

TREAT YOUR SPIRIT

Four soul-searching retreats designed with recovery in mind BY SARAH GOLD



When Laura Burges, a devout practitioner and teacher of Buddhist meditation, explains to a beginner the basic precepts of Buddhism, she reveals a fascinating bit of information.

“According to Buddha, the root of all human suffering is something called *tanha*. It’s a Sanskrit word that’s usually interpreted as craving,” says Burges. “But the literal translation for it is actually thirst.”

To Burges, who leads meditation retreats specifically geared toward people in recovery, this symmetry between the language of existential struggle and the language of addiction makes perfect sense. People gravitate toward spiritual practice, she says, for the same reasons they gravitate toward drinking and drugs.

“They feel restless, irritable and discontent,” Burges says, “like there’s something missing, a hole in their lives that needs to be filled.”

The pursuit of a spiritual discipline, such as meditation or yoga, isn’t in itself a cure for addiction, Burges says. But what thousands—perhaps even millions—of people are discovering is that spiritual seeking can be an “organic next step” in the recovery process.

“Once someone has found a certain level of clarity and stability by working through a recovery program, once they’ve cleaned house, then they’re ready to start living honestly, to start living with integrity,” Burges says.

Though Buddhist meditation is the path by which Burges encourages her students toward that place of integrity, there are many others. In fact the number of spiritual workshops and retreats specially created for those in recovery (sometimes in tandem with traditional Twelve Step programs) is higher now than ever before.

“Retreats are a great way to reinforce the decision to live soberly and mindfully,” says Kevin Griffin, a Buddhist teacher and author who leads recovery-themed retreats all over the country. “Addiction can disguise what’s really a hunger for deep spiritual connection, and we find that connection when we come together to heal.”

Here’s a sampling of recovery-minded spiritual retreats to try. Please note that all programs on the list serve only vegetarian meals and require enrollees to be at least three months sober.

Photos: Chopra Center for Well-Being

The Chopra Center for Wellbeing is located in Carlsbad, Calif. Chopra's methodology is based on Ayurveda, a holistic healing philosophy from India.

Opposite: Participants at a workshop at The Chopra Center. Participants should come prepared to do some heavy-duty panchakarma, otherwise known as whole-self cleansing.



Perfect Health

**The Chopra Center
for Wellbeing**
Carlsbad, Calif.

The home base for renowned author and spiritual teacher Deepak Chopra shares its beachside setting with La Costa Resort & Spa—a serene compound of Spanish-tiled buildings, tall shade palms and bougainvillea-filled gardens south of Los Angeles. Chopra’s methodology is based on Ayurveda, a 5,000-year-old holistic healing philosophy from India, and his signature retreat program, Perfect Health, incorporates Ayurvedic principles in order to detoxify what instructor Tiffany Murray calls “the entire person—mind, body and spirit.” The program, which lasts six or 10 days, is a “wonderful starting point for people seeking a new kind of balance” in their lives, Murray says. But though mind-body beginners are welcome, Perfect Health participants should come prepared to do some heavy-duty panchakarma, otherwise known as whole-self cleansing. The program includes daily meditation and yoga classes, seminars, massages and one-on-one consultations with Ayurvedic practitioners. But it also involves consuming a limited, very simple vegetarian diet and having regular bastis (warm-water enemas) to help flush toxins from the body.

Six-day program fee: \$2,875, not including accommodations. (Participants are given special room rates at La Costa Resort & Spa; standard doubles start at \$169.) *For more information, contact The Chopra Center: (888) 736-6895; chopra.com.*

Yoga of Recovery

Sivananda Ashram Yoga Retreat
Paradise Island, Bahamas

Although Yoga of Recovery retreats (which integrate the fundamentals of yoga with those of Twelve Step programs) are offered at Sivananda yoga centers all over the U.S., this tropical island ashram is easily its most popular location. Here, where the simple wooden bungalows and wide yoga decks overlook a sweep of sugary white Carib-



bean beach, Yoga of Recovery founder Durga Leela leads participants through a series of daily activities and seminars designed to work in tandem with the Twelve Steps. Among the offerings are instruction in yogic asanas (postures) and pranayama (breathing techniques); workshops in relaxation, meditation and positive thinking; and open Twelve Step meetings where all guests (regardless of what sort of recovery program they’ve come through) are welcome. The retreats, Leela says, are non-denominational. “They’re for anyone who seeks to reclaim their own health and healing and to become empowered in their daily life choices.”

Nine-day program tuition: \$450, not including accommodations. (Room rates start at \$64 for a shared dormitory and go up to \$120 for a private double room with its own bath). *For more information, contact the Sivananda Ashram: (866) 446-5934 or (242) 363-2902; sivanandabahamas.org.*



Clockwise from top left: Yoga of Recovery retreats are offered at Sivandra yoga centers all over the U.S., but the tropic island ashram in Paradise Island, Bahamas is its most popular location; Participants at the ashram are led through a series of daily activities and seminars designed to work in tandem with the Twelve Steps; Buddhism and the Twelve Steps workshop provides a beginner-friendly blend of meditation and discussion; The Circle of Recovery for Women workshop is located in Jamesburg, Calif., and is the first Zen monastery outside of Japan.



Circle of Recovery for Women

**Tassajara Zen Mountain Center
Jamesburg, Calif.**

Established in the 1960s as the first Zen monastery outside of Japan, the remote mountain sanctuary of Tassajara (it's set in northern California's Ventana Wilderness and accessible only by a 14-mile dirt road) is still a monastic training center for half of each year. In spring and summer, though, the settlement hosts short-term programs for guests interested in all aspects of Buddhist study, including A Circle of Recovery for Women. Zen lay instructor Laura Burges specially created the workshop because, she says, "something powerful—even primal—happens when women come together to help heal one another." The program provides daily seated meditation and mindful movement sessions as well as dharma talks (discussions about Buddhist precepts), free time for hiking and relaxing in the property's hot springs and daily Twelve Step meetings. (For men in recovery, Tassajara also offers open four-day study weeks, which provide a similar lineup of seminars and meetings.)



Four-day Circle of Recovery for Women program tuition: \$240, not including accommodations. (Room rates start at \$95 for a shared dormitory and go up to \$330 for a private suite with its own bath. Accommodations at Tassajara do not have electricity.) *For more information, contact Tassajara: (831) 659-2229 or (415) 865-1895; sfzc.org/tassajara.*

Buddhism and the Twelve Steps

**Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health
Stockbridge, Mass.**

Buddhist author and teacher Kevin Griffin leads recovery-minded retreats at spiritual centers all over the U.S. including this monastery-turned-yoga center perched high above a glittering lake in Massachusetts' Berkshire Mountains. Griffin sees his most popular workshop, Buddhism and the Twelve Steps, as a gateway for people who have been curious about segueing from recovery into spiritual practice but who may have been put off by the dogmatic approach of traditional Twelve Step programs. "I've always felt that meditation and mindfulness should be made accessible, right from the beginning, no matter what they do and don't believe in," he says. To that effect, the workshop provides a beginner-friendly blend of meditation, Buddhist instruction and discussion about how the principles of Buddhism and Twelve Step programs can complement each other. Yoga and other movement classes are also offered.

Four-day program tuition: \$240, not including accommodations. (Room rates start at \$84 for a shared dormitory and go up to \$296 for a private lake-view room with its own bath.) *For more information, contact Kripalu Center: (866) 200-5203 or (413) 448-3152; kripalu.org. ■*

Sarah Gold writes about travel, food, art and spiritual pursuits for Renew and many other publications.