

DIY RUNNING RETREAT

You don't need to spend beaucoup bucks to participate in a running retreat—you can build your own! Here's how. // BY AMANDA McCracken

People have been retreating for as long as people have been working. From military boot camp to Girl Scout camp and Buddhist meditation retreats in the Himalayas to the Islamic hajj to Mecca, retreats come in many forms, offering a chance to escape our normal routines and environments and observe what we've been too busy to notice. They're an opportunity to connect with others and reconnect with ourselves.

Running itself is a form of retreat. We run to explore, to get away, to escape a feeling of stasis in our bodies and reconnect with sensations we've numbed. Running retreats are everywhere now, but why shell out a couple thousand dollars when you can plan your own empowering trip—and make it exactly what you want?

Invite and exchange

Instead of paying a couple of strangers to teach you how to cook a power quinoa dish or stretch your psoas or meditate on climbing that hill, take a moment and think of the best team of experts you already know—your friends! Do you know someone who's a pro at massage, coaching, counseling, art, cooking, writing, yoga, strength training, photography, social media, meditation, sailing, swimming or finance? Ask each invited friend to take responsibility for sharing their knowledge and teaching the group during the retreat. There's a wealth of talent in our own communities that we often overlook.

Blend and bond

Integrating ceremony into your retreat can help settle nerves and set the groundwork to help those participating

to develop bonds. Brie Doyle, owner of She Glows Retreats, recommends opening and closing a retreat with a ceremonial circle. It can be something as simple as having each participant respond to the following prompt: *I come with the intention to _____.* And ending the retreat with: *I celebrate/have learned _____.*

By sharing responses, friends can find common ground. "Speaking our intentions aloud allows vulnerability, which ultimately leads to connection," Doyle says.

Set both individual and group goals for the week, and be sure to take into consideration varying ability levels. Goals may be set around mileage, nutrition, journaling, self-talk or recovery. More serious runners can consider running a pre- and post-retreat mile or hill time trial to measure

improvement and build accountability.

Be careful not to pack your itinerary too tightly. "Too much activity takes away from this sacred chance to reconnect with ourselves, the very purpose of the retreat," Doyle warns. Don't forget to schedule alone time, or "negative space." "Negative space in a picture makes the main image stand out more brightly," Doyle says. "Retreating is the negative space for our lives—the bright pictures—back home. Only when we step away from our day-to-day routine can we regain perspective on our lives from a bird's-eye view."

Location, location, location

Choose your own adventure as you build your retreat; it could take place along mountain trails in the Marin Headlands, Panama City Beach's impossibly white sand or built around a goal race, like the Chicago Marathon. Maybe you decide to build your entire retreat along a 50-mile route with the help of a Sherpa driver and multiple Airbnb bookings. Contact local running stores to get ideas on trails and paths for running, or consult Strava Local for routes around the world.

Tick-tock

If you really need to get out of Dodge for a weeklong retreat, start planning at least three months in advance. But maybe you just need a one-day getaway to recharge.

Sometimes scheduling a monthly three-hour adventure with a few friends can be just what you need to stay afloat. Consider making it a routine and rotate decision-maker duties on a monthly basis. The person in charge decides which trail to explore, how far to run and a non-running goal (e.g., identifying three wildflowers along the route).

Swag bags

Ask each person to bring one small item (set a price limit) to contribute to the swag bags: handmade jewelry, SPF chapstick, fun socks, homemade granola bars, electrolyte tablets or post-run pocket cocktail packets are especially popular among runners when found inside swag bags.

Close to home

Sometimes a retreat means pulling back and appreciating what we already have. In Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy says, "If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with." Have you explored your backyard lately, or asked your neighbors to share their talents? Invest in each other by sharing your unique skills and wisdom. You might not have to go as far as you'd think to get the space you need from the demands of your daily life. ☺