

## AN UNPLUGGED LIFE

Getting away from it all takes on new meaning with vacations inspired by peace, quiet, and leaving the family behind

By *Rebecca Gale*

It's 5am and Brooke Stanton is already awake. But for the first time in several years, being up this early has nothing to do with her kids. No one is crying from the crib, or asking for more juice, or jumping on her bed. She's awake for a day of yoga, hiking, spa treatments, and gourmet vegetarian fare; and she's across the country at the Ranch at Live Oak, in Malibu, California.

Stanton, who used to work in finance but is now a stay-at-home mom, gave birth to her fourth child just four months before — yet she couldn't imagine skipping this getaway with Rachel Sheridan, her best friend since college at the University of Virginia. They'd both received the trip as a Christmas present from their husbands — a girls' week away to rejuvenate. (So determined was Stanton to make the journey that she pumped her way through it, returning home from "luxury boot camp" with 200 ounces of breast milk. Now that's commitment.) "I was completely unplugged and had an incredibly peaceful week of healthy eating and exercise," she says.

"I try and get away on my own at least once or twice a year. You need that to keep your head on straight," adds Sheridan, a partner at a DC law firm and a mother of three in Arlington, whose vacations have included a week at the Ashram, another California destination dedicated to "health, fitness and renewal."



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a 10-to-15-mile hike. The afternoon could entail a massage or spa treatment, followed by specialized workouts such as Qigong or barre class. Guests lounge around in The Ashram's decidedly non-glam red outfits ("picture a 1985 sweatsuit," says Sheridan). Meals are eaten as a group, and meat, alcohol, and caffeine are forbidden, though Sheridan insists the food is outstanding. "You feel so amazing when you're done," she says. "You come home and you have this whole new appreciation. To be able to get perspective like that is hard, especially when you're running 90 miles an hour between dropping kids off, taking a conference call, and then going to New York for a dinner."

The need to get away from it all is what motivates Peg Mulqueen, a local yoga instructor, writer, and mother of two in Falls Church, to organize an annual weeklong getaway of "inspiration, adventure, yoga, and surf" in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula.

Mulqueen says the six or seven moms in the group find the retreat particularly rewarding. "People don't come to get away from their families. What they come to do is to spend that special 'me' time. As a busy mother, you don't really get a lot of that," she says. "My daughter once told me, 'You're a better mom when you do yoga.' What she really means is that when you spend time with you—when you're rejuvenated and when you feel good—you have so much more to give. You have more patience, you're happy, and you set a better example for your kids."

Robyn Cohen Churilla, a Bethesda mother of three and founder of the social networking website Mamas Link, plans an annual retreat closer to home. This past year, she and ten other moms went to the Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg. "It's a great chance to recharge your batteries," she says. "As a busy mother, you feel the trip is well deserved."

Another reason it's good for moms to get away? It gives dads a crack at the primary caregiver role. "For the most part, dads don't often get a chance to connect with children in that motherly way unless Mom is out," says Mulqueen. "When I step out of the picture, my husband Robert gets to step up. It's a good opportunity for them to develop that side of the relationship, and that wouldn't happen unless I left for a week."

Once the static of a nonstop life subsides and you quit absentmindedly reaching for your (unplugged) cell phone to check messages, finding peace in a solitary journey is the greatest escape of all.



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## NEAR

### 40MI

#### [Lansdowne Resort](#)

Leesburg  
703-729-8400

Lansdowne has something for everyone: an on-site spa, three golf courses, nearby vineyards, and outlet shopping. On a budget? Try vacation packages available on certifikid.com, a daily-deal website geared toward families.

### 79MI

#### [Inn at Perry Cabin](#)

St. Michaels  
410-745-2200

You may recognize the Eastern Shore scenery as the backdrop to Wedding Crashers. This historic inn has a gourmet restaurant and spa, and is walking distance to the antiques shops and boutiques of St. Michaels. Opt for a superior room and relax on a private terrace with a cup of coffee or bottle of wine.

### 93MI

#### [Tranquility Summer Camp](#)

Berkeley County, WV

This four-day retreat in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle includes yoga, organic meals, evening campfires, and "ample time to reconnect with nature and yourself." Kimberly Wilson, founder of the Tranquil Space yoga studio in Dupont Circle, leads the summer camp. For moms looking for shorter getaways, Wilson offers spring and fall weekend retreats at the same location.

### 122MI

#### [The Bellmoor Inn & Spa](#)

Rehoboth Beach, DE  
302-227-5800

Just two blocks from the Rehoboth Beach boardwalk but a world away in terms of relaxation, the Bellmoor Inn and Spa is known for its spacious guest rooms and soothing beachside vibe. The Girls Getaway spa package includes a massage, a facial, and gourmet breakfast. And though the hotel is family-friendly, the club-level suites and garden courtyard pools are adults only.

### 386MI

#### [Canyon Ranch Resort](#)

Lenox, MA  
413-637-4100

A quick plane ride to Albany or Hartford, and Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires awaits. The all-inclusive resort boasts a complete wellness experience, from complimentary airport pickup to outstanding meals and exercise classes. Indulge in healthful baked goods throughout the day (Canyon Ranch is known for its cookies), and sip house-made mocktails at night.



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## FAR

### 2,135MI

#### [Boca Sombrero](#)

Puerto Jimenez, Costa Rica

Join other yogis from the Washington area for a weeklong yoga-and-surf retreat in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. Each day starts with Ashtanga, a Mysore-style yoga, and afternoon options include surf lessons, horseback riding, and spa treatments.

### 2,692MI

#### [The Ashram](#)

Calabasas, CA

818-222-6900

This all-inclusive getaway limits the number of guests to 13 people. The Ashram schedules your day, from morning yoga to evening meditation, with afternoons free for spa treatments. Don't be surprised to find yourself among titans of industry or other powerful folks who frequently recharge here.

### 2,703MI

#### [The Ranch at Live Oak](#)

Malibu, CA

310-457-8700

This retreat is a bit more luxurious than the Ashram, but no less intense about getting you to unplug and focus. Chef Rob Dalzell, a graduate of the Napa Valley Cooking School, uses organic produce grown on site and eschews caffeine, alcohol, meat, and processed sugars.

### 4,122MI

#### [The Ashram](#)

Mallorca, Spain

818-222-6900

Want to take in the Ashram experience in a more exotic locale? This small island 100 miles off the eastern coast of Spain boasts breathtaking views of the mountains and Mediterranean. Guests stay on a restored 17th-century olive farm nestled in the Tramuntana mountain range. Unlike its year-round counterpart in California, the Ashram in Mallorca is only open April through June.

## VERY FAR

### 8,040MI

#### [Osho International Meditation Resort](#)

Pune, India

Less than an hour's flight from Mumbai, this is where to go if you're looking to truly free your mind and contemplate the bigger picture. Learn meditation and deep relaxation, and enjoy activities ranging from hikes to dance lessons at this tropical paradise, which boasts a 28-acre campus and myriad programs, classes, and rejuvenating experiences.