

UP FOR AN ADVENTURE

Lounging on the beach just isn't going to cut it anymore. When travel resumes, discerning wanderlusts will be looking to nourish their minds, bodies, and souls. We've handpicked three transformative destination experiences that make a lasting impression

BY VICKI WILLIAMS

IMAG: Wim Hof Method, Chosen Experiences and Behold Retreats

Remove something that's taken for granted and a new behaviour is sure to ensue upon its return, with a deeper appreciation of everything and a more selective approach. In 2021, that something is travel. When it returns, travellers are sure to be applying a fresh perspective when choosing their next trip. For some, this will mean seeking boundary-pushing, self-affirming, and life-changing experiences. We spoke to the founders of three pioneering retreats on how these will make a life-long impact.

WIM HOF METHOD

Known as the Iceman, Wim Hof is founder of the Wim Hof Method, which centres on breathing and cold therapy techniques. He's considered a trailblazer in offering transformative experiences with long-lasting beneficial change. This year, Hof is running a pair of five-day summer expedition retreats (in June and July) near the city of Huesca in the Spanish Pyrenees. "These will have an absolute awakening effect on the psyche, health and spirituality," he says. "Participants will become the alchemist over their body chemistry, connecting neurologically with the depth of the brain at will."

Attendees will learn Hof's patented "scientific breathing techniques", with physical benefits including improved energy levels, natural detoxification, reduced stress, a rebalanced nervous system, and a strengthened immune system. These techniques also help in embracing the cold as a "warm friend" to condition the mind and body. Learning how to work with it, including ice-baths, is said to help burn fat, boost immunity, improve sleep, reduce inflammation, and enhance nature's own mood boosters.

This of course, takes commitment. As the majority of Hof's programme is held outdoors, the right setting is



vital. "I chose the location because it is a beautiful and majestic setting of natural phenomena with mountains, rivers, abysses, sunsets, and more," he explains. Imagine, he says, an immersive breathing session, filling your lungs with clean mountain air, under a lush canopy offering shade from the Mediterranean sun, with a vibrant turquoise lake as a backdrop, as you're completely in the moment.

Accommodations are at the camping grounds of Morillo de Tou. With its breathtaking surrounds, this former village offers a variety of accommodations. During the day, explore the gorgeous hills, valleys, rivers, and falls of the area through hikes, swims, canyoning, and whitewater rafting. Evenings, meanwhile, are intended for mental and physical replenishment via locally sourced, traditional Catalan cuisine. "You're free to cap the day with a drink and tapas at the terrace bar, or opt for an early night's sleep," says Hof.

"Participants will discover that they can be so much more and will be able to face reality with a set of new skills to battle everyday challenges – bringing peace, power and love for who and what you are," says Hof. The most challenging aspect, he says, will be to open up and face fears and conditionings. The most rewarding? The long-lasting results. "All the love, happiness, strength, and health within our control is

nothing more than awakening to our true nature," he proclaims.

While Hof's programmes tend to attract the motivated, he says that everyone who joins benefits from the experience. "Each individual has their own unique story, yet all attending are united in their belief in the power of nature and of the human mind to rise above."

How To Experience The Wim Hof Method In Hong Kong?

For those who can't make it to the Spanish Pyrenees this summer, Hof's method can be mastered in Hong Kong thanks to Brian Lai, Asia's first certified instructor of the Wim Hof Method. "Witnessing the incredible shifts in myself and the others during the first training was the catalyst for me to continue studying under Wim," says the Australia-born Lai. After training directly with Wim in 2016 and 2017, involving breathwork, ice baths, cold exposure training, and meditation, Lai founded Primal Breathwork in hopes of teaching people the core concepts and principles of breathwork and science-based tools to build resilience, manage energy, better achieve their goals and "ultimately become happy, healthy and high performing humans." Find Lai's teaching schedule at primalbw.com and learn more about the Wim Hof Method at wimhofmethod.com.



CHÖSEN EXPERIENCES

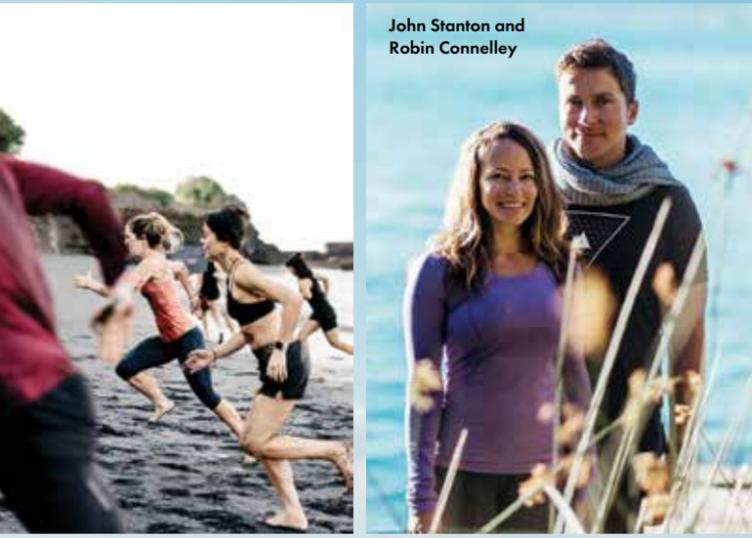
What do you do when you're suffering work-related burnout and an existential crisis? If you're former clean-tech VCs and athletes John Stanton and Robin Connelley, you create Chōsen Experiences. Held in luxuriously lush private accommodation on the spiritual island of Bali, and led by a team of wellness and performance experts, Chōsen offers a variety of experiences, the key of which is the seven-day Life Optimization programme. The

programme encompasses flow-state awareness, functional movement, adventurous wellness, and mindfulness.

"We create emotionally and physically powerful experiences that lead to deep learning," says Stanton. "The programme is neuro-designed to give attendees, who normally deal with high levels of stress, the space for reflection and learning." Basically, it's aimed at those experiencing challenges in balancing health and longevity with achievement and solving big problems.



IMAGES: Wim Hof Method and Chōsen Experiences



John Stanton and Robin Connelley



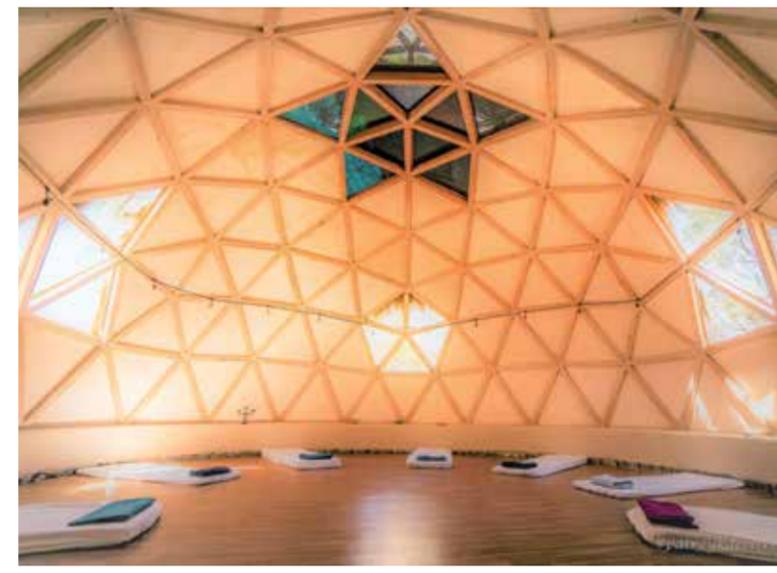
During the programme, participants also learn about optimal nutrition, movement, connection, communication, neurological inputs from the environment, and activities that promote neuroplasticity. “The wellness and performance aspects are designed to get attendees to a place where they can define their own ikigai, or ‘reason for being’, a key aspect of wellbeing,” explains Stanton.

The programme is challenging, although in what exact ways depends on the individual. For some, it will be the physical components, while for others it will be the emotional reflection. There’s also lots of laughter, fun, and play. “What’s so incredible about this type of learning is that the breakthroughs are amplified when everyone is on the journey together,” says Stanton. “What you take away from repelling a 30-metre waterfall or a conversation about ikigai will be personal, but the impact of hearing other’s experiences, and the connections formed, cannot be understated.”

Both the accommodation and the location play important roles. “Like the rest of the programme, optimal recovery is vital to reaching a point of breakthrough,” explains Stanton. “The accommodation is part of how we down-regulate our attendees’ nervous systems – well-appointed, amazing beds, being in touch with nature, all-natural toiletries, food from our partner organic farms, and so on.” He adds that there’s simply something special about Bali. “That je ne sais quoi is why we made this incredible island our Asia hub.”

There are numerous off-site activities that allow participants to visit untouched areas, interacting with nature in adventurous ways. The long-lasting impact on each attendee is referred to as the Chōsen Effect. Stanton concludes, “You leave feeling like you can overcome any challenge, with a calm confidence and a plan to incorporate the skills learned.”

IMAGES: Chōsen Experiences and Behold Retreats



BEHOLD RETREATS

With a singular motivation to help people, Jon de Potter founded Behold Retreats in 2020. Behold specialises in wellness services that harness the power of entheogen plant medicine, such as ayahuasca and psilocybin, for journeys of self-discovery and transformation to reach peak performance and wellbeing. “Plant medicine has opened new doors for me and made me a much happier, healthier, and better person,” says de Potter. “Each day is more loving, joyful, and peaceful.”

The seven-day retreat experiences vary; however, the main categories are guided activities like yoga, art, nature walks, and meditation, combined with ceremonies. It is during these expertly guided and safe ceremonies that plant medicines are taken for a “profound experience”.

“We are motivated to help others to make massive personal growth progress,” explains de Potter, and urges potential cynics to do their research. “I would encourage people to check out the science from Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Imperial College, Yale, and more that show the profound benefits.”

In a nutshell, plant medicine promotes neurogenesis – the growth of new neurons and new neuronal connections, which enables information exchange and reconciliation between parts of the brain that normally don’t communicate. This can lead to improvements in cognition, consciousness, belonging and social



Jon de Potter



connectedness, clarity of purpose, relationship to the self and others, mood and behaviour, and overall life satisfaction and wellbeing.

“We’re not here to convince or convert, we’re here to share the science, raise education and awareness,” says de Potter. “And for those that resonate – beautiful! We’re here to help.” For the benefits to be long-lasting, post-retreat integration work is required. “A large part of what we focus on is guiding our clients to give them the best chance at sustaining benefits and an elevated state of consciousness.”

The retreat’s clients predominantly consist of leaders, top-level executives, and entrepreneurs, with many choosing to arrange a private bespoke experience. De Potter describes the retreats as potentially challenging and highly rewarding. “Facing our true selves and healing some of the damage we’ve done to our minds, hearts, and spirits isn’t easy work, but it can really have profound improvements to the quality of everyday life.”

Retreats are held in stunning locations across Europe (Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain) and South America (Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Peru). One of the most popular choices, Peru, will be the setting for retreats in May and July. “The country has a long tradition with plant medicine, and a lot of high quality healers and facilitators live there,” explains de Potter.

There are multiple accommodation options available, including “a beautiful three-bedroom house on a lovely property not far from Machu Picchu, and another nearby that’s great for groups, staying in modern adobes with views of the surrounding Andes Mountains.”

Guests are encouraged to stay in the area for another seven days after the retreat. “It’s an amazing place to spend an extra week to explore the stunning surrounds such as the Sacred Valley, and to go hiking in the beautiful mountains,” says de Potter. “There’s also a vibrant culture and great food.” Who could argue with that? ≡

IMAGES: Behold Retreats

