Self-care for a new year: Make time to incorporate the things you enjoy into daily life for health and wellbeing

WORDS
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The thought of taking some time to relax and recharge your batteries is blissful, but can also inspire some guilty feelings. So many of us already feel we don't give life our all, especially with family responsibilities and busy work lives. In reality, the smartest way to look after yourself and others is to invest in your own health and wellbeing, so you're at your best too.

Walking enthusiast Laura Dorantt, far left, with pals on a Munro.

Laura's story

Laura Dorantt, 45, lives in Inverness and works with Go Flourish, a new charity aiming to make gardens part of school life.

I followed Wilderness Fit on Insta and was really keen to go to a retreat. I'm an active person and love the outdoors, which is one of the main reasons I moved up here from England. The people up here are community focused and land focused and that's very important to me, especially because Go Flourish aims to reconnect children with nature and improve their mental health, educational achievements and their employment opportunities in the future.

The first Wilderness Fit retreat I booked had to be called off because of terrible storms and I then rebooked for a weekend in Torridon. I did think twice about it because I have a young child and an elderly mother but looking at what was on offer convinced me I had to go. It had everything I love – the outdoors, Munro walking, outdoor swimming – and from the moment I met the leader, Yaz, and her team, I knew it was perfect for me.

The big picture offered by Wilderness Fit nourishes you at every level. Maybe I was lucky, but the group was really special and I felt Yaz took so much care of us. The sense of community underpins everything and as a trained yoga teacher I was aware how even all the food was part of this and so nutritious. There was space to share, time to yourself, barriers being broken down and so many experiences to enjoy. We all need to feel that our voices are being heard and that was a very important part of the retreat.

I think I'm probably like many other people in that I know how to look after myself but often don't give myself the space to do so. The inspiration and fuel I got from that one weekend was just incredible – exercise, fresh air, community and food. Everything you need to get the balance right.

This year Yaz also set up a social enterprise called "wildernessfit mental health CIC" which is breaking down financial barriers for those who are struggling and could really benefit from a retreat experience.

EXPERT OPINION

"Finding time to focus on rest and relaxation through activities like yoga and spending time outdoors is beneficial for both the body and the brain," says Dr Miles Welstead, Head of Cognitive Science at Scottish Brain Sciences. "Regular physical activity increases blood flow to the brain, supporting memory and thinking ability. Additionally, research shows that spending time in nature can reduce stress, improve moods and enhance mental clarity. Taking time to relax and restore isn't just a luxury, it is an important way to help maintain long-term brain health and cognitive wellbeing."

Karen's story

Karen Grant, 44, from Strathpeffer, is a team lead psychiatric nurse, with four children and a recently arrived first grandson.

It's hard for me to get the time to do something just for myself and weekends are busy as my youngest is just 11. Four years ago, I had breast cancer and was off work for 14 months and, ironically, after the chemo and radiotherapy, I was really good at self care. I journaled, I was mindful, but as I got excited about going back to work it was a struggle to think about what I needed. My go-to response is to do things for others, both with my family and in my work, which I also love.

I cover a wide area, including Skye and Wester Ross, so there are some amazing viewpoints where I will deliberately have my lunch and I see that as self care – just taking in the wonderful scenery and surroundings. But, a few months ago, I could feel everything getting on top of me, leading three different types of teams at work and facing challenges at home.

I was in Inverness one day and bumped into Meg Somerville, one of the leaders of Highland Retreats. I know Meg as we both trained in mindfulness together, although I had too many commitments and didn't finish the training. I'm a great believer in what's for you won't go by you, so when she told me about a weekend retreat called Rest, Reset, Restore, which was coming up in a couple of months, I booked it instantly.

I had a couple of moments feeling guilty in the weeks leading up to the retreat, and on the day the snow was so bad I had to be towed there, but every minute was a joy. The programme included mindfulness, meditation, sound baths, dancing, journaling and what I would describe as loving kindness, connecting with the other people taking part. The food was also delicious and it was great to be cooked for. I loved the sense of focusing on a goal, visualising where I wanted my life to go, and I came back more confident, focused and with a clearer mind.

The positivity and zest for life it gave me made me feel back on track in my personal life and at work and I'm being consciously mindful and planning to go once a month to Meg's daily retreats. I'll also go to a weekend retreat yearly from now on.

highlandretreats.co.uk
wildernessfitretreats.scot

I went on a retreat and every moment was a joy. It gave me back my zest for life

Karen Grant.

Jill's story

Jill Shaw, 63, from Cumbria, has always regarded Scotland as her place to escape to and, since discovering Scourie, has visited the same cottage 15 or 16 times.

My husband Nick is a semi-retired GP, so doing locum work has always offered a great excuse to head to the hills of Scotland. We definitely don't need an excuse, as we came many times when our four children were younger, but I swore my first visit to Scotland would be my last after a wet week in Poolewe.

However, the following year he talked me into a house in Kyle of Lochalsh which had a stove, so I reassured myself that at least we could dry our wet clothes. In the event, the stove wasn't on once as it was a baking hot week, and we've been coming to Scotland ever since. Discovering the cottage in Scourie was our best move and we come here at all times of year – though not usually school holidays – with the right clothes for walking our spaniel in any weather. As we cross the border I can feel the lift, that sense that I'm heading to my favourite place, where I can hang up my car keys and walk straight out onto the hills or onto the beach.

My favourite view is from the washing line at the back onto the sea, and it never fails to thrill me. We can walk for miles, then come back and I collapse into the lovely big bath and snuggle down with a book in front of the log burner. Our grandchildren love running and yelling with glee, excited about making noises in the wilds of the hills, generally getting stuck in the bogs and just laughing about it all. This is a very special place, where I sleep like a log and feel myself gently resetting as I switch everything off.

scouriecottage.co.uk/

I swore my first visit to Scotland would be my last but now I really love this very special place

Nick and Jill Shaw.