



# inspiring getaways

Taking time out from our daily lives is crucial for maintaining wellbeing. **Clare Wener** steps into a yoga retreat which nourishes mind, body and soul.



**N**ot so long ago I found myself sitting crossed-legged on a wooden floor. My eyes were closed and swirling around me were the beautiful tones of a harmonium and the energy of people chanting Sanskrit mantras. As I joined in with the 'om namah sivayas', I felt an enormous sense of connectedness with the space and those around me, and most of all with myself. My heart felt truly open.

But where was I? I was on a yoga retreat at the Earthspirit centre in Somerset with Lila Conway and Dory Walker. I first met Lila a few years ago in the Himalayas when we spent a month living in an ashram on the banks of the Ganges and she trained a group of us to teach yoga. But sitting in that room in Somerset, with her playing the harmonium and Dory playing the tabla, I could have been in the Himalayas. The 'bhakti' or devotion was the same.

And that's what I like about their retreats. You get much more than a few yoga classes and you leave feeling rejuvenated on a deep level. There are normally a few giggles thrown in too, which in my book, always goes down well.

We had two yoga classes a day – one in the morning and another late afternoon – and plenty of time in between to spend in the hot tub and sauna, exploring the surrounding countryside, and eating fabulous veggie feasts. One bloke even found the time to run the five miles to and from Glastonbury. Lila and Dory also ran workshops covering aspects of yoga beyond the physical and I've described the 'kirtan' or chanting workshop above.

On this particular retreat, they also brought along their talented friends. We had Liz, a massage and movement therapist and we tried our hand at five rhythms and expressive movement. I felt self-conscious at the start as I was instructed to "discover new ways of walking" and "let my knees interact with another set of knees in the room" but I soon banished my ego and got into it. We also had Nick the Astrologer give us his predictions for the future as we

sat around the dinner table one evening. He was available for private readings for those wanting a taste of what was to come in their astrological charts.

Lila and Dory have both spent time living in ashrams in India and Canada and you know that you're being taught by people who live and breathe yoga. They understand the teachings and their breadth of experience shows. The yoga classes were wonderful. Students were at different levels and we were taken through the basic postures and breathing exercises. As the three days progressed, they introduced variations so that those with a more advanced practice were challenged, whilst those with aching bodies were also catered for. In one class, we had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with some very imaginative 'trikonasana' or triangle variations, taking us as far as we were comfortable. Our final relaxation was particularly well-received after that.

I enjoyed getting to meet so many new and interesting people from different walks of life. Good chats were to be had in the hot tub whilst it was also possible to find a quiet corner and read a book. I shared a room with a lovely lady called Theresa and we've kept in touch. She's even been to a few of my yoga classes in London.

After our final dinner, we lit paper lanterns around a bonfire and watched as our positive intentions silently disappeared up into a starry sky.

For details of their upcoming Braziers Park Yoga Retreat in Chiltern Hills, Rural Oxfordshire (7th – 9th September), visit [www.yogaprema.org](http://www.yogaprema.org). Lila is also planning a pilgrimage retreat in India early next year. To keep informed, do sign up to her e-newsletter or like her Yoga Prema Facebook page.

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