

# THE GREAT ESCAPE

These wellness retreats are a refuge for Black men to heal trauma, find community and practice self-care

By Stephanie Long

More Black men are seeking spaces for restoration, and it's not hard to see why. The suicide rate among this group has steadily increased over the past decade—with research showing that Black men are less likely to receive mental health support, despite experiencing disproportionate levels of trauma. A study by the National Vital Statistics System found that suicide rates among Black youth ages 10 to 24 increased by nearly 37 percent between 2018 and 2021, rising from 8.2 to 11.2 deaths per 100,000 people. And among Black adults ages 25 to 44, rates rose by nearly 23 percent during the same period. Meanwhile, the persistent stress of racialized violence—from police brutality to systemic oppression—creates an ongoing mental health crisis that often goes unaddressed, especially in Black men.

In response, a growing number of alternative healing spaces—retreats, meditation circles and somatic therapy practices—are offering refuge from the unrelenting pressures of daily survival. Here are six transformative wellness-retreat spaces designed specifically to help Black men heal, grow and realign.

## **Healing, Rest & Embodied Liberation for Men of Color (Big Sur, California)**

Rest is not a luxury but a birthright: This is the core message of a retreat led by Danny Fluker, Jr., author and founder of Black Boys OM, and cofacilitator Darnell Lamont Walker. Hosted at Esalen Institute, the program focuses on mindfulness, meditation and yoga nidra. “The goal is for participants to come and rest—nothing else,” Fluker says.

## **The Black Man's Self-Mastery Retreat (Puerto Morelos, Mexico)**

Cofounders Gerald “Dr. G” Hassell, Psy. D., and Omar Buckner provide a balance of solitude and community to help retreat participants experience personal breakthroughs. “Whenever you get Black men together in a safe space, something miraculous is going to happen,” says Hassell. One powerful moment at a recent retreat saw a man overcoming childhood trauma by leaping into a cenote, fully supported by his brothers in healing.

## **Black Men Resting (Brooklyn)**

“Growing up, you hear, ‘Black men shouldn't cry,’” says Cordarius Williams, a participant in this monthly healing space at the Brooklyn Wellness Club. “This program is important, to break generational trauma and stereotypes we've experienced.” Black Men Resting is the creation of Brooklyn Wellness Club founder Paris Alexandra and creative director Denzel Deranamie. “I had been focused on Black women,” she explains, “and wanted to extend this work to Black men who support and nurture.” Alongside Kevin Joseph, Nigel Franklyn (of 500 Men Making a Difference) and Coach Tre (of Let's Eat Fitness), they center rest through yoga, meditation and sound work.

## **Brotherhood Reimagined (Joshua Tree, California)**

In August 2023, dating app BLK launched this wellness retreat at AutoCamp in Joshua Tree, California, to provide workshops and group discussions on love, identity and

spirituality. Participant and ESSENCE editor Okla Jones says, “It was a transformative experience that changed my perception of what a man is supposed to be.” BLK says the next retreat will take place in 2026.

## **Meditation for Black Men Who Do Too Much (virtual)**

Created by Lakim Desir, James “Amen” Bourne and Kenji Summers, this digital healing space challenges the hustle mentality. “When my father passed from heart failure, I realized he lived overworked and underloved,” Summers reflects. After hosting meditation retreats in New York, he helped start Meditation for Black Men Who Do Too Much. The monthly online mass meditation has reached Black men all over the country and abroad. Attendee Sance Nspire says, “The key is not just that it's a space for Black men but that it's created by Black men who have done the work on themselves.”

## **Permission and Refuge: A Healing Retreat for Men of Color (Stockbridge, Massachusetts)**

Launched by activist and globally prominent yoga and meditation teacher Reggie Hubbard, in partnership with Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health, this retreat addresses the need for healing-centered activism after George Floyd's murder. Since its inception, more than 60 men of color—straight, gay, queer and trans, ages 21 to 83—have found solace here. Music and sound play an integral role, with sound healing and movement practices set to Black music. As Hubbard says, “Can you imagine doing sun salutations to Fela Kuti?” Yes, we can.