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Planning a Fitness Retreat? You'll Want to Read This First

If you've ever been on a fitness retreat, you know how life changing it can be to escape your day-to-day reality and focus on wellness in a beautiful place. Whether you travel to the Caribbean or explore the wonders of the Galapagos Islands, it's way more fun to get fit while hiking a scenic nature trail or doing pigeon pose on the beach.

As a fitness professional, you may have dreamed about planning a retreat of your own. What could be better than being with a group of like-minded people in a serene location where you work on boosting your physical and mental health? As amazing as fitness and wellness retreats are—and countless fitness pros swear by them—there are plenty of potential drawbacks you should know about. We asked fitness pros who've planned retreats how to avoid potential drawbacks like liability and financial risk. The key? Planning, planning and more planning.

"We've attended fitness retreats, planned our own vacations and helped friends plan trips," says Loren Mayo, founder of [luxefit](#), which organizes all-inclusive, week-long luxury fitness retreats. "But there was so much we weren't aware of that actually goes into organizing a fitness retreat from scratch. From capital to marketing to securing trainers and clients, it's a huge undertaking."



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Jenna Muller, a certified barre3 and pilates instructor who is planning a [retreat on Long Island's North Fork](#) this summer, says staying on top of all the moving parts is key. "There's so many logistics that go into the backend," Muller says. "The drawbacks of doing it yourself include: tons of time to plan, research of locations, marketing, collecting payment and more." She recommends working with a retreat company (she's partnering with [Ketanga Fitness](#)) to make the process more manageable so you can focus on marketing and promotion.

[Alexa Silvaggio](#), a yoga instructor and retreat leader based in New York City and Los Angeles, recommends choosing a place you really want to go to make the experience that much more meaningful. One of the biggest risks you need to be aware of is financial, she says. "A deposit is required to hold your spot in paradise—somewhere between \$1,000 and \$5,000, depending on where it is, what's included, and the number of rooms set aside," Silvaggio says, adding that you'll need four months minimum to plan a successful retreat. "You may fill it, and everything will be hunky dory. But if the requirements aren't met (usually a base of 6 people), that deposit will not be returned, and that is no bueno."

Another important thing to remember? You've got to be prepared to work 24-7. "When on retreat, people will come to you looking for all sorts of answers," Silvaggio says. "They will expect you to know what's happening. They will expect you to hold space for them. They will expect a professional. Although you will enjoy the experience, you're there to cultivate a meaningful experience for your students. That's the bottom line."

In the end, meticulous planning is what will most likely result in a successful fitness retreat, says **Laura Cipullo**, RD, CDE, RYT and founder of the [L'ifestyle Lounge](#) in Closter, NJ. "If planning a retreat for the first time, recognize this is not a free vacation rather a trip that must be thoroughly thought out well in advance to prevent drawbacks and downfalls," she says.

Your Retreat Planning Cheat Sheet

Cipullo, a four-time author and founder of **Laura Cipullo** Whole Nutrition and Yoga in New York City, was the co-leader of a yoga retreat to Bequia in the Grenadines earlier this year. She's planning her next retreat to Costa Rica using the following 20 lessons she learned from her first experience. Here, **Cipullo** shares her cheat sheet to avoiding potential pitfalls and making the most of your first retreat. Hold onto this list as you plan yours.

1. Identify the purpose of the trip. Is it to increase brand awareness, make a profit or to enjoy a free trip someplace new while you work?
2. Choose destinations with direct flights. It makes life so much easier.
3. Choose a place you've previously been to make sure accommodations and staff are superior or at least meet your expectations.
4. Add 20 to 30 percent for meals and trips off premises if prices are not available before you reserve.
5. Consider a press budget before determining your final cost to clients.
6. Consider your liability for press or individuals who may win or bid on the trip.
7. Lock in room rates and hotel details with a paper contract signed by a hotel manager and retreat manager. Keep in mind other countries are more relaxed than we are in the US. They may not offer formal contracts. Create one and have them sign to prevent miscommunication and guarantee costs of services and goods.
8. Make sure coordinators and instructors are reserved on a separate flight one day before guests arrive.
9. Bring American dollars in case of emergency.
10. Carry a copy of all of your client's documents (passport, Visa, flight info, etc.).

11. Identify any medical information or food allergies before the trip to make alternative plans and food accommodations. Provide clients with a formal questionnaire that includes medical issues and medications that you may need to be aware of as well as emergency contacts.
12. Have clients sign a liability waiver that encompasses all things related to the trip including flights, transportation and the actual retreat.
13. Give clients a gift—something simple like an energy bar and water bottle upon arrival, a bottle of essential oil on their pillow with a note or a travel yoga mat to ensure they feel special.
14. Identify clients' goals before the trip to ensure they are met during the retreat.
15. Carry an emergency kit filled with Band-Aids and antiseptics.
16. Determine quality of water and if necessary, include water in the retreat price if it needs to be supplemented.
17. Carry a natural and more potent mosquito repellent for all guests. This means bring extra of anything that can't be easily purchased on the retreat.
18. Make sure friends and colleagues joining the trip recognize that your clients may also be on the retreat. (It may seem obvious to you but may not be to others.)
19. Hire talent with a following who can attract clients or be prepared to supply your own clients to fill the retreat.
20. Keep all receipts no matter how small or large for tax purposes.

Finally, once you've reached your destination, remember to make time for self-care. "When you're taking care of that many people, it's easy to not take care of yourself," Silvaggio says. "Carving out a few extra minutes to meditate or move or whatever makes you feel grounded is a must. Just know that there may be obstacles, and know that if you want to be on your A-Game, you must take care of your sweet self."