



**Wet and mild: Banjaran Hotsprings in Malaysia**



**If you view your body as a business, then this is the most important business you're in**

**Sharon Kolkka, Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat**

## The wellness break

Busy executives are finding spa retreats a relaxing way to combat stress and refocus on their fitness and wellbeing to maintain their edge in business. Report: Emily Chantiri

● As the founder of Spa Travel, a travel agency specialising in holidays to luxurious spa resorts and health retreats, Karen Goudge has made relaxation her life's work. Since starting the business in 2001, Goudge has experienced a shift in the holiday preferences of exhausted executives who increasingly are seeking "wellness" breaks.

The shift from the usual beach resort holiday started five years ago, she believes, when employees were feeling enormous pressure leading up to the global financial crisis. Since that time, Goudge says her clients are feeling even more tired and overworked.

What her clients are desperate for, she says is somewhere they can unwind and "de-stress". Unlike the run of the mill beach holidays, these types of escapes offer wellbeing and holistic

programs, such as detox, yoga, dealing with stress and burnout, fitness and weight control.

"Most people who go to a spa retreat, go for a purpose, such as to release tension and worry, or to unwind or to eat well," Goudge says. "They have been set up totally for this purpose; to provide support and comfort for the guest's wellbeing. Everything is taken care of."

"These places aren't just corner day spas in Bali or on a main street; they have been set up for wellness and transformation. This includes having medical doctors on the premises as well as alternative therapists."

Some of the most popular health retreats on Spa Travel's books are in Asia, among them is Chiva-Som in Hua Hin, the Kamalaya in Koh Samui, the Six Senses Sanctuary, Phuket, all in Thailand, Como Shambhala in Bali and the

Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat in Malaysia. Guests can expect to pay from \$2500 for five days up to \$20,000 depending on the length of stay and program chosen, says Goudge. She recommends a seven-day stay to get the maximum benefit.

The Kamalaya retreat on the southern coast of Thailand has won many international awards. Located in the midst of a lush, tropical landscape the resort encircles an old cave, once used by Buddhist monks as a place for meditation and spiritual retreat.

The focus is on wellbeing, as well as the integration of healing practices from the East and West. Executives can choose from a number of wellbeing programs designed to counteract stress and prevent burnout.

Eighty per cent of Kamalaya's guests book a wellness program or a retreat, the remaining come to rest and relax. The centre's therapists include practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, naturopaths, homeopaths, nutritionists, emotional and spiritual healers, a medical doctor, nurses, fitness specialists and teachers of yoga and meditation.

Closer to home is the Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat in the hinterland of Queensland's Gold Coast, with its ocean and valley views. The top reason people go to the retreat is to treat stress and sleep and eating disorders, says the resort's manager, Sharon Kolkka.

"People are working harder and faster," she says. "Technology has had a huge impact on our lives and our body. We are expected to keep abreast of everything without any down time. First thing in the morning, people warm up with coffee and then cool down with alcohol at night. It's no wonder insomnia is a huge issue for people."

Kolkka describes Gwinganna as a next generation health retreat that caters for busy people from all walks of life. The wellbeing programs are said to be based on science and backed by the latest research.

"Essentially, people come here to get away from deadlines and timelines and responsibilities and expectation," Kolkka says. "The only thing they can think of is what type of massage they want."

"If you view your body as a business, then this is the most important business you're in. We provide the space and the information for our guests to objectively analyse the state their body is in."

The retreat grew strong though the GFC.

"We were their rescue escape," she says. "More and more people are realising they need support and help through the trials and tribulations of business. High-end business executives and CEOs regularly come here to de-stress. We have a specific men's program designed for men run by men." **BRW**