



# Getting the right balance

A Perth boutique travel agency organises trips which aim to harmonise the mind, body and spirit

**I**t was a scary step and one she had persistently resisted. Julie Baker had long been involved, in one form or another, in the travel and tourism industry. Now she had the calling to provide tours that centred on her own interests of improving the mind, body and spirit.

And as much as she resisted the idea ("I really didn't want to expose that personal aspect of myself"), she couldn't shake it.

Her travel clients, who had become intrigued by her penchant for yoga and meditation, were supportive, so she took a deep breath and launched her new career.

The result was Journeys of the Spirit, a Perth-based

too many heads these days, 15 years ago the concept of "mind, body and spirit" holidays was "pretty wild . . . pretty out there", she says. Even spa resort vacations were a few years off.

But she discovered a market existed for people who wanted to rediscover a balance in their lives. Find some meaning. In some cases it followed a massive shock like a divorce; in some cases it was to cater for extremely successful people who discovered that success didn't bring happiness.

What they normally have in common, she says, is they're interesting, independent and sophisticated travellers. And usually well travelled. And usually solo. With Journeys of the Spirit, travelling solo is the norm, not the exception.

"They are solo travellers who want to travel with like-minded people," she explains. "It's a dinner-party size group of interesting, sophisticated travellers. They're wanting a deeper experience; they're wanting to re-connect."

Most (around 70 per cent) are women. "But more and more men are having the courage to say, 'I'm stressed and need something to re-balance'."

In the beginning, Ms Baker configured tailor-made trips with a health and wellbeing bent. Then she decided to take small groups to places most people wouldn't have the confidence to go on their own.

She started with the ayurvedic retreats to Kerala, India, in 2003. They've proved extremely popular and she's done 10 now and puts on two a year. "They sell out six to 12 months in advance."

Other tours have gone to Bhutan (that mystical kingdom where happiness is revered), to Peru, and Italy, where the emphasis is on food, wine, the arts and walking. "I look for a healing modality or the essence of a culture and then I create a journey based on balancing mind, body and spirit based on what that essence is," she says.

"You can just see people's energy rise. There's the balance of rest and exploration and discovery."

The experience doesn't end at Perth airport. After the travellers return home, dinners and get-togethers are arranged. "It's stepping back into what they got, what they shared with each other," Ms Baker says. "Friendships are formed so they can keep the momentum. The idea is it doesn't just stop at the travel experience or the retreat. It continues when you get home."

**'Friendships are formed so they can keep the momentum.'**

boutique travel operator, and that was 15 years ago. "Travel experiences and retreats to rejuvenate and nourish your soul," is how she describes what it offers. "I could do anything but it has to have that element of balancing mind, body and spirit."

And though it mightn't turn