



Surfing on serenity at Seminyak

Lying on a foam surfboard the size of a dining table, I'm contemplating Kuta Beach, Bali, across the water in front of me. The question is, how am I going to get to shore with any dignity or grace? This is my first time on a surfboard for many years, and I'm starting to feel a bit nervous. But my personal instructor, Made, is encouraging. As small waves lap over, he waits to launch me onto a bigger one. When one comes he yells, "Now! Jump!" I do, and immediately plunge into the water. Third time lucky and I'm actually standing, for a split second, to the cheers of my fellow learners.

I'm one of five booked into a surfing and yoga retreat exclusively for women at Escape Haven retreat in Seminyak, on the west coast of the Indonesian holiday island. Owner Janine Hall settled in Bali after a high-flying career in fashion marketing, and wants to spread the word about de-stressing and empowerment. She has also recently opened a sister retreat

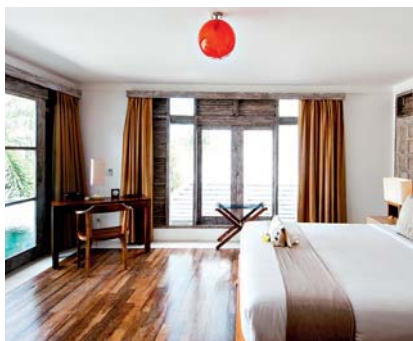
program at the Byron at Byron Resort in Byron Bay, northern NSW.

With yoga also a focus, on day two of the seven-day program I opt to forsake surfing for the slower pleasures of stretching and spa treatments. The retreat consists of six luxurious double rooms, decked out with Javanese antiques, whitewashed walls and stone-lined bathrooms. Air-conditioning is a bonus to escape the intensity of the tropical heat, although there is usually a seabreeze wafting around the central courtyard and lagoon pool (*above*), fringed with frangipani trees and laden with orchids.

A lounge and dining area occupies an open pavilion overlooking the pool and courtyard, and here the chef serves healthy, delicious meals. Wine is not verboten – it's not that kind of retreat – but on a couple of evenings we are transported to local beachside bars and restaurants, including the hip Potato Head Beach Club and elegant La Lucciola.

Trips with private drivers to the boutiques of Seminyak are tailored to guests' tastes and preferences, and a Balinese cooking class and a healing session with the local village medicine woman are also options. Doing nothing at all is fine, too.

Some of the profits from the retreat go to Hall's newly established charity, Creating Futures, which supports local orphanage schools in their English education – with a little bit of yoga and surfing thrown in, of course. **MARGIE FRASER**



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