

Creating a Private Writing Retreat

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“A writer’s discipline is about the return [to writing].” - Jessica Lopez Lyman

Attending a writing retreat is up there on the list of perfect vacations for me; idyllic location ripe for creativity, workshops, a secluded world of like-minded people, and stimulating literary conversation. However, the cost can be steep, vacation time may not coincide with the scheduled retreat, and the amount of time at the retreat is usually limited from a few days to a week.

As a solution, I decided to create my own private retreat which requires no submission fees, and only has minimal program costs for itinerary, travel, food, and lodging, and I didn’t have to wait to see if I was accepted. I can have it align with my vacation time and take a weekend here or there for a mini retreat.

There are four key elements I used to create my private writing retreat.

1. A writing partner, 2. fresh eyes to create an aesthetically appealing environment, 3. a readily accessible list of locations conducive for writing, 4. and an itinerary.

There are two main books on the craft of writing; *How Dare We! Write: A Multicultural Creative Writing Discourse* by Sherry Quan Lee and *The Writer’s Idea Book* by Jack Heffron that sparked the idea to create a private writing retreat.

Several months ago my friend, Allyson called me and asked if I would be her writing partner. This idea came from Lee’s anthology from an essay, *Imposter Poet* by Jessica Lopez Lyman. At the end of Lyman’s essay she suggests the buddy system to provide accountability; just like working out with an exercise buddy, the idea is to come together on a designated day and time to write. Lyman cautions that meeting in person is an easy way to get distracted so we use a Google doc.

Allyson and I continue to honor this writing commitment because without it writing would be a solitary act with no accountability, feedback or encouragement. Fellowship and workshopping is one of the cornerstones of a good writing retreat.

Another essential is choosing a prime location. Last year I attended The Watering Hole week long winter retreat where I stayed in a cabin by a beautiful lake in South Carolina. After the retreat I had an all too brief trek back home to what now felt like a mundane environment.

Chapter three of Heffron's book, *Leading a Creative Life*, begins with a quote by Marcel Proust, "The voyage of discovery lies in not finding new landscapes, but in having new eyes." His should be - Heffron's prompts are designed to have the writer create the ideal space for writing. These are the abridged prompts:

Describe your ideal writing space

Write a detailed description of your workspace

Design the ideal writing space

Fill it with the things you love

I had lengthy responses to them and used his suggestions. Even when I don't use my designated writing space, there is something about visually having a nook for writing that validates and grounds me.

For those who have limited space, another idea is to have a tote bag that you fill with things that inspire you and have it ready to take to a local library or a location that is aesthetically appealing to you. If seeing with new eyes is a challenge, have a friend help you to see your everyday spaces as possible retreat places.

After I had my personal writing space situated, I created a list of places and events that I thought might help me to get in the mood to write. I searched online and went to the Inlandia website which lists local events. I wrote down directions for places with beautiful scenery like the Huntington and the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden.

The final thing, but one of the most important, is amassing a bank of writing prompts, some I create, others I pull from magazines, books and writing groups. I also find that Ted Talks and podcasts have fascinating topics to springboard into writing prompts. I maintain a running list of both locations of interest and writing prompts so they are ready when I am.

I named it *Roro's Retreat* and created an official itinerary where I had scheduled different events for each day. This helped me to develop the idea that this is not business as usual but an actual low-cost retreat, no credit card, scholarships or sponsors necessary. Although I had a fun itinerary planned I didn't follow it because I ended up writing almost non-stop. I am looking forward to another retreat in a couple of months during summer vacation.

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