

# **5 Ideas** **For Making a Retreat** **Affordable**

**By S.A. Snyder**





# 5 Ideas For Making a Retreat Affordable



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[www.LunaRiverVoices.com](http://www.LunaRiverVoices.com)

## Greetings, seekers of a break from the **DAILY GRIND!**

If you are experiencing any of the following situations, it may be time to recharge and reset. It may be time for a retreat.

- Feeling unfulfilled in life
- Longing for stillness and serenity, a pause to center and relax
- Contemplating a career change or moving to another part of the country
- Grappling with partnership issues, a health situation, or other challenging event
- Wanting a deeper spiritual connection or improved wellness
- Seeking mindfulness, peace, or more joy

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Retreating is taking a break from your current daily routine to care for yourself in some way.

Retreating is NOT the same as taking a vacation.

Retreating has the intention of personal transformation, large or small. Although a vacation can transform you, typically that isn't the intention. Vacations are for getting away; retreats are for moving toward something. That something is a healthier you—whatever that means for YOU personally.

### Why you need to retreat regularly

Do you think you don't have the time or money to do a retreat? You can't afford NOT to take time to care for yourself. Self-care is NOT a luxury. Self-care is NOT something you can wait to do after the kids leave home or after you retire or after the person you are nursing dies.

Why do flight attendants instruct us to secure our own oxygen mask *before* helping others? Because we won't be able to help others if we pass out from lack of oxygen first—or from exhaustion or stress or some health issue that requires rest or worse: time in the hospital.

When you suffer, your dependents suffer. **Caregiver stress syndrome** is real, and it doesn't just apply to people looking after the sick, elderly, or incapacitated. You can also suffer caregiver stress syndrome from the everyday demands of raising a family. Even if you aren't a caregiver to others, the stresses of living in our detached and harried world can be relieved through practicing self-care.



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### Documented benefits of self-care

- Reduces physical and emotional stress, potentially relieving stress-induced health issues such as high blood pressure and heart disease
- Reduces anxiety and increases contentment
- Promotes restful sleep
- Boosts your immune system so you spend less time being ill
- Promotes clear thinking, better decision-making, and productivity
- Improves self-confidence and promotes healthy relationships
- Improves overall quality of life

**One way to get self-care is by retreating.**

### *But I can't afford to do a retreat!*

“When I have the time to get away, I don't have the money. When I have the money, I don't have the time.”

Sound familiar?

Where do you find the money and time to do a retreat with bills and jobs and families? Money-wise it's easier than you think. You just have to be creative. Time-wise, you must make retreating a priority. It doesn't mean months away at an ashram in India or two weeks at a health spa in Sedona.

You don't have to go to exotic places for a five-star treatment to benefit from retreating. There are plenty of less expensive options for the same—or better—gains. You can even do a daylong free retreat in your own home town and benefit greatly.

Try this: Replace “I don't have the time” with “I'll make the time” and “I don't have the money” with “How can I make this happen?” Then see what happens.





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## 5 Ways to Make Retreating Affordable

During my twenties and thirties, I eked by on a small income yet still managed to do occasional retreats of all types and durations. I did it by creatively financing these breaks to make them affordable. Although, there are plenty of retreat options all over the world that don't cost much—some are even free—experiment with the following ideas to increase your options for affordable retreating.

### 1. Ask about concessions or grants

Many retreat venues offer concessions for people with limited funds, although they may not advertise it. In particular, religion-affiliated places are more likely to. Some even charge only a nominal fee or ask only for a “suggested donation.” You don't have to be a member—or a believer—of that religion to do a retreat (unless the retreat expressly requires it). For example, many monasteries offer retreat programs or spaces to the public.

If the expense is out of your budget, ask the retreat if they are affiliated with local organizations that offer grants to prospective retreaters. Or the retreat itself may offer grants. You might have to prove need, both financial and personal. The key is to ask. If you *can* afford the cost, don't abuse the concessions offer just to score a deal. You would be taking from others who could benefit.

### 2. Volunteer your talents

Ask the retreat whether they accept volunteer labor, such as helping in the kitchen, cleaning rooms, or doing office work or other tasks. You could work in exchange for free or reduced-price retreat time, either during a retreat program or at a later time. Working while on retreat may seem counterintuitive, but the act of service has personal rewards and can be retreating in its own way.

Retreating can also include volunteering for a cause, learning a new skill, or travel retreating to immerse yourself in a different culture or spiritual or personal growth practice. Follow these steps to market your talents to a small operation, an organization, or charity of interest:

1. Search the internet for a pursuit that interests you (e.g., dispensing care at a free clinic or teaching basic small-business skills to a community in need; working on an organic farm; teaching literacy; building homes for the homeless). You may find organizations that provide these services in your home country or abroad.
2. Make a list of potential contacts involved in your pursuit.
3. Tailor your resume or create a list of your talents to offer in exchange for what you want (usually room and board). Some organizations provide room and board. All you do is apply and show up.
4. With your resume or talents list, send a covering note that describes your interest and how the organization would benefit from your service. If your goal is to get experience you don't have, demonstrate your enthusiasm to learn.
5. If you don't get a reply, follow up in two weeks. You may get a counter offer. Negotiate.
6. Tell others about your plan—they might have a lead for you.
7. Do your research, try different marketing angles, and rinse and repeat until you get an offer you can't refuse.



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I have used this marketing technique to get room and board at three different retreats. One was volunteering for six months at a private red deer park in England. Another was volunteering my organizational skills at a film festival in Jackson, Wyoming (to see whether I'd like working in that industry). The third was volunteering my forestry skills, among other things, at a spiritual retreat in Scotland. The latter turned into two years of service that changed my entire life. I even wrote a memoir about it. All of these experiences were retreats because they provided a much-needed break from my daily routine and a chance for personal growth. The Britain adventures also included immersion in a different lifestyle and a moderately different culture.

### 3. Create your own home-based retreat

If leaving home isn't feasible, create a personal retreat space in your house. Or maybe you have a garden shed you don't use. You could even set up a backyard tent!

If you can't spare an entire room, section off part of a room that has enough space for a comfortable chair or floor pillows. Put up a partition, even if it's just during your retreat time. A physical barrier will train your mind to know that the space is not for any other activity but retreating. Search thrift stores, online sales or giveaway platforms, home goods stores, or garage sales for a hinged panel screen. Or create your own using recycled cardboard and duct tape or scrap wood, then paint or decorate it. In a pinch, you could tack up sheets or curtains (hello, thrift store) or drape them over something to form a partition.

Personalize your retreat space with things that bring comfort and pleasure, such as a cozy blanket, candles, and rocks, shells, or other nature objects (the latter are good for grounding and calming). Hang soothing pictures of nature scenes, a loving family portrait, a beloved saint or guru, or inspiring words and phrases.

Avoid retreating in the room where you watch TV, in the home office, or where others in your household are likely to hang out. Such spaces can distract your mind.

When you retreat to that special place, use it only for self-care, not other activities, such as reading email or talking on the phone. Meditate, do centering prayer, sit silently, read inspirational materials, listen to inspirational recordings, or write in a journal.







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### 4. Solo retreat locally

If you can't find a distraction-free zone in your house, try house or pet sitting locally. Perfect for getting a break from roommates! Search the internet for local pet sitting jobs or companies that hire pet sitters. Bonus: If you love animals but don't have any yourself, this gives you the opportunity to connect without the full-time responsibility of pet ownership. Advertise your services for house or pet sitting on online forums, and put the word out among your network that you are looking.

Book a weekend room through an online sharing network (e.g., Airbnb, HomeAway, TripAdvisor) in your hometown or a neighboring town. Ask the host whether the place affords distraction-free peace and quiet. You can often find inexpensive places through the sharing economy.

Some public spaces also make great places to retreat: art museums, botanical gardens, arboretums, or parks. Do a reconnaissance mission to locate a suitable spot in these venues. Big museums in metropolitan areas often have nooks and crannies with comfortable seating for people to spend an hour or so of quiet time.

### 5. Group retreat locally

Communing with others can open minds and hearts and make connections that keep the benefits flowing for years to come. Is there a thought-provoking book or spiritual topic you want to explore? An experience you want to share with others or a technique you'd like to learn (e.g., mindfulness, centering prayer, or meditation)?

Invite friends and acquaintances to retreat with you. Propose a discussion topic with a goal in mind. Build a retreat around a topic that interests members of your faith or social community: women, men, LGBTQ, parents, couples, or people struggling with a specific issue. The topics are endless!

If you belong to a faith community, ask them whether they will let you use a room in the building for free for your retreating group. Even if you don't belong to a faith community, religious houses of worship often allow non-members to use their space for free or a minimal charge. Alternatively, ask someone in your faith or social community whether they would be willing to host a retreat at their house.

For a relatively minimal price, you can book a room at a library, community center, parks office, or other public space. Or ask a restaurant, coffee house, book shop, arts center, or business whether they can spare a space. Some may charge a minimal fee and some may agree to let you gather for free with the caveat that you'll buy their food and drinks, if they serve them.

Maybe a friend or relative has a small business office they'll let you use on a weekend for a group day retreat. Or maybe your neighbor owns a yarn shop that's closed on Mondays and perfect for retreating.

[This website](#) includes 60 church retreat planning ideas, themes, and tips. Although the list includes some Christian-themed ideas, you can use it as a guide for any faith tradition or topic related to your retreat goal. The list includes ideas for gatherings of women, men, couples, and youth, as well as other helpful planning tidbits.

*See the next page for **BONUS MATERIAL** about creating your own group retreat.*



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### **BONUS MATERIAL: Checklist for creating your own group retreat**

**Write down your retreating goal.** You must have a purpose and define it clearly. This includes having a clear idea of your target audience. Whom will you invite? Who would benefit and enjoy your retreat?

**Co-create with others.** Choose co-creators that would work well together, then enjoy planning!

**Decide on the length.** Half-day, whole day, weekend? For a weekend retreat, will participants sleep in their own homes at night and regroup in the morning? Or will they stay at the venue?

**Outline an agenda.** What is the program and who will facilitate? Include breaks and time for processing, especially when potentially emotional topics are included. Don't overload the program with too much. Keep it simple.

**Book the venue.** Check freebies first but don't sacrifice suitability for price, if you can afford to rent. If it costs, determine the per-person price and minimum number of registrants you'll need to cover the costs.

**Decide on food.** If your retreat spans a meal time, here are some ideas: Make it a potluck. Have food delivered from a local soup and sandwich shop, or order catering. Ask non-retreating friends to cook. Prepare food in advance to heat up, if required. If the venue has cooking facilities, cooking a meal together could be part of your retreat. At the very least have drinks on hand, such as juice or tea and coffee, plus healthy snacks.

**Invite a facilitator.** A local leader, trainer, instructor, or coach may be willing to facilitate an interactive workshop or discussion. For example, you can organize two hours of yoga and a discussion with a wellness advisor. A local author could discuss her book. Develop some thought-provoking questions on the author's topic. Many authors will do these gigs for free (including me), especially if people buy their books.

**Promote your retreat.** How will you reach your audience? Is this a closed group by personal invite only, or do you promote it publicly? Promote through your faith community, local wellness or community center, local paper and online events calendars, and posted flyers. If a book is the center of discussion, promote it through local bookstores and libraries.

*Regardless how you choose to retreat, at home or away, by yourself or in a group, remember the point is to get some peaceful, enjoyable me-time. Get clear on your goal and then go for it.  
For best results, make it a regular date with yourself or others.*

### **Learn more**

For links to retreats and other resources, including many affordable ones, visit [www.LunaRiverVoices.com](http://www.LunaRiverVoices.com) and navigate to the [Resources](#) page.



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