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Summer in America: for peace, quiet and meditation, retreats are the way forward

Meditation: not a bad way to spend summer.

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For we lovers of cold weather, the hellishly humid east coast summer presents only a handful of truly enticing options: scurrying into air-conditioned movie theaters, hunkering down in the freezing “igloo sauna” at [New York’s Spa Castle](#), or just leaving the country for cooler parts. (Caving, I’ve often thought, is probably another excellent low-temperature summer pastime; the problem is it looks terrifying.)

The alternative is to get a bit more Zen about the heat – and about everything else, actually – at a meditation retreat.

Perhaps you don’t especially like the sound of rising at 5.30am for nine hours of sitting and slow walking, while focusing on your breath, for three or five or 10 days in a row? But then again, freeing yourself from the grip of your likes and dislikes is part of why so many people find a retreat to be life-changing. Or if you’d rather a less spiritual incentive for attending: many meditation centers, such as [Insight Meditation Society](#) in Massachusetts, are in stunning rural locations, and serve delicious food. Most are conducted in silence, so you won’t lack for peace and quiet. Oh, and they’re cheaper than hotels.

Anyway, what else are you going to do – keep pretending sweaty backyard barbecues are fun?

- Spots at the big US meditation centers, like IMS or California’s [Spirit Rock](#) tend to fill up far in advance, but [you can explore a wide range of other options at Retreat Finder](#). Urban locations like [Brooklyn Zen Center](#) offer non-residential retreats: go during the day, then sleep in your own bed.