

Your DIY wellness retreat

Set aside a weekend to nurture yourself, spring clean your goals and re-ignite your passions and plans

Words: Siobhan Mason

There are times when we all need to take a step back from our lives to recharge our energy, replenish our motivation and re-evaluate our goals. A wellness retreat is the ideal place to do this, but we can't always afford a luxury weekend away. Luckily, there are many things we can do to create one for ourselves at home. It might involve getting others out of the house and a bit of tidying up beforehand, but with a little forward planning we can reap the rewards of a weekend 'away' at a fraction of the cost. This is an ideal time to look back on the year so far and ensure that your everyday life and your priorities are still a reflection of what you want them to be. Read on for our simple tips on getting your home retreat-ready and our favourite rituals and activities to help you make the most of your weekend...

Clear any clutter

There's nothing more distracting than seeing crumbs, toys or lost socks under the sofa when we finally make the time to lie on our mat for a workout or meditation.

"You're not going to be able to retreat if your physical space is cluttered, if there's laundry hanging about or dishes on the side of the sink," says wellness coach Juls Abernethy, who runs women's retreats year-round (thebodyretreat.co.uk). "Clear the decks as much as possible in the room you'll spend the most amount of time in. Add candles or incense and keep the light low in the evenings to help relax you."

Pick a meditation

Starting each day of your retreat with a meditation will help clear your mind and set your intentions. There are also lots of excellent meditation apps to guide you. Insight Timer is free; it offers meditations along themes including motivation, manifestation, mindfulness, gratitude, guided imagery, nature sounds and yoga nidra (ideal to help you sleep). Other great apps include Buddhify (only £1.99 on android with an easy-to-navigate wheel), Headspace and Calm (both of which have some free meditations and a monthly or annual cost for more.)

Download your app of choice and explore it ahead of your retreat weekend to see which voice and meditation style appeal most, then choose your meditations in advance. ▶





Minimise distractions

“When we go away on a retreat, we naturally leave distractions and interactions behind,” says Juls. “To remove these, put your phone on ‘do not disturb’. Check the news and social media on Friday night at 6 o’clock and decide not to check back in until Sunday night. Don’t buy a newspaper or go on social media, and just allow everything to wind down.”

This won’t be an entirely screen-free weekend. As much as technology can stress us out, it also has its pluses, including access to great yoga teachers, meditations and workouts online. By turning off notifications and temporarily removing the most tempting apps, we can still use our screens for their more mindful offerings.

Get physical

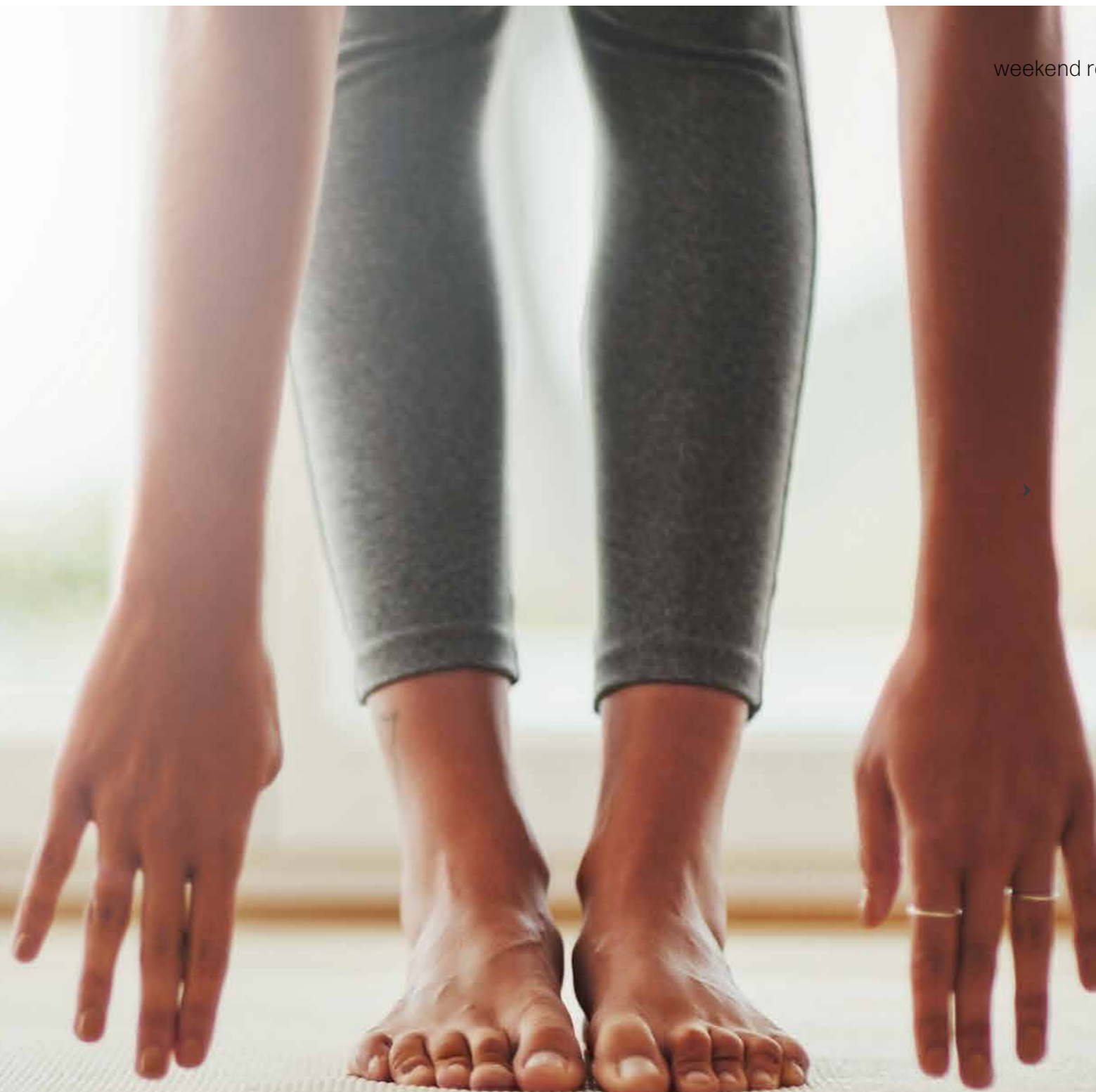
Make time over the weekend for physical activity. As well as being good for your physical health, focusing on your body gives your brain a chance to slow down and for goals to settle in your subconscious. You might like to go for a brisk walk, a swim or a run, or choose a workout at home. Fitness Blender ([fitnessblender.com](https://www.fitnessblender.com)) has a range of online cardio, strengthening and stretching workouts and OMstars ([omstars.com](https://www.omstars.com)) features over 1,000 yoga classes from teachers around the world. Be guided by your fitness level and ability, however a cardio workout followed by stretching or yoga is a great, rounded combination. ▶

Create a home spa

Use essential oils to create an authentic retreat feel. Jo Kellett, Tisserand Aromatherapy’s wellbeing collective essential oil expert suggests blending 2 drops of Frankincense, 2 drops of Atlas Cedarwood and 4 drops of Sweet Orange essential oils in an oil burner. “Frankincense has the ability to calm and deepen the breath. Atlas Cedarwood has gentle uplifting qualities that also make you feel strong and secure while Sweet Orange has a pleasant, aroma that gently uplifts the spirits and aids relaxation,” she explains.

Wind down at bedtime

A bedtime ritual will help you settle in for a good night’s sleep. Try some or all of the following: light an aromatherapy candle (many people find lavender relaxing) and take a soak in a warm bath (add Epsom salts to relax muscles); practice a few gentle yoga poses (find a simple bedtime routine on our website at bit.ly/itmyogasleep); drink a cup of herbal tea (chamomile and valerian are known to aid sleep, we love Pukka’s Night Time blend); read a few chapters of a good book (find our recommended reads at bit.ly/itmnextread) or listen to a bedtime story (try calm.com/sleep-stories).



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Prepare some nourishing food

Cooking mindfully could be part of your retreat or, if you prefer, you might like to prepare some nourishing dishes in advance. Depending on the weather outside, vegetable soups and salads are simple to make, will keep hunger at bay and are full of goodness. Juls Abernethy serves her retreat guests a nourishing immune-boosting soup. This recipe makes six hearty portions.

1 Heat 2 tsp rapeseed oil in a pan and gently fry the onions, carrots and celery for 5 minutes.

2 Add the garlic, red peppers and courgette and generous pinches of allspice, chilli flakes and smoked paprika. Fry for 5 minutes, or until the veg is tender.



3 Add the tomato purée, chopped tomatoes, chickpeas, quinoa and vegetable stock. Simmer gently for 10 minutes.

4 Take off the heat, add the fresh orange juice, chopped basil, chopped spinach and frozen peas.

5 Season with sea salt, black pepper and basil leaves to serve.

Ingredients

- * 2 tsp rapeseed oil
- * 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- * 2 onions, diced
- * 2 carrots, diced
- * stick of celery, diced
- * 2 red peppers, seeded and diced
- * 1 small courgette, diced
- * generous pinches of allspice, chilli flakes, smoked paprika
- * 1 tbsp tomato purée
- * 3 tins of chopped tomatoes
- * tin of chickpeas
- * 50g (1.8oz) quinoa
- * 500ml (18fl oz) vegetable stock
- * 300ml (10oz) fresh orange juice
- * 4 tbsp chopped basil
- * large handful chopped spinach
- * ½ cup of frozen peas



Make the most of where you live

Spending time in nature has been shown to lower blood pressure and the production of the stress hormone cortisol, so make time outdoors (combined with exercise if you like) a part of your weekend. Spend time in the garden, a local park, wood, lake or beach. Take advantage of whatever green space you have on your doorstep.

Write a letter

A creative way to clarify your goals is to write a letter to someone close to you, dated a year from now. It's the letter you would want to write if everything had gone the way you wanted it to. Write about the year – in great detail and with great gratitude – as if it's already happened. You can include how harmonious your interactions with your family, your boss and your neighbours have been. You can write about your adventurous holiday and your outstanding progress at work. Be specific and be excited. This process really helps to cement in your mind where you want your life to be and ensures all of your upcoming decisions will help get you there.

Prepare a homemade herbal tea

Set aside time each day for a soothing tea-making ritual, then sit and drink your tea mindfully, savouring each sip. Rachel de Thample, author of *Tonics and Teas* (Octopus, £9.99), suggests a rosy ginger tea. "Rose is a lovely medicine for your heart in terms of calming your emotions," she says, "while the ginger and star anise are great digestive soothers."

To make a 250ml (8.5oz) serving: peel and roughly chop a 3cm (1.25in) piece of fresh ginger; add a tablespoon of rose petals or buds and one star anise and place into a teapot. Pour over 250ml (8.5oz) of freshly boiled water; steep for 10 minutes, then strain into a mug.

Massage helps to release toxins back into the blood stream, be sure to drink lots of water after.

Release muscle tension

"Self-massage can relieve muscle tension and reduce pain by getting good blood flow to over-strained areas," says sports massage therapist Laura Morris.

"A common place for tension to occur is between the neck and shoulder. To release this, have your hand on the shoulder you wish to massage and turn the head to the opposite side to stretch the muscle. Then, use medium-firm pressure to help release the muscle. Repeat on the other side."

Laura also recommends using a tennis ball to roll into the upper and lower back muscles and the gluteal muscles (the ones that make up our buttocks). The ball needs to be between your muscles and a surface, such as a mat or the wall. "Roll for 90 seconds or until you feel a release of tension," says Laura. "And since massage helps to release toxins back into the blood stream, be sure to drink lots of water after." 🍵