SUSTAINABLE GROWTH CONSULTING & COACHING, LLC

Why Sold-Out Retreats Still Lose Money

The five pricing mistakes that quietly drain retreat profits, and the simple math that catches them before you commit.

Created by **Arilda Surridge & Alex Sandev**

THE PROBLEM

"We sold every spot. So where did the money go?"

It happens more often than you would think. A retreat fills completely. Participants love it. And when the host sits down afterward to look at the numbers, the profit is a fraction of what they expected. Sometimes it is zero. Sometimes it is negative.

Not because anything went wrong. Because the price was set before the numbers were known.

Most first-time retreat hosts price by feel: what similar retreats seem to charge, what feels comfortable to ask, what a friend paid for something similar. Then costs get discovered one at a time, after the price is already public.

The pattern: price first, discover costs later, absorb the difference personally. Every one of the five mistakes in this guide is a version of that pattern.

The good news: the math that prevents it takes about ten minutes. This guide walks through the five mistakes and gives you the exact checks to run before you announce a price.

MISTAKE 1

Pricing from comparison, not from costs

"Other retreats like mine charge around $2,500, so I will too." The problem: you cannot see their costs. Their venue deal, their group size, their included extras, and their margins are invisible. Copying a price without copying the cost structure underneath it is how a full retreat ends up unprofitable.

The check: build your price from your own numbers: total costs, target profit, realistic group size. Then compare to the market. Comparison is a sanity check, never a starting point.

MISTAKE 2

Forgetting the invisible costs

Venue and meals are easy to remember. These are the ones that show up late and eat the margin:

- Airport transfers and local transportation
- Payment processing fees (typically about 3% of every registration)
- Materials, printing, welcome gifts, special events
- Your own travel, room, and meals
- A scouting visit to the venue
- Marketing costs: ads, design, landing page
- Contingency for currency shifts, no-shows, and surprises

The check: after listing every cost you can think of, add 10 to 15% contingency. If the retreat still works on paper with the buffer, it works in real life.

MISTAKE 3

Building the budget on a full room

Most retreat budgets are built assuming every spot sells. But your costs arrive whether the room is full or not. The question that matters is not "what do I make if it fills?" It is "what happens if it doesn't?"

Break-even = Total costs ÷ Price per attendee

A worked example. Say your retreat is priced at $2,800 with $12,400 in total costs:

Enrollment	Gross revenue	Costs	Profit
10 attendees (full)	**$28,000**	**$12,400**	**$15,600**
8 attendees	**$22,400**	**$12,400**	**$10,000**
5 attendees (break-even)	**$14,000**	**$12,400**	**$1,600**
4 attendees	**$11,200**	**$12,400**	**-$1,200**

Five registrations is the line between profit and loss. Knowing that number changes your decisions: the deposit policy, the marketing timeline, even whether the venue contract is safe to sign.

The check: know your break-even number before you sign anything. If you would still feel okay running the retreat at break-even enrollment, the plan is resilient. If not, adjust now.

MISTAKE 4

Adding inclusions that don't add value

The instinct when a price feels high is to add more: another excursion, a gift bag, an extra workshop. Every addition raises your costs, and most of them do not raise what participants would pay. Sometimes adding more does not make the retreat better. It makes it more expensive to run and harder to deliver.

The check: for every inclusion ask two questions. Does it support the outcome participants came for? Would anyone pay more because it is included? Two nos: cut it.

MISTAKE 5

Treating your own time as free

Months of planning, marketing, and delivery are real costs, even when no invoice arrives. When your time is priced at zero, a retreat can look profitable on paper while actually paying you less than any other work you could have done with those hours.

The check: estimate your total hours (planning, marketing, delivery, follow-up) and divide the projected profit by them. If the hourly result embarrasses you, the price, the format, or the plan needs to change.

The five checks in one sentence: price from your own costs, list the invisible ones, know your break-even, cut inclusions that add cost without value, and pay yourself.

NEXT STEP

Run your own numbers

Everything in this guide comes down to one ten-minute exercise: your attendees, your price, your full cost list, your break-even. Two free tools to make it easy:

- **Retreat Profit Calculator**, enter four numbers, see your revenue, costs, profit, margin, and break-even instantly
- **The Retreat Starter Plan**, a short workbook covering the five decisions to make before you book anything

Both are free at **sustainablegrowthconsultingcoaching.com/resources**

And if you would rather have experienced eyes on your numbers before you commit, that is exactly what we do. We look at the whole retreat: the concept, the pricing, the participant experience, and how you will actually fill it.

Want us to look at your retreat with you?

We help therapists and business owners create retreats that are meaningful for participants and sustainable for the business. Strategy, pricing, participant experience, marketing, and systems, the whole retreat, not just one piece of it.

See how we can help

sustainablegrowthconsultingcoaching.com/retreat-consulting