

LOVE & LIGHT

South west London yogini Charlie Morgan on why escaping the city for Poundon House is yin and tonic for mind and body

Words MADELEINE HOWELL



Yoga teacher Charlie Morgan studies constantly. It's perhaps this, her relentless quest for wellness wisdom since giving up her job as an assistant buyer in 2011, that has led to her astonishing success as yoga instructor to the Harlequins rugby team. Initially trained at The Wise Living Yoga Academy in Bali after a life-changing trip to the Himalayan Yoga Institute in 2011, she has taught across the globe, privately all over London, and at top yoga studios including Hotpod Yoga, Heartcore in Notting Hill and Evolve in South Kensington. You'll find her running workshops at Yogahaven in Clapham and at Sweaty Betty on the Northcote Road, as an ambassador for the branch.

Now, she is turning her hand to country weekend retreats beyond the city, at the idyllic, homely Poundon House in Oxfordshire. Morgan's collaboration with fellow yoga lover and friend Alicia Roscoe, who co-founded



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the &Sister retreats at her family home along with her sister Natalie, has given her the opportunity to share her knowledge with others on a deeper level than is possible in an hour snatched on a lunch break or after work in London – as I was lucky enough to experience for myself at their inaugural autumnal retreat, Autumn Light.

'A lot of people are living in the fast lane, even if they're not always aware of it,' she tells me before the other guests arrive. 'A retreat is an amazing opportunity to make a lasting difference, and to take a step back and see how far you've come. When you're more relaxed, you're more open to learning. In London, people want to work out and leave, whereas in this environment, I can really start to show people how beneficial things like daily meditation and little affirmations can be.'

Just an hour from London, the retreats cater for complete beginners through to advanced practitioners, while men,



Far from a bootcamp, a retreat at Poundon House is full of little treats



STYLE NOTES

Alicia Roscoe and Charlie Morgan wear Manuka Life and Sweaty Betty. Shop their style at Manuka Life, 275 New King's Road SW6 4RD; 020 7371 7878; manukalife.com

women, couples and groups of friends of all ages are all just as welcome. As well as yoga practise, there's plenty of time to relax in front of the log fire, chat over dinner in the gorgeous yellow dining room, and to go for walks in the surrounding Oxfordshire countryside.

The retreats are themed around the changing seasons, and are geared towards helping people through the transitions that come with different times of the year. As 2017 rolls around after the indulgences of the festive season this January, now is the perfect time to plan ahead for the coming months and book on to the Wild Spring or May Bank Holiday retreats. Alicia Roscoe's other &Sister offerings include the likes of a three night New Year retreat with Mischa Varmuza, Soul Dive, with a three course banquet on New Year's Eve. She offers a slightly different experience at each and every one – whether by introducing sound healing or Tibetan bowls, or mixing up the itinerary with special guests. Though this year is already

sold out, it's not too late to book onto Varmuza's new Awaken Your Heart retreat at Poundon House from Friday 17 to Sunday 19 February.

Later in the year, autumn is a time to prepare to wrap up after the headiness of summer. 'Practising yoga is like giving yourself a big warm hug,' Morgan explains simply, which is a feeling that certainly stays with me after the retreat – along with the help of the nourishing, gluten-free yet hearty meals served up by Leiths-trained chef Sophie Glover (think grains and greens, and lashings of avo), endless cups of steaming herbal teas, luxuriant long baths and ample free time for treatments, rest and reading.

So, what other health benefits are unique to yoga, I wonder? 'It's really physical,' Morgan ponders the vastness of my question, 'but the beauty of it is that it also works on an emotional and mental level. Even though some people

might come to the mat for the physical workout, on retreats, they realise that that's only the first layer of the onion. They can be blown away by how amazing they feel. It's a way of giving yourself an internal massage, and stretching out certain areas to work on energy blockages. It's deeply healing for the mind and body, and that's where it's worlds apart from any other form of exercise.'

Her aim on the retreats, she continues, is not to send people into oblivion and then 'chuck them back into the sea', but to give them a toolbox of transferable skills and accessible ideas to take with them back to their day-to-day lives – 'because, unfortunately, we can't be at Poundon House all the time!' she laughs. That might be true – but at least we can be for a weekend...

Visit charliemorganyoga.com to find out more and go to retreats.poundonhouse.com to book a place on a seasonal retreat this year