 per cent discount for those staying at two or more of their properties in far west NSW in the one trip.

Less toured and free of crowds, far western NSW is home to majestic, ochre-red sand dunes, endless plains, Aboriginal rock art, star-filled skies and rugged ranges as well as quirky outback pubs brimming with stories.

To book phone 1300 679 688 or visit www.outoftheordinaryoutback.com.au.

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guests, and I found myself a frequent visitor also. A trip to Club Mud is a must during the stay. A natural treatment, you lather yourself in nutrient-rich clay, bask in the sun as it dries and wash off to reveal soft and silky skin.

In addition to the daily activities, you can select from an array of treatments to further assist in your healing journey. I indulged in an Eastern Therapies treatment and the signature Kahuna Massage. They were so profoundly healing, it left me walking on air.

It was not all blissful balance, as I learnt with the flying fox and balance pole. These challenges are designed to push you out of your comfort zone and overcome fears. The sense of accomplishment was evident on all participants' faces after launching off the platform of each challenge.

NOURISH

Fuelling the body and soul for all the activities at Eden is exquisite food. It is all organic, seasonal and unprocessed, with much of the produce sourced from Eden's own garden. Even the water comes from their own natural spring.

Never have I experienced healthy food to not only look good but taste amazing. It was a delight to sit down at every meal and wait in anticipation for what would be served next.

The first evening dinner was a bone broth chicken laksa, the most tantalising meal I had tasted in a long while. My breakfast, I would take out on the deck, accompanied by my daily selection of herbal tea.

Throughout the course of the week, I learnt that eating well did not mean losing

taste in meals. One day I accidentally stumbled into a session I had not planned on attending, a nutrition talk. I was glad I had. I learnt more from that session about how to eat well and better look after my health than I had in my entire adult life. To say I found it life-changing would be accurate, and I furiously noted in my diary all the changes I planned on making to my eating habits.

REPAIR

On my last day at Eden, I found myself sitting down by the creek in my own little headspace, reflecting on the week. I had chatted with the other guests and enjoyed listening to the journeys that led them here. Some guests seemed part of the furniture, having visited many times. Others were newbies like me.

I was surprised at the number of males that were staying at the retreat.

When I asked why they chose a health retreat, the answer always came back to "they needed it". One guest told me that a week in Eden felt like he had taken a month-long holiday. I saw the value in that. The value we need to put into our health and well-being is paramount. So if you can spend a week repairing, reversing the clock a bit and regenerating to be better in mind, body and soul – why wouldn't you do it.

I walked away from the week feeling like a snake that had shed its skin. It was out with the old and in with the new. I was refreshed and feeling fabulous. I have found my Eden and I plan on returning yearly to refresh again.



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