

NATURE'S CURE

Body and mind are both improved with time in the great outdoors—it's a truism that dates back to ancient proverbs and is backed up by cutting-edge science. // *By Jen Murphy*



IT WAS PARACELSUS, the 16th-century German-Swiss physician, who presciently declared, "The art of healing comes from nature, not from the physician." Fast-forward to an era of urban living and non-stop screen time and doctors are now prescribing time outdoors as the best cure for ailments ranging from depression to diabetes.

Japanese culture has long believed in the curative powers of nature. Research by Japanese scientist Dr. Qing Li, an expert in the powers of "shinrin-yoku," or forest bathing, has shown 50% of the positive health effects of forest bathing come from the chemistry of the forest air, which has a higher oxygen content compared to an urban setting. Health benefits are also linked to plant chemicals called phytoncides, natural oils that are part of a plant's defense system. Human exposure to phytoncides have been shown to reduce physiological stress, blood pressure, and heart rate.

The concept of forest bathing is as simple as slowly walking through a tree-filled area, quieting the mind and breathing deeply. Great thinkers and creatives such as John Muir, Hippocrates,

JOHN KASPUHL

“THE CONCEPT OF FOREST BATHING IS AS SIMPLE AS SLOWLY WALKING THROUGH A TREE-FILLED AREA, QUIETING THE MIND, AND BREATHING DEEPLY.”

Henry David Thoreau, and Nikola Tesla found inspiration on walks in the woods. But forests aren't the only natural landscapes that yield benefits. At a time when humans are more nature-deprived than ever before, any outdoor fix, be it a walk on the beach or ramble through urban gardens, will do. Studies have shown exposure to any natural stimuli can lower blood pressure, boost immune function, reduce stress hormone levels, improve mood, and promote immune-system function.

People evolved in natural environments, but urbanization, the industrialization of agriculture, and a shift to a sedentary lifestyle have destroyed our relationship with nature. In 1950, around

30% of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 2018, that number was 55%, and, by 2050, it is projected to be 68%. And the work-from-home, Zoom-meeting culture has us spending more time than ever indoors. On average, Americans spend 93% of their day inside. A rapidly growing body of evidence shows restoring access to nature can alleviate some of the most significant public-health problems, including obesity, stress, violence, and social isolation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for nature-based therapy. During the lockdown in England in 2020, a survey showed 85% of adults reported that being in nature makes them

happy and those who visited natural space in the last seven days reported being happier than those that hadn't.

A free miracle drug sounds too good to be true, but there is a growing movement of medical centers and doctors around the world prescribing nature remedies ranging from general advice to get outside at least three times a week to specific instructions such as walking in a park for one hour a day. The U.S. now has over 100 provider-based nature prescription programs, while countries like Scotland now have trained ecotherapists, and doctors in Australia have been prescribing greener workspaces to improve both health of workers as well as productivity and job satisfaction.

A pill-free answer to a happier, healthier lifestyle is as easy as walking out your front door. Read on for more inspiration that will get you outside.



JULIAN RENTZSCH

Melanie Webb

The Park City, Utah-based owner of WebbWell and author of “Adventures in Mother Nature’s Gym,” runs luxury wellness retreats and nature immersions.



SEAN FITZGERALD

How did you personally discover the healing powers of nature?

After working as a wildlife biologist in Southern Utah I took myself out of nature and lived in Washington D.C., working as an environmental consultant for the federal government. I lived to work, putting in 11 hours, six days a week, and kept getting sick. I didn't realize I was burning out, and it took leaving that job and spending time in nature again to regain my health as well as clarity on what I wanted to do—help others rediscover themselves through nature.

What benefits are there to being outdoors rather than indoors, whether it's working out or writing emails?

Studies show that when you do activity outside versus inside your systolic blood pressure can drop up to 10%. Also, the cognitive frontal cortex of the brain gets a reboot and restorative break when exposed to the sights, smells,

and sounds of nature. Those natural soundscapes and landscapes we evolved with soothe the most primal part of our brain.

What can clients expect from your retreats?

I partner with different luxury properties located in wild places, like Vermejo (left), a Ted Turner Reserve set on 550,000 acres in New Mexico, to lead four- to seven-day, all-inclusive retreats programmed with guided mind-body workouts, breathing meditations, and outdoor excursions. Activities might include outdoor yoga, horseback riding, hiking, and mountain biking, and all meals are sourced locally and sustainably to provide nourishment. The focus is getting people to move their bodies in a nature-rich place.

How is an immersion different from a retreat and who benefits most from an immersion?

Immersion are longer, one-on-

one, 10- to 21-day trips focused on mental and emotional transformation. For real change to happen from within, you need time and solitude in nature. These programs have been popular with what I like to call power players in recovery, or successful business owners who look in the mirror one day and realize their next project is them.

What's included in an immersion?

Immersion include pre-trip discovery meetings, nutritionist evaluations and three-month customized meal plans, up to four hours a day of breathwork, meditation, and outdoor fitness activities plus remote follow-up coaching.

What are some of your favorite retreat and immersion destinations?

Kivik, a trapped-in-time fishing village in Österlen, Sweden, and Todos Santos, a bohemian beach community in Baja, Mexico. webbwell.com

“The brain gets a reboot and restorative break when exposed to the sights, smells, and sounds of nature.”



GADGETS TO GIVE YOU A DOSE OF THE OUTDOORS INDOORS

ISTOCK



WAVE PREMIUM SLEEP THERAPY SOUND MACHINE

The sounds of city sirens and noisy neighbors don't produce sweet dreams. Drown out the distractions with a choice of six soothing soundtracks, including the lullaby of rain pattering and streams bubbling. An optional sleep timer shuts off the machine after 15, 30, or 60 minutes, and it's compact enough to fit in your carry-on bag for travel. pureenrichment.com

HATCH RESTORE SUNRISE ALARM CLOCK

Morning sunlight affects your circadian rhythm and signals to your body that it's time to wake up. Research suggests when you wake up due to sunlight, your body will naturally shake off sleep grogginess and be more alert. This smart sleep device's sunrise alarm mimics morning light and pairs it with gentle sounds like lapping ocean waves. hatch.co



NATURESPACE APP

Calm anxiety or fuel creativity with this free app that transports users to serene natural environments. Cutting-edge recording technology recreates natural soundscapes ranging from a rainforest in Hawaii at sunset to a north woods lake with soft waves and crickets chirping at night, with remarkable accuracy. Choose from over 120 natural spaces, averaging 12-plus minutes. naturespace.org

Must-Reads on Nature as Medicine

INTO THE FOREST

How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness by Dr. Qing Li
A deep-dive into forest medicine by one of the foremost experts in the Japanese art of "shinrin-yoku," or forest bathing.

THE NATURE FIX

Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative by Florence Williams
A compelling investigation into whether time spent in nature can improve both the quality and quantity of life.

THE HEARTBEAT OF TREES

Embracing Our Ancient Bond with Forests and Nature by Peter Wohlleben

The follow-up to the German forester's bestseller, "The Hidden Life of Trees," draws on new scientific discoveries to show how humans can rekindle their connection to the natural world.

NATURAL REMEDY

A Story of Depression and Healing by Richard Mabey

A powerful memoir that relates distance from nature to a larger problem in modern life and a tale of how the author's re-engagement with nature leads him out of his depression.

Move Your Workout Outdoors

INSTEAD OF THE EXERCISE BIKE

Book a self-guided or group cycling trip in the Swiss Alps with luxury bike tour operator Butterfield & Robinson. Electric bikes make Tour de France-worthy climbs accessible to all. butterfield.com

INSTEAD OF THE TREADMILL

Hit the ground in the Dolomites (*left*) on a guided trail-running vacation with outfitter Dolomite Mountains. Run along the Alta Via N.1, one of the region's famous high routes, over five days sleeping in mountain huts or boutique hotels along the way. dolomitemountains.com

INSTEAD OF THE ROWING MACHINE

Get out on the water in a kayak with adventure outfitter OARS. Itineraries in Baja, Mexico island hop around the Sea of Cortez and promise wildlife encounters with seals and whales. oars.com

INSTEAD OF THE SKI ERG

Explore the wilderness of Banff National Park in Canada on Nordic skis. Base yourself out of Skoki Lodge, which can only be reached by gliding along a seven-mile ski trail. Once there, you'll have five adjoining valleys to discover on skis. skoki.com

Jared Hanley

The co-founder and CEO of NatureQuant, a new company based in Bend, Oregon, which optimizes technology to track, assess, and promote nature exposure.



JULIAN RENTZSCH

There are apps that track steps, sleep quality, heart rate, and more, but an app that monitors time spent outdoors is novel. How exactly does it work? Doctors are already prescribing time outside, but there's no way to monitor or quantify it. Our app, NatureDose, acts as a personalized nature prescription tracker that monitors your aggregate time inside, outside and exposed to nature.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends we get 10,000 steps a day. How much nature exposure should we be aiming for? There is no consensus, but most doctors writing nature prescriptions suggest getting outside for two hours a week. That is what we're using as our base. Research shows if you get that amount of nature per week it will improve your mental and physical wellbeing.

How do you quantify nature? We've created NatureScore, a mapping system that captures every tree, body of water,

grassland and other natural elements as well as human elements, like buildings, down to 10 meters. This allows us to determine the quality and quantity of natural elements for a location. A score of zero, for example, is a largely built environment, where 100 is a largely natural environment. We've mapped and created a score for every census tract in the U.S. and Canada, and Europe will be finished later this year.

Can these scores serve as health predictors for cities? NatureScores are super-predictive of a lot of health outcomes. We know, based on data from the CDC, that there is a correlation between obesity, cancer, asthma, and mental stress based on location. Research shows that for every 10% increase in greenness within a 0.5-kilometer radius of where you live, your chance of all-cause mortality death is reduced by four percent.

What implications do these scores have for urban planning? Right now, the Arbor Day Foundation is using our data to determine

"There is a correlation between obesity, cancer, asthma, and mental stress based on location."

where access to nature isn't equitable in cities. They can take those nature-deficient scores to donors and then use our data to show how tree planting in certain neighborhoods could affect the rates of obesity as much as five percent in 30 years.

Is a walk in Manhattan equivalent to a hike in Colorado? If you're in a park or formal natural area you are scored 100% credit for your time there so every minute you spend in the park counts as a one-minute dose of nature. If you're walking in downtown Boulder, Colorado, versus the foothills, you may get credited 40 seconds of nature for every minute. In Manhattan or the Las Vegas strip, one minute outside might only be equivalent to 10 seconds of nature.

Do different types of nature have more powerful benefits? For example, is a walk in a forest better than a walk on the beach? We've found that desert is not as beneficial as water and water is not as beneficial as live vegetative biomass, like trees and forests, but all of it is better than anything human modified.

Will you gamify the app? We have plans to add features like reminders to get off your screen because you haven't been outside in two days. We hope to partner with different organizations to create challenges with motivations like a coupon for REI if you hit a certain number of minutes in nature per month. We foresee insurance companies and employers using the technology to incentivize healthier living. naturequant.com

TOP RETREATS TO SOAK IN NATURE'S HEALING POWERS

These off-the-grid escapes complement their wild landscapes with five-star comforts and amenities.



© WEBER ARCTIC

1. ARCTIC WATCH WILDERNESS LODGE, CANADA

The most northerly fly-in lodge on Earth has 16 private cabins and your only neighbors are polar bears, muskox, and Arctic foxes. Explore the surrounding tundra by ebike or ATV or take to the water on paddleboards or kayaks. For the ultimate whale-watching experience, visit in summer when thousands of beluga whales congregate in a bay just a 15-minute walk from the lodge. weberarctic.com
 ➔ ARCTIC WILDERNESS LODGE AERODROME: 1 mile

2. EXPLORA EL CHALTÉN, ARGENTINA

Experience the wilds of southernmost South America at this 20-room lodge set within Los Huemules Reserve, a private 14,300-acre parcel devoted to the preservation of native flora and fauna. Guided activities range from ice hiking on glaciers to treks to dazzling Desert Lake. explora.com
 ➔ EL CALAFATE AIRPORT: 135 miles



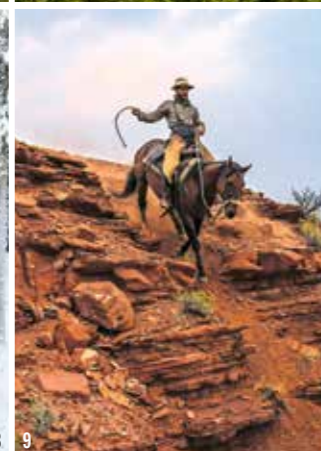
CELINE FREES

3. GANGTEY LODGE, BHUTAN

An all-suite adventure base overlooking Phobjikha Valley, Gangtey Lodge delivers an experience steeped in both nature and culture. The valley is laced with trekking trails that wind through blue pine forests and past endangered black-necked crane roosting grounds. Mountain biking is also top-notch, with trails that lead to local villages and far-flung monasteries. At day's end, reward your efforts with a traditional hot-stone bath. gangteylodge.com
 ➔ BATHPALATHANG AIRPORT: 89 miles

4. THE GREEN O, GREENOUGH, MONTANA

A new adults-only hideaway from the owners of luxe glamping outfit Paws Up is tucked away in a dense patch of towering pines on the southern edge of its 37,000-acre sister property. Twelve architecturally striking accommodations include treehouses perched 23 feet in the air and curvy round houses that have bedrooms with 180-degree forest views. thegreeno.com
 ➔ MISSOULA AIRPORT: 38 miles



© GANGTEY LODGE (3), © THE GREEN O (4), © KASIIYA PAPAAYO (5), TEAGAN CUNIFFE (6), ROB CANNING (7), FREDRIK BROMAN (8), SYLER PERALTA-RAMOS (9), KONRAD BORKOWSKI (10)

5. KASIIYA PAPAAYO, COSTA RICA

With just nine spacious tented suites set on 123 acres of untouched jungle between a hill and two dreamy beaches, this 100% off-the-grid eco retreat feels like your own private island. Floor-to-ceiling windows make it easy to spot monkeys from your bed, but you'll eventually want to get up to snorkel, kayak, and hike around the grounds or venture further on surf safaris and boat expeditions to marine-rich reefs and wildlife-filled mangroves. kasiya.com
 ➔ LIBERIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT: 24 miles

6. LITTLE KULALA CAMP, SOSSUSVLEI, NAMIBIA

The closest base to the renowned dunes of Sossusvlei, Little Kulala Camp is set within the 67,000-acre Kulala Wilderness Reserve. Nicknamed "the Living Desert," this region is home to desert-adapted wildlife like ostrich, aardwolf, and dune lark. One of the darkest places on Earth, stargazing is unrivaled and each of the camp's 11 suites features rooftop beds for starry sleep outs. wilderness-safaris.com
 ➔ HOSEA KUTAKO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT: 237 miles

7. RIFFLIN' HITCH LODGE, LABRADOR, CANADA

Immersed in the solitude of deep wilderness, Rifflin' Hitch Lodge is an angler's paradise located steps from the Eagle River, one of the top Atlantic salmon-producing rivers in North America. Seven rustic, yet elegantly appointed rooms feature paintings from Canadian folk artists and goose-down comforters. Over-the-top meals might include your catch of the day cooked on an open-fire riverside or a wine-paired evening feast showcasing the regional bounty. rifflinhitchlodge.com
 ➔ GOOSE BAY AIRPORT TO HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY: 6 miles (then helicopter transfer to Rifflin')

8. AURORA SAFARI CAMP, SWEDEN

This Arctic glamping experience in remote Swedish Lapland

offers the unique experience of hot-air ballooning under the aurora borealis. Snowshoe and fatbike quiet forest trails in winter; kayak and swim out to a floating sauna in summer. aurorasafaricamp.com

➔ KIRUNA AIRPORT: 165 miles

9. 3 SPEAR RANCH, DUBOIS, WYOMING

Located in the small cowboy town of Dubois, this eight-cabin luxe ranch is a 90-minute drive from the grandeur of Yellowstone National Park and an hour from the majesty of Grand Teton National Park. Nestled on 1,200 acres, the property has plenty of natural attractions to keep you on site, from warm springs to hiking and horseriding trails and two lakes for fishing. 3spearlodge.com

➔ DUBOIS WYOMING MUNICIPAL AIRPORT: 5 miles

10. ARDFIN, JURA, SCOTLAND

George Orwell described Jura, an isolated island in the Inner Hebrides, as "an extremely un-get-at-able place". Ardfin, a 12,000-acre estate on the southern tip of the island, is worth the effort to reach. Outdoor pursuits include golfing on what's been called the greatest course on the planet, kayaking, deer stalking, and exploring endless trails, including one that passes Barnhill, the house where Orwell completed "1984." ardfin.com

➔ ISLAY AIRPORT: 19 miles

11. CAP KAROSO, SUMBA, INDONESIA

Opening in September, this eco-haven situated on pristine Karoso beach in southwest Sumba Island boasts 47 rooms, 20 oceanfront villas and a sustainable farm run by a local Sumbanese team. Local-led excursions include snorkeling the calm waters of Karoso Lagoon, hiking to waterfalls, and getting schooled in the island's signature sport, Sandalwood Pony riding. capkaroso.com

➔ TAMBOLAKA AIRPORT: 30 miles