

POWER TRIP

With women searching for something more fulfilling in their precious free time, healthy retreats have become the new go-to destinations for girlie weekend breaks.

By *Jessica O'Sullivan*



It began 15 years ago when Carrie Bradshaw set the #GirlSquad bar high (or low, depending on your viewpoint). Legions of women decided that only a lifestyle worthy of an episode of *Sex and the City* would suffice. For the purposes of the storyline each SATC character was a successful career woman in her own right, but never did we catch a glimpse of them doing a 14-hour day at the office followed by a microwave dinner: Far too unglamorous for prime time TV. Fast-forward a few (recession) years later and your average woman is exhausted. And not the kind of exhausted that a good night's sleep will fix, or even a weekend of shopping. This feeling of exhaustion goes a lot deeper, whereby even 'brunch with the girls' seems like it might require super-human energy.

Susie Pearl, author of *Instructions for Happiness and Success*, is a mindfulness guru and one of the experts that teaches at Ibiza Retreats (Ibizaretreats.com), a company which offers luxury detox and health breaks that include yoga and mindfulness. She says that many of the women she works with are typical of how most women today are feeling – a little bit grey, a little bit lost, and with a hole that material things will not fill, mostly as a result of the 'dig-in' work attitude so many had to adopt during the economic

downturn, as well as the fact that women today feel overwhelmed by the pressure to 'have it all'. "We now have access to powerful jobs, there's pressure to look good, eat well, wear beautiful ethically-sourced clothes, take time for others, time for ourselves, create busy social diaries, take an active role in our children's school life, and take care of our minds, bodies and exercise. It's easy to feel overwhelmed when trying to excel at living the dream," explains Pearl. Because of this many women have found that their work/life balance is skewed, with little time for the pursuits that make them happy, or for taking care of themselves, possibly working an unfulfilling job. Not only this but time spent with loved ones is of poor quality because of a lack of energy and a feeling of unhappiness. "Feeling stuck in a job takes away freedom within and low energy decreases our chances of making good decisions or taking new steps in life. Many people can say what they don't want but can't really answer the question of what do they want in specific terms."

It's for this reason that women of all ages are turning to retreats that offer the chance to stop, rest and reassess. "People are in search of a mental break," says Larah Davis, founder of Ibiza Retreats. "The speed of our internet-driven lives means we can be switched on 24/7. Because of this people want to come to a

place that is free from external pressures and which allows them to unplug from the mainframe." Two days pounding the pavements laden down with shopping bags followed by elbowing your way to the bar to order cocktails at a trendy joint is no longer how time-poor women want to spend quality time together.

Eva Buckley, 36, a busy marketing executive said that she knew it was time to try something different when she and her best friend would schedule catch-up phone calls days in advance and still miss them because of working late or simply being too fatigued to even make conversation. "Not only that but when we did eventually meet up we'd spend the entire time complaining about being stressed or on our phones. It was like we couldn't switch our brains off from the negativity of our work lives." With this in

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mind Eva booked a stay at a spa in Epic Sana Spa in the Algarve (Healingholidays.co.uk). "We wanted to go on a holiday, so we chose a package which included some pampering, meditation, plenty of outdoor exercise in the sunshine – both in the countryside and on the beach – but we could still have a glass of wine by the pool in the evenings if we wanted to. We really connected again and had the best chats we'd had for years."

Strict detox holidays are also gaining in popularity, especially amongst those who find it hard to follow a health program while stuck in the routine of everyday work and home life. Juicing expert and author of *Slim for Life*, Jason Vale, saw that many of his followers wanted somewhere they could concentrate fully on their detox away from normal life. "Following a detox plan, while trying to work, take care of a family or live your everyday life can be tough which is why I set up Juicy Oasis Boutique Retreat & Spa (Juicyoasis.com) in Portugal. This way visitors are able to concentrate ▶

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fully on their wellness without distraction or temptation.” While there are only 19 rooms in the retreat, Vale says he gets a lot of like-minded friends who attend together. “I’ve had visitors who like to holiday every year together for a few days in the sun, but when they get home they fall back into bad routines. Here you find that it’s a very supportive environment and each client leaves with a realistic programme, so that they can become increasingly self-sufficient at home.”

With inexpensive flights in abundance, it’s very easy to hop on a plane for rest and relaxation, not to mention some much-needed Vitamin D. However, Irish spas and hotels are now catering to the growing demand for breaks that offer a more holistic approach to ‘getting away’. Monart Destination Spa (Monart.ie) has been leading the way in this regard for a number of years and has continued to up its game. “We’ve always adopted policies that have allowed our guests to switch off when they walk through our doors. Newspapers are only available in one area of the hotel and Wi-Fi is restricted to our Library and Conservatory in the Palladian Manor House, while mobiles are discouraged in the spa area,” says General Manager for Monart, Mark Browne. This year, Monart has introduced the Monart Life five-day programme (from €1,095 per person) which allows guests to work on their nutrition and fitness levels with experts and overall wellbeing, with targeted cleansing and detoxifying treatments. “Sometimes, two days just isn’t enough to really switch off or get your health regimen back on track,” says Amy Beamish, Spa Manager at Monart. “The purpose of a five-day journey is that we are on hand to help get you through the tough part. When the body has started to eliminate the toxins, it can be hit with tiredness and headaches, so what better way to get through this than with a spa treatment. When we have groups of women they often spend their time



relaxing, doing yoga or just reading alone but we can schedule meals or even personal training together so you really get the best of both worlds – switching off without being unsociable.”

Often, a weekend away puts a lot of pressure on friends to expend huge amounts of energy partying, talking and not always in a positive way. “People can feel under pressure to have a good time and maybe party harder than they’re able for, meaning that you come back from these ‘breaks’ more drained,” explains Pearl. “This type of activity tends to only take, whereas a break, which allows you to rest, to think

and to put yourself and your health, both mental and physical, first gives back. When away with friends, try to stay strong and set your boundaries clear, so that you can have fun without feeling exhausted at the end of it. Gossip and bad talk is the biggest energy drain. Keep the chat upbeat, bright and positive with plenty of laughter. When we feel calmer, happier and more centred, we are more able to think clearly, make positive moves for change and see how we can take on new projects. To love what you do every day is the ultimate success and leads to a greater feeling of happiness.” ■