

# Autumn Retreats



## Creative getaways

Turn loose the author, painter or thin person inside you on these retreats

### Cook up a storm

Autumn is a time to take stock, a time to get cosy, do some navel-gazing or inner contemplation, or maybe attempt to realise that long-held creative dream or learn a new skill.

You only have to turn on the TV to see that cookery is more popular than ever right now, and if you fancy yourself as a budding *MasterChef*-in-training, it's time you got serious about the craft – and what better way to do it than on a relaxing holiday? George's Boutique B&B and Culinary Retreat ([www.georgesonarthurs.com.au](http://www.georgesonarthurs.com.au) or (03) 5981 8700) is a uniquely Aussie version of those live-in gourmet cooking schools that have become so popular overseas. Set in a beautiful building perched on Arthur's Seat overlooking Port Phillip Bay and in the middle of the prestigious Mornington Peninsula wine region, George's is heaven for foodies. It holds a two-day (\$1100) or three-day (\$1300) culinary retreat with executive chef Duncan White-Robertson, including all meals and drinks – with maybe a swim, a sail or a spa treatment thrown in.

### A novel concept

It can be difficult being a writer, especially in a city with so many shiny distractions, noise and bustle. If you're

a scribe with noisy neighbours or just need a place where you can clear your head, immerse yourself and pump out that magnum opus, a writer's retreat might be the best way to turn over a new leaf. Varuna, the Writers' House, is a Katoomba heritage-listed mansion built by Australian writer Eleanor Dark and her husband, Dr Eric Dark, in the late 1930s. It can accommodate five writers and is chilled-out with an open fire in the living room and plenty

**FOODIE HEAVEN:** Learn the art of gourmet cooking at George's Boutique B&B and Culinary Retreat in the Mornington Peninsula.

of charm. There are writing nooks and crannies aplenty and the garden studio contains Dark's own writing desk. It depends on writers respecting each other, so it's individuals only. There is an extensive library, a reference collection and piles of eclectic fiction and non-fiction throughout the house. A week-long residency costs \$850 and runs from Monday to Monday.

Find out more at [www.varuna.com.au](http://www.varuna.com.au) or call 4782 5674.

### Picture this

Maybe your talent doesn't run to words, but rather the strokes of a brush.

Hidden away in Queensland near Childers is Woodgate Beach, home to a retreat run by Delwynne Dwyer, an award-winning Australian artist who has been painting since she could first hold a brush. Her retreat, where the rooms are decorated with modern furnishings, paintings, sculptures and mosaics, is just 30 paces to one of Queensland's most beautiful and clean beaches. Whales, dolphins, turtles and dugongs have been sighted

from the large decks and kangaroos trim the lawn every morning.

In Dwyer's studio you can learn watercolour, collage or mosaic tiling.

You don't have to cosset yourself away, though – this is the Sunshine State and there's fishing, safe swimming, beachcombing (perfect for those "found art" installations), plenty of national park walking trails and 4WD tracks. A one-bedroom unit is \$210 for a minimum of two nights, or \$450 a week.

See [www.woodgatebeach.com](http://www.woodgatebeach.com) for more info or call 0438 336 821.

### Getting hands-on

It might not be painting that's your forte – instead, it might be nimble fingers. In that case, Transformations Artists' Retreat ([www.mahlers.com.au](http://www.mahlers.com.au) or (03) 54871 438) might be what you are looking for.

Set on 32ha of tranquil and secluded farmland cut off by rivers, creeks and lagoons, it's west of Echuca, off the Murray Valley Highway. Hosts Bruce and Glenys have years of teaching

experience, working in wood and metal, patchwork and soft sculpture.

They will put you up in a charming 100-year-old mud-brick cottage with an open log fire, cathedral ceilings, leadlight windows, spiral staircase and spa. Every morning you will wake to a hearty cooked breakfast of eggs, bacon, mushrooms, tomato and hash browns or waffles.

Rooms are \$110 a night and two-hour courses in doll-making, wood-turning and more cost \$60.

If you discover you are not the dextrous, artistic type after all, you can just throw a rod in the nearby creek or wander the beautiful gardens. It is the perfect hideaway to relax and try your hand at something new.

### Fight the flab

Perhaps all you want from a retreat is not to master a new skill, just your own body. *The Biggest Loser* has seen the popularity of fat-battling retreats soar and there is no need to skimp on luxury just because you are putting in the hard yards in the gym.

The NuYu weight-loss and lifestyle program ([www.nuyutotalhealth.com.au](http://www.nuyutotalhealth.com.au) or 4577 4970) is based in 4.5-star luxury in the beautiful Hawkesbury Valley, at the foot of the Blue Mountains.

The luxurious resort has all the creature comforts of home plus a gym, hydrotherapy pool, games room and acres of manicured gardens.

There is also direct access to two golf courses and one of Sydney's finest day spas, Villa Thalgo.

At the retreat you will hit the treadmills, exercise bikes, cross-trainers, rowing machines, boxing circuits and outdoor fitness tracks to burn off the weight.

You can expect serious results from a team of health professionals. As well as two, four and six-week weight-loss retreats, they offer boot camps for fitter folk who want to get back in trim. The two-week program starts at \$1590 a person a week, twin share.



**CHARMING RETREAT:** Varuna, the Writers' House, is an ideal place to get the creative juices flowing. Picture: Bette Mifsud