



IT'S TIME TO RETREAT & REVIVE

If the pace and unpredictability of life is taking its toll, a wellness experience on the remote Kawau Island might be just the tonic.

WORDS KATHRYN CHUNG

If this past year has left you in need of a little escape, a new retreat in the Hauraki Gulf might be the place for you. Located on the remote Kawau Island and surrounded by native bush, Parohe Island Retreat is a wellness destination that invites you to slow down and hit 'reset'. Previously a family holiday home, the property has been redeveloped as an island oasis, with Scandinavian-style cabins, cabanas, a three-bedroom villa, and a charming Honeymoon Cottage.

Those looking to embrace the relaxation aspect can make the most of the retreat's sauna, massage room and outdoor hot tubs. A wooden platform nestled in the forest is the perfect spot for some yoga, the sounds of native birds a blissful backdrop to your vinyasa flow. Or discover some grounding meditation and intention setting in the Enchantment Pavilion. For those wanting a dose of adventure, there are paddleboards, kayaks and bush tracks, while boat trips to a nearby island can be arranged. When the sun sets, head to the shore where you might see bioluminescent



ISLAND ESCAPE

Surrounded by native bush, Parohe Island Retreat has an extensive wellness programme, as well as space to simply rest. The Honeymoon Cottage (left) is one of the retreat's charming accommodation options.



phytoplankton set the water aglow, a common phenomenon on the island, according to Parohe General Manager Rawinia Buchanan. "There are about 70 permanent residents that live here. It's only an hour from the city, but you really get the sense of stepping away when you go to the island. The ocean is this beautiful, emerald green and you're right in the middle of the bush and can hear birdsong. It truly is a disconnect from what you would experience in your everyday life."

The concept behind Parohe is to offer a balanced and flexible approach to wellness. The all-inclusive retreat packages vary from the more physical and adventurous, to food focused, to yoga and mindfulness. "I've been on retreats in the past where you leave and can't quite integrate the learnings into your life," says Buchanan. "Rather than just being an escape where somebody steps away from the everyday life, makes some powerful changes and then reverts back to the way they were living before, we've tried to create a cohesive process where we tailor a programme to target areas of their life they want to change, and then after, we can stay in contact with them. We have practitioners in central Auckland who can continue to follow up with their care."

One of the most enticing aspects of Parohe is the culinary offering. French chef Jean-Philippe Carreras, who has worked in Michelin-starred restaurants, has designed the retreat's cuisine to be 'French gastronomy meets wellness'. "Sometimes there's this stigma behind wellness that it's inaccessible, or the food doesn't taste great. So by combining a French culinary master with the wellness aspect, it's a great point of difference," says Buchanan. Guests can enjoy garden-to-table style meals, made from fresh produce in the organic garden and orchard. They can also participate in cooking classes and demonstrations with Carreras.

PHOTOGRAPHY: YUJIN CHOI

Pieces of Kawau Island's history are found throughout the retreat. Repurposed windows from buildings on the island make up the greenhouse, part of the resort's sustainability efforts.

"To look at things at a glance, it might look slightly mismatched, but when you dive into the reasoning behind it, why things are the way that they are, it is actually quite enchanting," explains Buchanan. The rustic Honeymoon Cottage is another charming nod to the past. Built around the 1860s, it is said to have housed the lover of Sir George Grey, one of New Zealand's first governors, who also built the famous Mansion House on the island.

Parohe also embraces a digital detox approach, with guests invited to refrain from using devices in some parts of the retreat. Buchanan hopes it will give visitors a chance to disconnect from the busyness of life, creating space to reconnect with themselves. "Life ends up getting a little too busy sometimes and I think people lose track of themselves. By taking technology out of the equation and encouraging people to be present with themselves, their food, and the environment around them ... you allow yourself to have some time to breathe."

Of course, this is all underpinned by Parohe's considered take on wellness, encouraging guests to participate as much or as little as they want. "A benefit of being a small boutique property is that we can create these bespoke experiences for guests depending on their reasoning for being there," says Buchanan. "It's such a beautiful place, we want to allow people to experience this little slice of paradise, but geared towards healing rejuvenation as well. COVID has really taught us that life can be stressful. We all need to take some time out for ourselves."

parohe.co.nz