

Sharing a road to revival

A determined cancer survivor is taking others on her path to mind, body and spirit enrichment, writes MEAGAN ROOTH

WELLNESS warrior Karen Goudge has twice walked in the shoes of breast cancer survivors.

Now she wants to walk, and even hike up a mountain to watch a Balinese sunrise, together.

The Barwon Heads travel agent, who has battled breast cancer twice in the past eight years, says regular power walks, beach strolls and yoga stretches nourish the mind – something she has grown to treasure since her first diagnosis.

“As much as I can put some tinted moisturiser on my face and some gloss on my lips to look fine, for me it is about building and nurturing my happiness and wellbeing and eliminating angst and negativity,” says Karen, who has planned a wellness retreat in Bali this September for like-minded survivors.

“I do believe in mind, body and spirit and that all three need attention. A change of scenery can be stimulating, it gets the brain ticking.

“I want to give women the opportunity to retreat with other women, be with women who understand what they’ve been through, to experience some activities they may not have experienced before, to have a laugh and use the time to revive.”

Karen grew up in Drysdale and Ocean Grove, went to school at Sacred Heart College and worked in Queenscliff before booking a one-way ticket overseas, where she travelled for more than three years.

But, missing her family and getting tired of saying goodbye to fellow globe-trotters, she returned to the Bellarine Peninsula and has lived at Barwon Heads for the past 23 years, setting up Spa Wellness Travel and Travel With A Difference agencies.

It was after a spa treatment during a work trip to the Philippines she noticed an irregularity with her breast and sought medical advice when she got home.

Karen was rushed through the testing process and results confirmed the worst. Within



a week she had surgery to remove the lump, followed by six weeks of radiotherapy.

“It felt like I was on a conveyor belt going from one thing to the next,” she remembers.

“I was keen to break that world of oncology and to make a fresh start. I didn’t want to socialise or mingle with others, I just wanted to focus on nurturing my wellbeing and happiness.”

In 2011 Karen noticed a lump next to her scar, which was diagnosed as a non-cancerous cyst.

She queried it again before a trekking adventure in Vietnam in 2012 before it reared its head in 2013.

“That tiny lump the size of a grain of rice that had been growing had burst through my skin,” she explains.

“The second diagnosis was met with anger and questions of ‘how?’

“Sure there were tears, but I knew the best way to deal with it was to keep your humour – words of advice that have been passed down the generations.”

This time, Karen required a mastectomy and three months of chemotherapy.

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After a “dreary” winter, she hoped spring would deliver hair growth and renewed work-life balance.

But it was not to be.

“I had surrendered myself to things that I had no control over,” she says.

“I had lost parts of me. I had lost my mojo.

“An 80-year-old friend said I needed a strategy, which resonated with me. I needed to get control of my life again.

“I was ready to take that step with my very short grey hair and one boob.”

Karen, who hadn’t been beyond Geelong for months, grabbed a friend and booked a trip to Indonesia. She then ventured to Malaysia and the little town of Luang Prabang in Laos.

Experiencing the benefits of relaxation and movement first hand, she has since planned the special Revive Retreat, which includes four nights at a stunning spa resort in north-east Bali and a final night in a bamboo constructed village.

Daily activity options include a gentle hike to watch a sunrise, snorkelling, visiting waterfalls, beach walks, meditation and fitness, nature tours and wholesome cuisine.



Brave cancer survivor Karen Goudge has organised a nurturing wellness retreat to help other women. Photo: Nigel Hallett

“Being active, weight bearing exercises, stretching, taking deep breaths and anything that involves movement has benefits both pre and post surgery,” she explains.

“It helps strengthen the mind and body and allows us to get more out of life. It’s important to have daily activity and to have that sense of achievement. Whether you’ve done yoga or not, for example, there’s joy in trying.

“I want the women to leave this retreat with

a smile, having had the time to reflect and to embrace their life for the experiences thus far.”

Karen is also gathering donations of surgical and mastectomy bras to hand over to Pink Ribbon Bali for distribution in local villages.

The retreat will be held from September 11-16. Bookings close on Friday, July 17. Donations of bras close August 10. See SpaWellnessTravel.com.au