



Life with style



If you need to wind down and de-stress, this region has much to offer.

In the 1990s, people went to retreats primarily looking for weight loss, says Sharon Kolkka, general manager of Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat (above).

"They were interested in exercise and diet," she says. "Today, people who come to Gwinganna are looking for strategies to ease and reduce their levels of tension. That has been the great change. People from the cities, who are working long hours and under huge pressure, need to wind down and relax. I want people to come to Gwinganna and discover how easy it is to integrate health and wellbeing into your life."

It is with this in mind that Sharon and her highly qualified team of health, movement and lifestyle experts are turning Gwinganna into one of the most essential lifestyle experiences on the Gold Coast.

Located on a 170-hectare property once owned by publisher Kevin Weldon and set on a mountain ridge on Syndicate Road in Tallebudgera Valley, Gwinganna is the kind of "get-away-from-it-all" resort that people who want a real escape dream about.

This is the new leisure resort. Nothing is compulsory. Everything is available. The food is plentiful and always organic. The classy accommodation - polished timber floors, spa baths, large and comfortable beds, absolute privacy - boasts superb views over peaceful bushland where the only sounds are those of the birds singing. The aim is to bring serenity back into too-busy lives.

Created and owned by Tony de Leede, who brought Fitness First to Australia when he went into a joint venture in 2001 and is now recognised as one of the country's most successful health and fitness entrepreneurs, Gwinganna offers a new vision of what a lifestyle retreat should be. With 20 massage therapists, a nutrition manager (who has a PhD in nutrition) and specialist chefs, the retreat "offers you space to breathe, relax, revive, nourish and re-energise" and provides "solutions on how to live a healthier life, manage modern-day stress effectively and enhance ageing with energy and vitality".

Gwinganna has a range of lifestyle escapes from weekends to week-long

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programs. The emphasis is on movement (tai chi, yoga, pilates), organic skin care, "dreamtime" (where you sit around and literally do nothing), exercise (if you want it) and spa treatments.

But this is not the only spa in the hinterland. The spa business is booming both in the hinterland and along the coast. At the spectacular new Q1, with its dramatic views up and down the coast, the spa, known simply as Q1 Spa, is run by Exclusive Spas Australia, whose Reef House Spa at Palm Cove, Queensland, was voted by *Conde Nast Traveller* in

2005 as the number-one spa in the Australasia and South Pacific region.

And for those looking for a more boutique option, further into the hinterland at Mount Tamborine, at the remarkable Witches Falls Cottages, Alison Shaw has created a totally different



experience with her ripple Russian massage, which is designed to "feed the senses, body and spirit".

Imagine this: the setting is a sublime mixture of flowering scented gardens edged by rose gums - a cross between Australian-bush and Japanese-rural retreat. The accommodation is in stone cottages that are split-level and have beds raised above the lounge areas. The floors are timber. The finish is immaculate.

The Ozen dining room, where you remove your shoes and settle down to

miraculous Japanese-fusion cuisine, has a central fireplace for those cold mountain nights. The food, always with that interesting Australian twist, comprises tempura, teriyaki, sushi and marinated ingredients, many of which come from the cottage gardens.

And in this setting, Alison and her masseurs will deliver to your room their rare Russian massage (left).

As Alison says: "It is relatively unknown in Australia. It is a beautiful and deeply relaxing style of massage which is fantastic for letting go of stress and tension. It is based on techniques that have been used extensively in Russia for more than 100 years, and is based on the philosophy that through massage the body can learn to heal, relax and repair itself."

"Russian massage uses some unique techniques such as cresting friction - where the top half of the fingers are used to massage along the back - and also involves the rocking and movement of the body to release stress."

Ah! There's that stress word again. Decades ago the Gold Coast was about running at your holidays and exhausting yourself. Then it became a lifestyle alternative where weight had to be lost and diets had to be strictly adhered to. Today, it is all about relaxation and stress management and places like Witches Falls Cottages and Gwinganna are a reminder this region is much more than just sun, sand and surf. ■