A WHOLE LIFE COACHING GUIDE

How to get ready for a retreat

So you don't do what I did.

I've been doing these kinds of retreats for about 15 years, and I can still totally stuff one. Retreating is a slower pace. It's a desire to connect in with the deepest part of yourself, and that cannot be done in a hurry. Here's what I'd tell myself next time.

> *If you're going 100 kilometres an hour, you can't brake at the last minute.*

1 In the weeks before *Start slowing down early.*

- [ ] **Try not to book it for the end of a big rush.** Sometimes that's unavoidable.
- [ ] **Give yourself permission.** Guilt can stop you booking at all. Decide now that this time is worth taking. Write a note to remind yourself why you're doing this - keep it handy.
- [ ] **Plan for whoever relies on you:** young children, teenagers, ageing parents. For young children, start about six weeks out, depending on your circumstances.
- [ ] **Do mini moments of mindfulness or prayer in the lead-up.** Don't go to a multi-hour hour retreat with no lead-in.
- [ ] **Choose your place.** Somewhere near nature and, if you can, somewhere with low/no internet or phone reception.

2 In the days before

- [ ] **Set an intention.** What is drawing you to this retreat? What are you hoping find? Is there a question you're asking?
- [ ] **Hand over, don't just switch off.** Tell one person whats happening with all the important things, so the phone can truly stay off.
- [ ] **If a busy lead-up is unavoidable,** leave yourself time inside the retreat to slow down. The first night might just be a bath and a good sleep.
- [ ] **Plan your food.** Bring something easy, or take yourself out for a meal.

3 How to arrive *Have a ritual. This is how I arrive.*

- [ ] **Arrive in the light.** It's a lot less spooky than arriving in the dark.
- [ ] **Text the family:** I'm safe, I'm okay. Then turn the phone off.
- [ ] **Worried about emergencies?** Set it so only your emergency people can call through.
- [ ] **Light a candle and read something** you know will help you get into the mode of mindful prayerfulness.
- [ ] **Sit down to your meal,** set up well, with a view, even it's just the candle. No scrolling.

4 What to pack *It seems simple, but it matters.*

- [ ] **Walking shoes** you're happy to go a really long way in.
- [ ] **A candle,** and the reading that helps you arrive.
- [ ] **A journal,** and the prompts on page 5.
- [ ] **A light backpack and a water bottle,** so your hands are free.
- [ ] **Books** that slow you down and lead you back to who you are.
- [ ] **Your food,** prepared ahead.

Leave at home: the laptop, the inbox and the TV. But you do you.

5 While you're there

- [ ] **Get outside.** It is very hard to connect with who we truly are indoors and away from natural sound.
- [ ] **Let yourself sleep.** Sunrise is beautiful, but letting your body wake naturally is a big part of a good retreat.
- [ ] **Go somewhere your body knows.** A place you return to becomes its own ritual. Here we are. We're in this place. This is where we connect deeply and spiritually.

A loose shape for the day, if you'd like one:

Morning
Get outside. A big walk, or a sit with a view.

Afternoon
Rest. Read, nap, let your body lead.

Evening
Reflect. Journal, breath prayer, early night.

6 For when you "fail"

You might struggle with guilt. You might not be able to switch your brain off. Plan now for how you'll speak to yourself when that happens.

- [ ] **It happens.** I ate dinner on a spiritual retreat whilst scrolling Facebook.
- [ ] **Your mind will wander and that's ok.** Be gentle with yourself as you return.

What I'll say to myself:

7 If the budget is tight

Overnight is awesome, but it's not the only way.

- [ ] **House sit for a friend** who's away for the weekend. Somewhere different, where you can't see the jobs that need doing.
- [ ] **Drive half an hour** to the countryside or the beach. Go for a big walk, or sit down with a view.
- [ ] **Birdsong and the sound of the ocean are free.** Sitting in the car with the windows down counts.

8 If a night away on your own isn't for you

A lot of women wouldn't find sleeping somewhere on their own pleasant at all. So find something that feels safe.

- [ ] **Stay in a familiar home** locally.
- [ ] **Make it one good quality day.** Out at the crack of dawn, back late at night. A full, solid day on your own.

9 Coming home

Before you leave, take a few minutes with these.

- [ ] **What insights did you discover** about yourself during silence and solitude?
- [ ] **How would you like to incorporate** the practice of silence and solitude in your everyday life? What support do you need?
- [ ] **Book the next one** before you drive home.

Connecting in with the deepest part of yourself cannot be done in a hurry.

Prompts to take with you

Just select what you are drawn to, or just be.

A breath prayer

Take long, slow breaths and choose a mantra or prayer of six to eight syllables that fits into one inhale and exhale. Ask, “What do I want, what will make me feel whole?”

“Help me rest; give me peace” “Out of darkness, into light” “Help me see; a new way”

In nature

Find a place to rest. Slowly look around you for something nearby: a leaf fluttering, a crawling insect, a solid trunk, a bird. Observe closely. Explore its shape, texture, colour, smell.

What insight or inspiration might it offer you today?

Self-reflection

- What am I most grateful for in my life right now?
- What do I love most about myself?
- What am I rushing past or overlooking in my daily routines, and why?
- If I could create a moment of rest or refreshment today, what would it look like?

Healing

- What is not mine to carry anymore?
- What habitual thought or belief no longer serves me as I live out my life?
- Who or what do I need to forgive, to lighten my pace and heart?

Personal growth

- How do I want to show up in the world?
- What's the small action I've been putting off that would bring relief?
- Where am I spending too much time that is draining me?