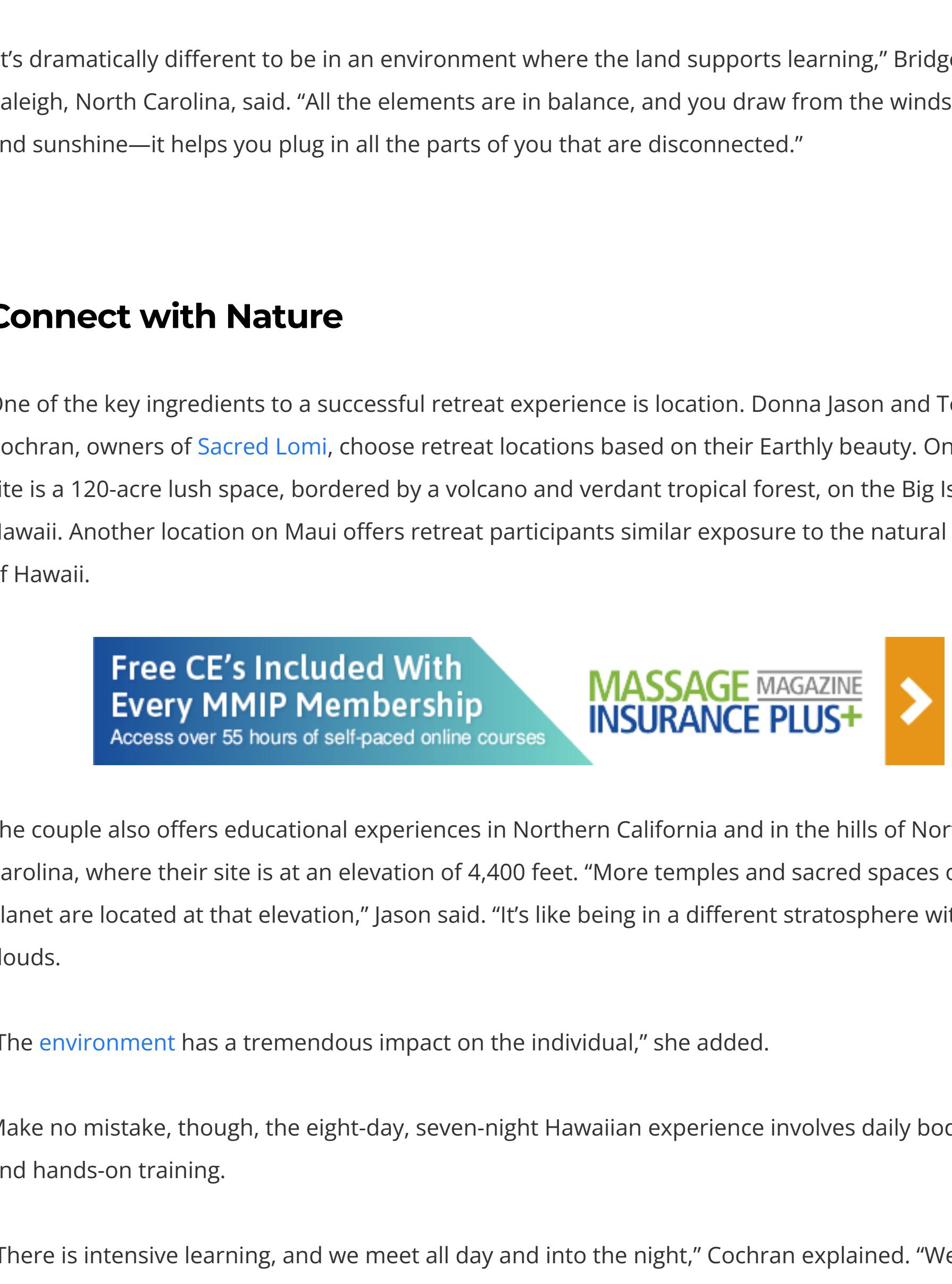




EDUCATIONAL RETREATS: GET REST, ADVENTURE & CE HOURS

July 15, 2016 by Phyllis Hanlon

Self-Care Tips 6 minute read



Multicolored parrots screech from the top of a nearby banyan tree as the sun begins to peek over the Hawaiian horizon. Massage therapist Jan Bridges has slipped down to the beach to perform her daily *aikido* practice before enjoying a breakfast of locally sourced foods that will fuel her for an intense day of massage classes. While her surroundings induce a vacation mindset, they are an integral part of the experience, nurturing her professionally and personally.

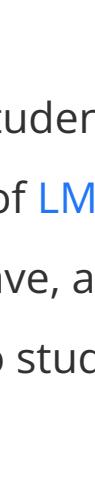
"It's dramatically different to be in an environment where the land supports learning," Bridges, of Raleigh, North Carolina, said. "All the elements are in balance, and you draw from the winds, waves and sunshine—it helps you plug in all the parts of you that are disconnected."

Connect with Nature

One of the key ingredients to a successful retreat experience is location. Donna Jason and Tom Cochran, owners of *Sacred Lomi*, choose retreat locations based on their earthly beauty. One such site is a 120-acre lush space, bordered by a volcano and verdant tropical forest, on the Big Island of Hawaii. Another location on Maui offers retreat participants similar exposure to the natural beauty of Hawaii.

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The couple also offers educational experiences in Northern California and in the hills of North Carolina, where their site is at an elevation of 4,400 feet. "More temples and sacred spaces on the planet are located at that elevation," Jason said. "It's like being in a different stratosphere with the clouds."

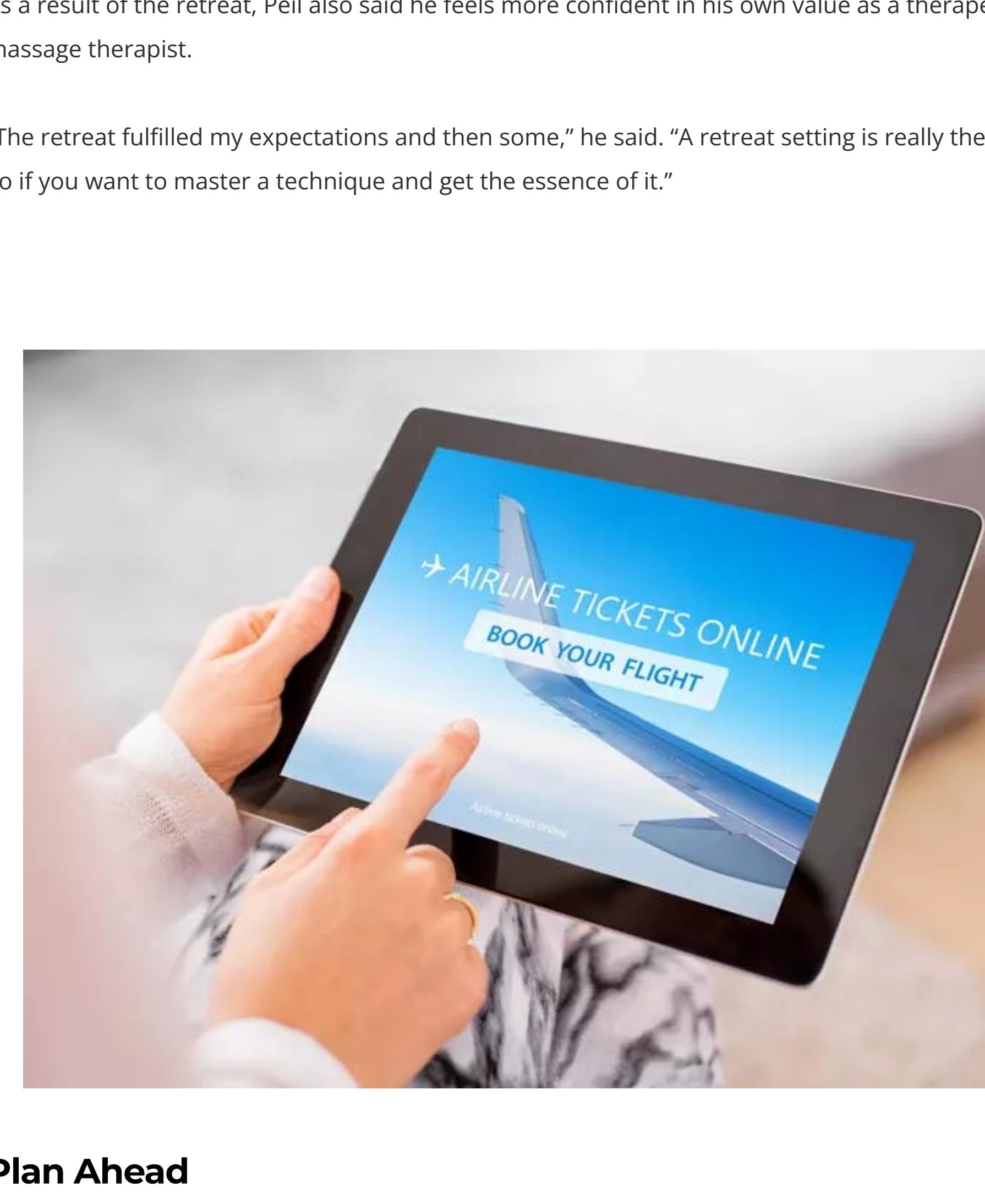
"The environment has a tremendous impact on the individual," she added.

Make no mistake, though, the eight-day, seven-night Hawaiian experience involves daily bodywork and hands-on training.

"There is intensive learning, and we meet all day and into the night," Cochran explained. "We have structure, but we work with the land and the group energy."

"Because of the environment and the way we teach, participants receive bodywork as much as they give bodywork," he added.

Educational retreats offer a challenge for body *and* mind. Educator Erik Dalton offers a Pain Management in Paradise educational retreat in Costa Rica. He said learning in an environment where beautiful lodging and meals are included supports the learning experience. When students aren't in class, they can keep their bodies stimulated with ziplining, whitewater rafting, music, dancing, yoga, beach excursions and more.



Compelling Classes

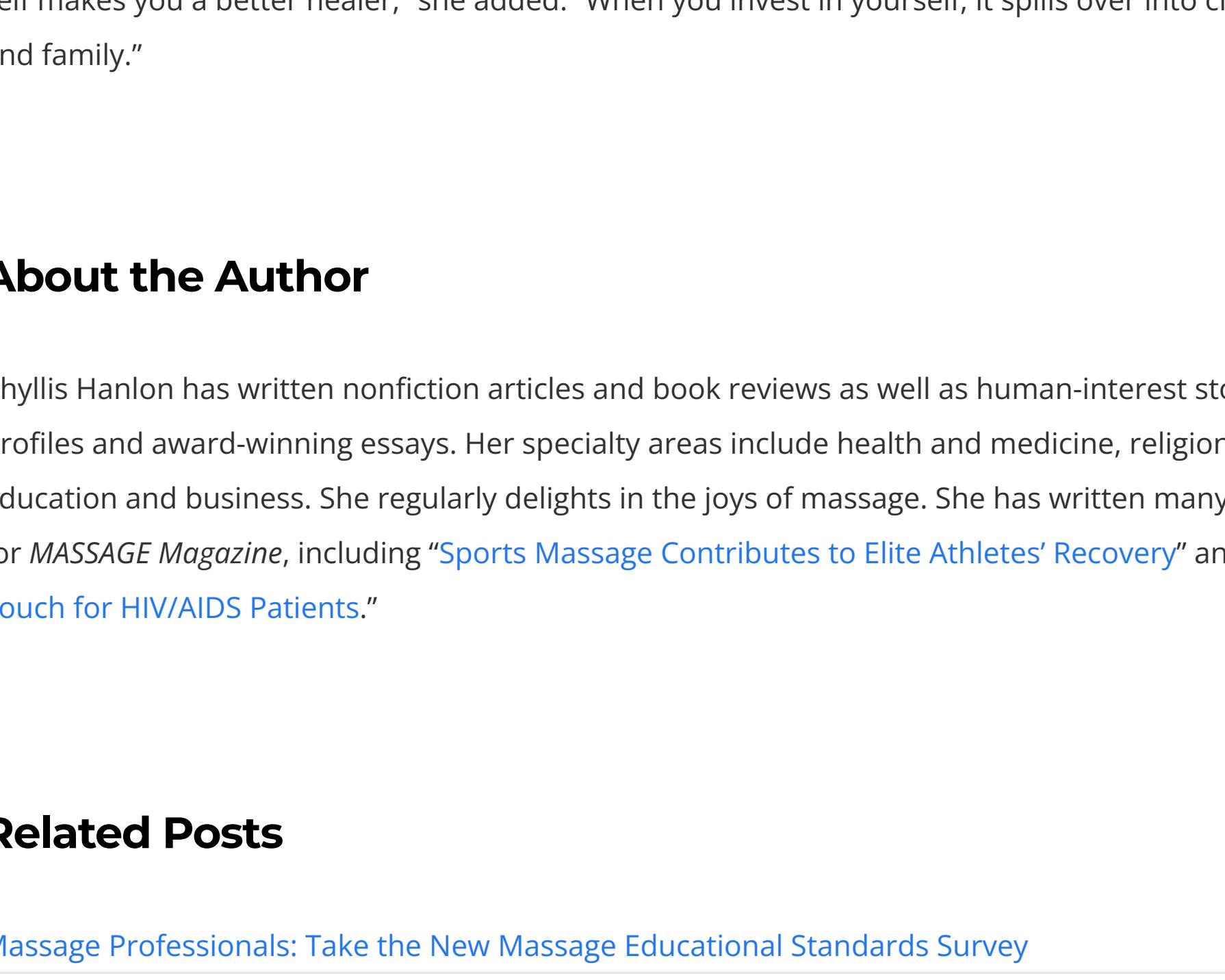
Although you might expect exotic locations to be distracting, Suzanne Scurlock-Durana, C.M.T., C.S.T.-D., owner of *Healing From the Core*, who conducts retreats at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, and other locations, said interesting subject matter makes a difference.

"If you teach a compelling class, attendees won't skip, but if it's run-of-the-mill, you might lose them," she said. "Also, CEUs are the issue. You can't offer them if [students] don't come to class. Legal bodies that give CEUs are very strict about that."

Building in downtime can provide a balance between academic and social aspects. Scurlock-Durana said classwork at Sedona, Arizona, retreats takes place in the early morning, late afternoon and early evening, because midafternoon is the best time for hiking the hills of Sedona.

"You have to work with the circumstances," she said. "At Esalen, we have a structured schedule, but leave a three-hour chunk of time to soak in the hot tub, get a massage and do other fun things."

Destination retreats also present an opportunity for close interaction between student and teacher, as well as networking and socializing, according to Paul Kirchhoff, L.M.T., owner of *LMT Success Group*. "We teach a lot of land-based classes where students come, learn and leave, and on retreats they eat together and socialize together," he said. "The teachers are accessible to students—and you don't get that in normal educational settings."



Stay in Touch After Educational Retreats

While on retreat, students can share stories and anecdotes about their experiences with peers, he added, and some people form lifelong friendships. "This is much better than a hotel workshop," Kirchhoff said. "The personal and professional experience comes as a surprise for some massage therapists."

Educator James Waslaski, L.M.T., C.P.T., who in 2015 has, so far, taught orthopedic massage and integrated manual therapy destination seminars in Australia, Indonesia, Ireland and Scotland, said powerful friendships are forged among retreat participants and educators as well.

"By bringing leaders in our industry to teach together, we have integrated the world of manual therapy and built lifetime friendships," said Waslaski, who started offering annual seminars aboard cruise ships in 1995. "We laugh together, play together and build family ties that last a lifetime."

LMT Success Group offers retreats at two locations in Costa Rica, in three tracks: medical, spa and business. While the energy of the group typically inspires and keeps students academically grounded, Kirchhoff builds in two half-days and one full day off in Costa Rica; cruise excursions feature equal time for learning and for fun.

When massage therapist Norb Peil, L.M.T., whose practice is located in Tucson, Arizona, traveled to Hawaii for a lomilomi retreat, he engaged in a significant amount of hands-on work.

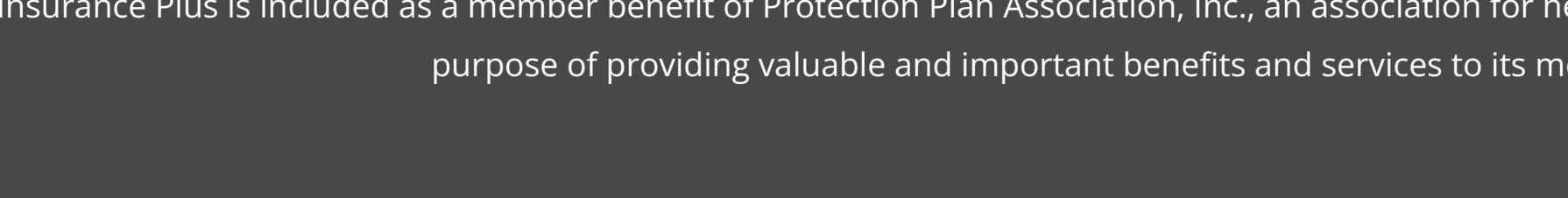
"We worked in teams of three," he recalled. "We gave two massages and received one every day."

During the morning and evening conversations, the therapists discussed their experiences. "This back-and-forth during meals was an integral part of the overall retreat experience," Peil added, and the effects of the retreat stayed with him. Once he returned to Arizona, Peil changed the way he practices.

"I'm more mindful and act with intention, and I'm able to be more present for my clients," he said. "What I learned there is incorporated into part of who I am."

As a result of the retreat, Peil also said he feels more confident in his own value as a therapeutic massage therapist.

"The retreat fulfilled my expectations and then some," he said. "A retreat setting is really the way to go if you want to master a technique and get the essence of it."



Plan Ahead

Destination, distance, airfare, rental car expenses and tuition require an investment of anywhere from a few hundred to more than several thousand dollars. Pricing on cruises tends to be dynamic, although tuition costs remain the same, said Kirchhoff.

Peil planned approximately four months in advance for his educational retreat and is already planning his next one. He said budgeting is important, particularly when taking the Hawaiian retreat, given the cost of airfare and car rental. "At the retreat, everything is self-contained," he said. "You have food and lodging. But anything pre- and post-retreat is on you."

Jason encourages individuals to listen to their hearts. "If you feel pulled to do something, it means it's right for you," she said. "You'll find the right airfare and timing."

One therapist who attended a Hawaiian retreat devised a smart way to pay for the trip: He pre-sold sessions featuring what he was going to learn. "This way you have people lined up so you can apply what you've learned right away," Cochran said.

Back Home

Once you return home, you will want to integrate your experience into daily life.

"You are stepping away from old habits and whatever has been holding you back," said Jason. "It's transformational."

"Retreats help extend your career, increase the value of what you offer and are essential to self-care," she added.

For Bridges, the re-entry process was somewhat shocking. "While on retreat, you typically receive and give bodywork every day, so returning to everyday life requires some readjustment," she said. "You have to adjust to being responsible but still hold onto the ideals you want to incorporate into your life."

"If your reservoir is not full, you are seeing the world through an impaired perceptual lens," she added. "Our culture pulls on people. We lose track of what is going on inside. It's your internal navigational signal that will make sure your lens is as clear as it can be."

Bridges said she intends to book another retreat in the future, and encourages other therapists to consider doing so as well. "If you feel called, go," she said. "Life is too short."

"Massage therapists tend to be over-givers—they like to nurture others, but taking time to nurture self makes you a better healer," she added. "When you invest in yourself, it spills over into clients and family."

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