

4 Reasons to Go to a Pilates Retreat

Master Instructor Jamie Isaac goes even deeper and explores four big reasons to attend a Pilates retreat in 2018.

Last month, we looked at questions you should ask [when you consider hosting or attending a Pilates retreat](#). I promised to go a little deeper, so let's dive into Pilates retreats, and discover what to expect, for both the teachers and the practitioners alike.

1. Personal Practice

From a pure self-practice perspective, this is a very strong reason. We all love our own Pilates sessions. There's something settling, mindful and almost meditative about flowing through the classical work. The endorphin release and uplifting feeling of being challenged by a teacher can bring a Pilates buzz that lasts all day.

However (and I hate to be a buzzkill), it is so hard to focus exclusively on your Pilates. Daily life has the incredible ability to sneak into our thoughts and joining us on our reformer carriage. Shopping lists, deadlines, fatigue, appointments and bills all force us away from our practice and step between us and the ever out of reach principle of flow.



Now, on a retreat, all of those thoughts, stresses and obligations of daily life begin to fade. This kind of space for practice can give a clarity and focus that will bring you to your Pilates and into your body like never before. And following each class, you'll be free to relax and allow the body to reintegrate and maybe even take in a little Vitamin D-fueled sunshine too. Recharging your muscles and maybe even indulging in some massage therapies will all bring your body to an optimum level to respond to this new and intensive physical challenges. And on a well-crafted retreat program, you'll be amazed at how far you can take your practice even in a short period of time.

In exactly the same way, leading a retreat has the same potential to deepen our practice as teachers. With no outside distractions from life to take focus away from students and sessions, retreats provide the perfect opportunity to explore the method. Alongside your standard class offerings, you now have a captive audience eager to learn and grow, so it's a

great space to throw in workshops, or themed sessions that reveal another side to your teaching skill set.

2. Pure Immersion

We've all seen those t-shirts that say "Eat, Pilates, Sleep, Repeat." Well, a retreat is the chance to put those words into action. Yes, it's okay to just take part and experience the classes, but how much better to take the chance and go all in. Eat healthy with food that will fuel the core, practice with all you have, ask questions, experiment, explore, and then head to bed feeling that wonderful physical exhaustion that Joe Pilates talks about in Return to Life. Don't just dream about performing your best Teaser or finally releasing that tight spot in your back; make it a reality!

From a more technical perspective, this massed-vs.-distributed practice where rapid progress can be discovered. This is how we work when skill coaching in other sporting realms. So how wonderful is it to spend a long weekend or week living like a professional athlete?! You can focus on that one aspect of your practice you've been struggling with, or even rehab an ongoing area of pain.

As a teacher, this is one of my favorite aspects of leading a retreat; the progress that your students can make in such a short amount of time is amazing. Think outside of the box and focus an entire week on achieving a common goal, or discovering a concept or principle. I've had weeks where the main focus of breath has been the thread throughout every session, or others where something as simple as learning the classical order has been the focus to develop students' practice and confidence.

3. Discover a Different Pilates Perspective



Perhaps this retreat is the chance to discover new things about the method, maybe even life. This retreat may reveal a new take on an old exercise or allow us to experience it in a completely new way. It doesn't have to be

profound; maybe it's as simple as giving contemporary or classical Pilates a try, or something as fun and adventurous as experiencing stand-up paddleboard Pilates for the first time.

As a teacher, some of my most memorable sessions have been adventuring out with my groups amongst the dramatic backdrops of white-sand beaches or mountainous vistas. But be warned, this doesn't always go as planned. High tides can strip beaches away, sunshine has been known to produce sunburn, and mosquitoes find Pilates people rather tasty. In one of my most memorable cases, I took a group for an outdoor class in a natural park filled with sand dunes—stunning, beautiful and memorable. However, I hadn't realized that it was also a favored spot for naked elderly sunbathers. I'll leave the details there, but some Pilates exercises will never be quite the same for me again!

4. Community

Pilates is, by nature, a solo pursuit. Even in the middle of a busy group class, our focus is internal, personal and all about us. This is where retreats go deeper. Although you may be focusing on your own practice, you'll be sharing this unique and wonderful experience with other Pilates-minded people who, in my experience, become lifelong friends. Beyond connecting with your body, you'll have the chance to connect

with the entire Pilates community, as well as learn and grow with others. This translates to feeling supported and empowered and has the potential to keep us motivated long beyond the return home from the retreat itself. Many of my groups on a Pilates retreat come together on WhatsApp and continue to share their Pilates journey, even though they may even live in different countries.

When I hear how Joseph Pilates saw his method as a way of making people feel better about themselves and maybe even bringing peace to the world, I think he'd of loved to see how much his method has been embraced by so many across the globe. Retreats can play a huge part in this sharing, supporting and growing community.

What to Expect:

Hopefully, my top 4 reasons why to retreat have convinced you that it could be an adventure worth embarking on, but now we're going what should we expect? Well, once again, there could be infinite answers to this question too. However, there are a couple of points that I find to be consistent across most retreat experiences.

Expect to Practice and Expect to Teach:

This sounds obvious, but it's easy to be surprised by how much practice can take a physical and emotional toll on our bodies. If we consider a general week of Pilates back home, for many, three full sessions a week will be a good optimistic goal, so consider how we'll be feeling when we're achieving this in only one or two days.

For retreat teachers, be aware of this and plan your schedule accordingly. Make space for rest days and less intense sessions. I like to throw a few Q&A discussion sessions in the mix too in order to create a learning environment where movement is optional. Likewise as a teacher, expect to teach!

Another obvious point is that, when the atmosphere is full of sun and fun, it's easy to overlook that you are here to work. Give yourself space to recharge and focus before classes to be at your most awesome. Keep in mind that many of the students will still be coming to your classes when you get back home, so keeping a professional attitude is vital. Turning up late for class with sand between your toes or struggling the next morning after one sangria too many are not considered the best ways to show your students that you care.

An Emotional Release:

Emotions are also known to sometimes sneak into our suitcases. I've seen this many times. Back home, day-to-day living often doesn't allow us time to reflect or tune into our minds and bodies in the way that the relaxation, space and energy of a retreat can.

Intensive physical movement combined with these has the potential to free up some emotional blockages or allow us the safe and secure space to confront choices or unresolved issues.

So don't feel concerned or anxious if you experience some emotional release. This is actually often part of the incredible and positive change that retreats can initiate. It may be hard, but if possible try and embrace it, maybe chat with a friend or write a journal throughout your retreat.

Finally, with all of these emotions arising, expect to fall in love...with Pilates of course! This could be the perfect time to reconnect with your body and who knows, maybe even fall in love with yourself as well. Unlike other holiday romances that are often best left at the departures desk, this is a love affair with an incredible, healthy, mindful and inspiring method that may just turn out to be the one.

So have fun, jump on in and retreat yourself to the next step on your Pilates journey!

This article was contributed by Jamie Isaac, Peak Pilates Master Instructor and founder of Azulfit & Fluid Art Pilates Studio in Vista, California. You can read more about his Pilates journey [here](#).