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How to Become a Goddess for a Week

by Fiona Harper

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Looking to retreat from the outside world and discover your inner gypsy? Travel Writer Fiona Harper shares her experience at the Surf Goddess Retreat in Bali.

The Urban Dictionary describes a Goddess as a woman who is so beautiful, brilliant and wholesome that she is simply not like any other woman on Earth. Looking around the dinner table I see 13 such women.

We've lobbed into Seminyak, Bali from points across the globe for a seven day Surf Goddess Retreat. Mostly newbies, few of us have surfed before but have long held dreams of carving up the waves.

I confess I was a little wary at attending a women's only retreat. Perhaps it's a throwback to adolescence when the pretty girls seemed so cool and aloof. Besides, like any self-respecting tomboy, I'd prefer to be out doing stuff rather than sitting on the couch talking about what others are doing. I had visions of gossiping princesses discussing the latest nail varnish colours. But my foolish fears were groundless. We're invited to approach the retreat with an open mind and a generous heart - which turns out to be exactly the right guidance.

At Surf Goddess Retreat they've successfully melded most of what women want in a relaxed, supportive and welcoming environment. Combining splendid accommodation, villa style in a walled compound with central pool, it's fun and it's safe. More importantly, it's inclusive and friendly thanks to a team of retreat staff at the top of their game, treating retreaters like, well, Goddesses. It's also rather inspiring to meet other solo travellers, most of whom have never surfed before, ensuring that everyone is equally outside their comfort zones.

Photo: Fiona Harper

Want to skip the morning yoga class and sleep in? No problem. Had enough sun and surf and prefer to go shopping instead? Want to know where to find the best fabric shop in Bali? Sure, Retreat Manager Sally Mansfield will organise a driver (she'll also ring her favourite dressmaker too if you ask nicely). Or more likely, if you want to linger in the surf after the daily lesson, you're most welcome to surf as long as you like.

Like any retreat, there is a structured program each day to ensure Goddesses make the most of retreat facilities. Daily surf lessons revolve around the tide, while yoga and meditation sessions in an open-sided pavilion are held early morning or late afternoon. Aussie Surf Goddess Extraordinaire Melinda Lloyd is an inspiring cheerleader on the shore, offering advice and tips as well as cheering wildly when Goddesses make progress. In the surf a team of patient instructors from the Rip Curl Surf School show us how to paddle our foam boards, calling out 'stand up, stand up' as momentum mounts. On shore Chief Instructor Budi provides tuition on technique and style along with tips on how to read the ocean, swell and waves.

Back at the retreat there's a team of spa therapists on hand for Goddess pampering in between surfing, yoga and divine healthy substantial meals. Each seven day retreat includes four hours' worth of pampering spa treatments: the Balinese are famous for their massages so it's a valuable inclusion. Therapists will even set up in your room after dinner, so that it's merely a few steps from massage table to bed after an exhausting day in the surf. Pure bliss!

The brainchild of Aussie Chelsea Huntley who set up Surf Goddess Retreats ten years ago, Chelsea sees surfing more than simply being a sport. "I see surfing as a state of mind and a way of being, that helps women grow in confidence and see themselves and their place in the world from a fresh perspective."

"Surfing teaches us about patience, acceptance and adaptability. In my view, all the three are must have's to lead a happy and successful life. Year after year we see women come here solo, with friends and even mothers and daughters; then leaving with a new respect for themselves and a renewed appetite for living," says Chelsea.

Chelsea named Asia's first all-female luxury surf camp after the term male surfers used for the bikini-clad 'babes' tanning on the beach. "I wanted to reclaim and change the term's meaning, as today's Surf Goddess has zero interest in lounging on the sand; she's out there riding the waves with the guys," says Chelsea.

Surf Goddess has been such a success Chelsea has recently opened up in Japan, utilising a similar model as Snow Goddess Retreat. Snow or surf, what sort of Goddess are you?

For more information, go to www.surfgoddessretreats.com

Fiona Harper is a travel writer specialising in cruising, active and soft adventures. Follow her at www.travelboatinglifestyle.com

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