

Executive health

Mountain retreat targets mind, body

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Health retreats are big business overseas, where annual turnover is estimated at \$US73 billion annually.

Some international chains even have their own specialist spa resorts emphasising wellness and healthy living, such as Intercontinental's Even in New York.

But New Zealanders usually have to travel to Australia to get a full taste of resorts such as those run by Golden Door, whose Gold Coast property has been rebranded as the Biggest Loser Retreat and focused on weight loss. Golden Door also operates the Elysia in the Hunter Valley, NSW.

These retreats provide a full package that emphasises optimal physical and mental health through a "bootcamp" dawn-to-dark regime of physical activity, vegan-style eating (all chocolate, caffeine and sugar snacks or drinks are banned, along with alcohol and tobacco) and educational programmes.

All are underpinned with individual programmes and goals applied through team or one-on-one sessions in pools, gymnasia and tennis courts.

After the initial "detoxing," on to what most would consider a rigorous if tasty diet prepared by a specialist chef, the benefits show through by mid-week, backed up by lectures, cooking demonstrations, bush walks, meditation and plenty of time for spa and massage treatments.

Now, an alternative destination is



ALL IN ONE: Accommodation and vegetarian food are part of the Aro Ha package

under way near Queenstown, where Aro Ha Wellness Adventures is building a retreat near Glenorchy. Co-founder Damian Chaparro, an American who has been refining the model of a spa-style wellness for the past 10 years both here and in California, says he and partner Chris Madison have put \$25 million into the project.

Aro Ha combines a wide range of disciplines and activities – from vinyasa yoga and sub-alpine hiking through to strength training, meditation, therapeutic massage and vegetarian cuisine.

These are designed to be undertaken in dedicated groups over a period of five-to-seven days. Unlike some retreats, there is no opting out or choosing bits here and there.

"Multiple aspects of wellness are combined into one condensed experi-

ence," Mr Chaparro says. "It's a place where people come to change their perspective and return to centre. Bodies become lean, strong and flexible, as minds become calm, clear and present."

Mr Chaparro says the physical structure of the accommodation and other facilities are designed and constructed on the principles of "permaculture" to exemplify the best practices for living in balance with nature while meeting modern needs.

The buildings boast off-grid power generation, Passive Haus building techniques and this country's first renewable distributed heating scheme.

Local food will be used in a menu designed by chef Suzie Bohannon. Aro Ha will accommodate up to 32 guests with the target being groups of 14.