



Wellness

in the

Wild

Tony Feder, Jake Applebee, Andrew Thomasson

Need to reset in 2020? You could spend thousands at a dedicated wellness retreat. Or you could add these nature-based experiences to your to-do list. By **Alexandra Carlton**.



01 Dip in a hot spring

• Dalhousie Springs, South Australia

Historically, almost every culture that has access to hot springs has prized the benefits of bathing in their warm waters. There's even a term for those who study their properties: balneologists, who claim the various trace elements found in natural mineral water can soothe and heal the skin, alleviate mental strain and ease muscle and joint pain. On the western edge of the Simpson Desert in Witjira National Park, 1200 kilometres north of Adelaide, the Natural Heritage-listed Dalhousie Springs (parks.sa.gov.au) are made up of about 60 hot springs including a large main pool that remains around a pleasant 37 degrees and is perfect for bathing, swimming and letting your cares vanish into the silent depths.



02 Hike your way to good health

• Larapinta Goddess Walk, Northern Territory

This three-day, women-only exploration of the storied Larapinta Trail in the Red Centre is led by Australian Walking Holidays (australianwalkingholidays.com.au) and combines walking with daily yoga, mindfulness and meditation. Yoga sessions are facilitated by experienced instructors and self-guided meditation takes place each morning to the sound of the dawn bird chorus. Healthy meals and exclusive eco accommodation are all part of the package.

03 Go chasing waterfalls

♥ Kosciuszko National Park,
New South Wales

They're not just catnip for social media, or so a study of the effects of alpine waterfalls on stress levels suggests. Several years ago, a group of moderately to highly stressed individuals signed up for a week-long hiking tour in an Austrian alpine region. Testing afterwards showed their physical stress had reduced – but the half of the group who had been exposed to a waterfall for an hour each day also showed lower levels of psychological stress and improved immunity. In New South Wales, you can try the six-kilometre Waterfall walking track in Kosciuszko National Park (nationalparks.nsw.gov.au), which takes around two hours. Added bonus: you might spot an echidna.



07 Meditate on a mountaintop

♥ Mount Buffalo, Victoria

The popular Mount Buffalo, 40 kilometres west of Bright in Victoria's north-east, is not the first place you'd think of for a moment of quiet contemplation. But with more than 90 kilometres of walking tracks criss-crossing its slopes it's easier than you'd think to find an empty stretch of clifftop all to yourself (victoriashighcountry.com.au). Meditation has been proven to lower the heart rate and reduce stress. Add the scent of summer wildflowers and 360-degree views to the Victorian Alps and you've found a simple and free way to recharge. The mountain is easy to traverse by car until you find a spot to stop and explore, except in winter when snow may hinder accessibility.

06 Try forest bathing

♥ Near Hobart, Tasmania

Popular in Japan for nearly 40 years, forest bathing or *shinrin-yoku* is a way of letting your senses connect with the natural world via a slow, immersive, experience in a wood, forest or park. Indigenous cultures have engaged in the practice for thousands of years; research has now shown that it can help boost the immune system and reduce stress. In Tasmania, certified nature and forest-therapy guide Kara Spence (naturebeinit.com) leads forest-bathing walks in natural locations just outside Hobart that end with a lunch of gourmet Tasmanian produce or a dinner by lantern light followed by an hour spotting the area's nocturnal wildlife such as possums and wallabies.

05

Contemplate the stars

♥ Throughout regional Western Australia

According to a study by the University of California, Irvine, a sense of awe derived from things like stargazing can make us kinder and more generous because it leaves us less focused on our own troubles and more aware of the greater good. With its vast horizons and minimal light pollution, regional Western Australia is a hotbed for stargazing and astrophotography. Top spots include Lake Ninan, 170 kilometres north-east of Perth, and the Urawa Nature Reserve near Mullewa, an hour east of Geraldton. Astrotourism WA (astrotourismwa.com.au) lists regular stargazing events and provides information about the best places to turn your eyes heavenwards.

John Crux, Kerstin Meyer, Andrew Wilson

04 Connect with a dwarf minke whale

♥ Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

Every winter, inquisitive dwarf minke whales converge around the ribbon reefs off the coast of Far North Queensland. Several operators run tours from Port Douglas or Cairns (mikeball.com; silverseries.com.au) where you can get in the water with these playful creatures that sometimes swim right up to look a human in the eye as if to say, "Let's play!" Those who've experienced this unique encounter say an interaction with these gentle, sociable mammals verges on spiritual and is an unmatched way to connect with the natural marine world.





08

Reset stress levels with fly-fishing

♦ Lake Eildon, Victoria

According to an article in the Harvard Mahoney Neuroscience Institute newsletter, the repetitive motion of casting a fly-fishing line, combined with the soothing sound of splashing water, is an all-but guaranteed stressbuster.

About 2.5 hours north-east of Melbourne, Eildon Pondage at Lake Eildon (lakeeildon.com) is consistently stocked with rainbow and brown trout so your meditative hobby can be combined with a tasty dinner afterwards.



For more great wellness experiences, visit qantas.com/travelinsider.

09 Take a mud bath

♦ Eulo, Queensland

In the south-western town of Eulo in outback Queensland, silky grey mud oozes up from aquifers deep inside the earth. Packed with minerals like silica, magnesium, calcium and iron, the mud is the stuff urban day spas dream of but out here a salon looks a little different to those in the big cities. At Artesian Mud Baths (artesianmudbaths.com.au), you can gloop yourself with this invigorating mud from head to toe while lying back in a private single or double bathtub, indulging in wine and canapés. Their evening baths are especially popular, letting bathers lie back in the milky mud while gazing up to the Milky Way. ●