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The Rise of the Sup Retreat, by Lisa duBusc Miller



By [evelynodoherty](#)



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"A chance to live the dream we're all after, and do it in style"
– Evelyn O'Doherty

One might wonder what makes any retreat, more specifically a Sup Surf Retreat, a hit. While hard to

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quantify the how and why, there does appear to be a fundamental recipe that can be followed to ensure success.



SUP RETREAT DREAMS – LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

It's all about the ingredients, so it makes sense to start with a slice of perfectly toasted paradise, surrounded by crystal clear azure seas baked to a comfortable 81 degrees. Add in warm salty breezes of the same delicious temperature. Sprinkle in plenty of pelicans, sea turtles and rustling palm trees. Top it off with puffy white clouds,



promise. Toss lightly and place it all just steps from consistently beckoning surf.



Villa Playa Maria in Rincon, Puerto Rico sits right on the surf break at Maria's Beach and offers every comfort for paddlers who want to live in style. Photo by: Chuck Patterson

SUP RETREAT BONUS: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE TRIBE

The pièce de résistance is an adventurous group of like-minded souls stoked to surf and stand up paddle to their heart's content, while strictly adhering to an itinerary caveated with:

"Entire schedule is subject to change at a moment's notice."

Ultimately, what this recipe allows is for those who come (doctors, teachers, psychologists, writers) to fully unplug from their regular lives and connect instead with each other and with the rhythm of the ocean.



When a gathering of likeminded souls come together to share in their passion, the ocean and their dreams ... it's tidal wave of success. Photo by: NY Surf Girl Retreats

WATERMAN'S LIFESTYLE RETREAT IN RINCON, PR.

In this case, it is called "Waterman's Lifestyle Retreat," held at [Villa Playa Maria](#) in Rincon, Puerto Rico.

This exceptional experience is hosted a few times a year by sup race fitness trainer [Evelyn O'Doherty](#) and legendary surfer [Chuck Patterson](#). This duo exudes an aloha vibe while making sure, through months of planning, hard work and attention to detail, that those who attend achieve a daily balance of chill & challenge, over five sumptuous days out on the water.



makes the Waterman's Lifestyle

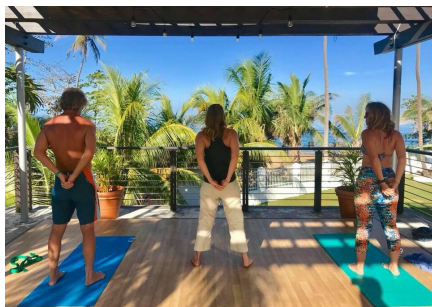
Retreat a treasure for the water tribe.

Photo by: Chuck Paterson

I was lucky enough to attend their **Waterman's Lifestyle Sup & Surf retreat** in April 2018, for a second year in a row, and yes, my inner child was nurtured while a sense of calm began as I discovered new ways to enjoy the glide. The ocean provided gentle waves – or as Chuck laughingly put it,

“Glassy, 1 foot and firing!”

And we all took the opportunity to bust out of our comfort zones and attempt new wave riding techniques.



Pre-surf warm up on the yoga deck with Evelyn overlooking the ocean at VPM.



WATERMAN'S LIFESTYLE: EXPLORE YOUR BOUNDARIES

I discovered a new passion—
sup surfing and could not get
enough of it. Some surfed,
some foil-surfed, some sup
surfing, some paddle boarded,
some kite-boarded, but we
were all just happily buoyant
beings.

**“We all took
the
opportunity
to bust out
of our
comfort
zones and
attempt new
wave riding
techniques.”**

Yes, I found myself feeling
laden with guilt over leaving
my commitments and family
behind to dive into several
days of quality “me time,” but I
still managed to get on the
flight and go. The second I
arrived in that little slice of

lying in bed and then do rooftop sun salutations to the actual setting sun, regret was the very last thing on my mind.

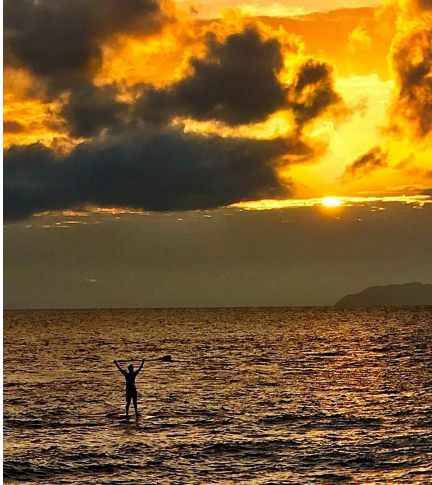


Lisa Miller finds plenty to smile about, having disconnected from home commitments for a week to plug into her Waterman's Lifestyle Dream in PR. Photo by: Chuck Patterson

SUP RETREAT: COMMUNITY ON THE WATER

And even more so when joyously embraced by some familiar faces of last year's retreat, along with some excited new welcoming ones. We had all come here, escaping the endless winter up north, with the same mission: to dial in our surf and paddle board skills while having fun, keeping expectations to a minimum and relaxation to a maximum.

awareness about water sports” while rejoicing in our common purpose and cheering each other on. It felt a bit like church, the ocean our pulpit.



“It felt a bit like church. The ocean our pulpit.” Photo by: Chuck Patterson

During our collective decompression, the food was healthy, the hydrating was often, the laughs genuine, the surfside setting idyllic, and the camaraderie on the water so joyous that we stayed out long after sunset.



“Make like a tree and work it!” sessions made for impromptu driftwood art for the mermaids.

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There were bonuses to this kind of intimate group dynamic, such as impromptu tips and lessons. For example, I learned how to make go pro movies and how to better access all my Go Pro photos. I also loved learning the in's and out's of surf and paddle board fin placement as well. And one afternoon, a few of us went to a local shop nearby to load up on new women-specific Sup Surf outfits.



Chuck's GoPro skills and mentorship are a huge bonus (besides his legendary waterman skills besides 🤔) to retreat participants. Evening GoPro talks become a part of the vibe.

Another noteworthy sidebar is that in addition to imparting extensive sup race training skills, Chuck, a waterman and talented Go Pro photographer, captured many perfect moments. He also made sure that we all left with those epic shots to post to social media and commemorate the trip.



The view from the top deck at the Villa provides an excellent perspective of Desecheo, the island 18 miles off of Rincon under a spectacular sunset every night. Photo: Lisa duBusc Miller

PUERTO RICO & THE EFFECT OF HURRICANE MARIA

At the time of this retreat, Puerto Rico was just 7 months into its rebuilding efforts following the [devastating damage of Hurricane Maria](#) and Irma. We were fortunate to be able to talk with locals, such as the owners of Villa Cofresi, to learn firsthand about details of the efforts.

“If everyone could have this opportunity, ocean health and coastal conservation would be even more paramount

political agenda.”

As we paddled all along the shores of Rincon, we saw the extent of coastal devastation up-close. The [Rincon Beach Boy](#) sup race was not able to be held this year due to all the damage, but it will be held next year on its 10th anniversary, and it's a sure bet that the race will be better than ever.



Once they fall in love with the land & water of Puerto Rico, participants want to do everything in their power to restore and protect it. Community service is all part of the package on the Waterman's Lifestyle Retreat. Photo by: Chuck Patterson

We also got to pitch in and help with a nearby beach cleanup, which left the beach a bit better off, and everyone feeling a bit more connected to this island paradise and its people. We supported local artists by attending the weekly art walk in town where

place and time, like my new necklace bearing the simple statement: SALTWATER.



Experiencing the Tres Palmas Marine Reserve from the perspective of your own vessel or sup, one becomes intimately connected with the beauty beneath. Photo: Lisa duBusc Miller

As we paddled across the Tres Palmas Marine Reserve on one of our long morning paddles, the quiet pristine beauty of the protected elkhorn coral left us feeling reverent. As we hovered on our boards gazing at the reef, I felt more connected to it, to the sea, and more protective of it all. If everyone could have this opportunity, ocean health and coastal conservation would be even more paramount on the global political agenda.



reef and protects beaches with sea Grant, Puerto Rico, a program promoting the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources in Puerto Rico & the Carribean. Photo: Evelyn O'Doherty

FISH TACOS, SUNSETS AND REFLECTIONS

Our final night was gathered around a square outdoor table eating fish tacos prepared by Villa Playa Maria's extraordinary chef, Gaby. We reflected on what we'd learned and shared personal stories while feeling more relaxed and confident in our sup, surf and sup surf skills.



Arriving as friends and strangers, departing as family. Photo by: Chuck Patterson

As Evelyn summed up so beautifully in her own reflection on the retreat:

**“A group of
people
started the**

**expressing a
need for a
reset and
time for
reflection
before
moving
ahead into
the next
season. Upon
departure,
each one of
them is
happy, tan,
smiling, and
full of water-
based
memories for
the year
ahead. New
connections
have been
made and
relationships
shared. No
matter
where we go,
we are**

the water.

Yes, Evelyn, that is exactly how we all feel.

Written by, Lisa duBusc Miller

For MORE information about Villa Playa Maria:

<http://www.rinconpuertoricobor.com>

For MORE information regarding the 2019

Waterman's Lifestyle Retreat:

<http://www.evelynodoherty.com>

ABOUT LISA:



Lisa duBusc Miller was born in Greenwich, CT. She received her BA from Bucknell University and her Masters in Psychology from The American University.

She lived in London, Thailand and Vietnam before working on Wall Street for several years, where she was a published Sovereign Credit

focus on SUP, surfing, sailing and skiing. She has written about her own world travels, as well as profiling athletes who excel out in the ocean, and those who serve to protect it. Her articles have been published in The Rye Record, The Rye City Review, Global Living Magazine, Adirondack Daily Enterprise, The Art Of Magazine, Indagare Magazine, Eastern Surf Magazine, The Greenwich Citizen, The Examiner News, Whalebone Magazine, The Pingry Review, American Yacht Club's Scotch Caps, Bucknell Magazine, and Scuttlebutt Sailing News. Mrs. Miller lives in Rye, NY and Montauk, NY with her family, which includes three children and two dogs. She gets out on the water almost every day.

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Wonderful Story, Lisa..!!

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