

Yoga in the Burren? ‘I thought yoga retreats were for a certain kind of person... thankfully, I was wrong’

Audrey Kane went with the flow during a weekend retreat with a difference in the west of Ireland



Burren Yoga and Meditation Retreat

Audrey Kane

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THE pandemic really did a number on us. After almost two-and-a-half abnormal years of life, my shoulders now seem to permanently live up around my ears.

I am stiff, I make creaky noises when bending over and, while I would not know my Vinyasa from my Asana, I have never felt more ready to relax, stretch and embrace a wellness weekend.

That's why I've come to Burren Yoga and Meditation Retreat near Kinvara, Co Galway, for a retreat that is, thankfully, suitable for complete beginners as well as regular practitioners.

The itinerary for the weekend is filled with meditation, yoga, and gentle exercise through the wilds of the Burren, all punctuated with vegetarian food and, hopefully, naps.

Leaving our shoes and phone signal at the front door, myself and my friend Naomi are warmly greeted by yoga teacher and owner Dave Brocklebank, who has been running the retreats for over 20 years.

During the pandemic, Dave undertook a massive upgrade, and the centre is now three times bigger than its original size. He started with a vision to build a wonderfully comfortable yoga retreat in one of the most spectacular and special places on the west coast of Ireland. It's safe to say he has achieved just that.



Food at the retreat is vegetarian

Our first stop on a tour with retreat co-ordinator, the lovely Joanne, is the state-of-the-art yoga room with amazing picture-windows to take in the breathtaking panoramic views.

The en-suite accommodation is comfortable and clean. However, it is in the lounge room upstairs, with the sun streaming through large windows, that I imagine I will spend most of my time sipping herbal tea when I am not trying to touch my toes.

After settling into our room and wandering around the gardens, we meet our yoga instructor for the weekend, a very chilled-out Margarida Tree. As the rest of the weekend participants start to filter into the dinner room, she gradually introduces everyone.

I won't lie, I did have preconceived ideas that yoga retreats were for a certain 'kind' of person: toned, sipping juice and bendy like rubber bands.

Thankfully, I was wrong – they are simply normal, down-to-earth people looking for some Zen, who are curious about yoga and meditation, while others are here to deepen their practice.

There is no pressure to socialise at the Burren Yoga and Meditation Retreat, but you end up chatting a lot over the meals as the group turns out to be a fun and easy bunch to be around.



Downtime at Burren Yoga and Meditation Retreat

Vegetarian meals are freshly prepared by Siobhán and her team every day; nourishing spreads which cater to various dietary requirements. The ingredients are quality – from the freshly-baked bread, spinach pie and tofu salad to the exquisite banoffee pie. I'm a dedicated carnivore, but happily eat everything I'm served.

Our first session takes place at 9.30pm, giving us plenty of time to rest after dinner. Our teacher Margarida has a soothing aura and chats to us all individually before she begins the breathwork and Yoga Nidra (deep relaxation).

Every session is different, but tailored to the time of day so that it works in sync with your system. The morning sessions leave you energised, and evening sessions leave you ready for bed.

The schedule gives you lots of opportunities to undertake several sessions each day and a two-hour yoga class, starting with meditation at 8am followed by Vinyasa – a surprisingly effective way to wake up on Saturday morning.



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Margarida is highly skilled, encouraging, and mindful of each guest's needs. She is careful to suggest options for most poses to accommodate both the bendy and the not-so bendy.

She helps to demystify yoga and makes it interesting, enjoyable and, dare I say it – fun.

After our class, Dave leads us on a walk up to Abbey Hill (note to self, bring the suggested hiking boots, as the terrain of the Burren is quite rocky), and the view from the top is worth the climb.



Audrey and Naomi on their hike

Afterwards, we have lunch in the nearby Linnane's Lobster Bar in New Quay. The name gives away its signature dish, but the rest of its seafood offering is fresh and delicious too, plus you can also take in the fantastic views of Galway Bay while you eat.

We have plenty of time to unwind and digest back at the centre before some restorative yoga. This must be my new personal favourite as I found myself quite frequently doing what I like to call "meditating" (my friend Naomi calls it napping) – waking myself up with a snort.

Afterwards, we are all a little more mellow before dinner and more Yoga Nidra.

By Sunday morning, I'm wide awake and ready to go to meditation class at 8am without first having a cup of tea – unheard of in my world – before Vinyasa at 8.30am.

After breakfast, myself and Naomi recline in the lounge room with a cuppa, giving us enough time to unwind before our final yoga class.

As we tuck into lunch before bidding farewell to the group, we chat about our weekend and some of the things we learned and will bring back into our day-to-day life.

For starters, not checking your phone every five minutes is quite liberating and some simple yoga stretches really help to set you up for a wonderful day.

At the end of it all, I feel I can breathe a little better, stretch a little more, and almost touch my toes.

Namaste!

How to do it

Burren Yoga and Meditation Retreat runs two- and six-night retreats.

For two-night retreats, a twin en-suite bedroom (two people booking) costs €490pp, and an en-suite single costs €560pp, inclusive of accommodation, meals and sessions (except for lunch on the organised Saturday outing).

Audrey was a guest of the Retreat. Additional dates are available at *burrenyoga.com*.