

Self-Guided Forest Bathing

Introduction

Have you ever found yourself captivated by the sound of bird chatter in a quiet wood, or have lost track of time sitting by and watching water? These are two examples of forest bathing experiences. The term, 'forest bathing', may be a relatively new one, but it might be something you are already practicing.

- Forest bathing (also known as, “shinrin-yoku”) is spending time in nature in a calm and relaxed way that allows you to connect with your natural surroundings. It can take many forms from a gentle stroll through the woods to enjoying a mindful meal in your backyard.
- Many cultures around the world have ancient practices that would be considered forest bathing.
- In more recent history, forest bathing became a formalized practice in Japan as a way of promoting wellness and rejuvenation through nature connection.
- With the formalization of forest bathing practices in Japan, it has allowed the scientific community to study the benefits of this practice. The findings show wide-reaching wellness benefits from boosting our immune systems to improving our sleep and mental health.
- Forest bathing does not need to take place in a forest, it can be practiced in any natural setting including on a beach or in your own backyard. It might be something you're doing already!

Practicing Forest Bathing

A forest bathing experience can take many forms. There is no right or wrong way to have a calm and relaxing nature experience. These guidelines are here simply to help you make your experience more rejuvenating.

- Go for the journey: Many nature excursions are planned in order for us to reach a certain destination. With forest bathing, it's about the journey, not the destination. There is no minimum or maximum amount of time to spend forest bathing and no destination to reach. Pick a comfortable location (which could be your own backyard) and know how long you would like to spend forest bathing so you don't need to worry about time (set an alarm if needed).
- Be quiet: Plan for some quiet time and avoid distractions by keeping your phone on silent and refraining to listening to a device while forest bathing. If forest bathing with a group, take some time for everyone in the group to be silent so you can better listen to the sounds of nature.

- Explore with alert senses: Use your senses to experience your natural surroundings. Take in the sights, sounds, smells and other sensations you encounter along the way.
- Move slowly: Walk slowly or even take some time to stand or sit still. When we move slowly, it helps us embody a calm and relaxed state and allows us to better take in the atmosphere of the forest.
- Be open to connect: In a forest bathing experience, we want to give ourselves the opportunity to connect with nature and soak in the atmosphere of the forest. If your attention wanders off in a different direction, you can use a nature connection prompt to help bring your attention back to your present moment experience and natural surroundings.
- Follow joy: It is also helpful to notice what experiences we enjoy most. You may find there are certain sounds you love or types of natural habitats you connect with more deeply. Allow yourself to follow any little joys you encounter along the way (or plan to encounter them) – the more you enjoy your experience, the more you will benefit from it.

Planning and Preparing for a Forest Bathing Experience

Although little is needed for an enjoyable forest bathing experience, a little planning and preparation can be helpful in avoiding common discomforts and to help make sure you get the most from your experience.

- Select a safe and comfortable setting. If we feel unsafe or uncomfortable (e.g. for fear of getting lost or encountering wildlife etc.), it will be challenging to have a calm and relaxing experience. Selecting a familiar location and going with another person can be helpful in alleviating these concerns.
- Check the weather and dress for the weather. Again, it will be difficult to enjoy the birdsong if you're shivering in the early morning cold. Have extra layers and be prepared so you can embrace the elements.
- Pack some essentials for the season and weather such as: sunscreen, hat, bug repellent, hand/foot warmers, water/tea, snacks, etc.
- Plan ahead for washroom breaks and make sure you know your available washroom options. Not having this facility available when needed could lead to uncomfortable forest bathing or an experience cut short.
- Bring any other comforts that will help make the experience enjoyable such as a blanket for warmth or resting outside.