

Shinrin-yoku Forest Therapy Trail

Humans need the calming effect of nature to return us to a normal state. Before the Industrial Revolution, humans spent 99.9% of their time in nature. After the Industrial Revolution, humans only spent 0.07% of their time in nature. Spending time in a forest induces a state of physiologic relaxation which increases mental and physical health.

*-Yoshifumi Miyazaki, author of *Shinrin-yoku: The Japanese Way of Forest Bathing for Health and Relaxation**

- * Shinrin-yoku means “taking in the forest” or “forest bathing” in the Japanese language. Shinrin-yoku is an ancient practice of using a forest atmosphere to improve mental and physical relaxation. This experience nurtures heart-centered relationships between all peoples and the more-than-human world of nature.
- * Leave your phone, camera, and any other distractions behind so that you can be fully present in this experience. If you are with others, agree to resist talking to one another until your Shinrin-yoku experience is complete.

Did you know that medical research continues to prove that many health benefits result from spending time surrounded by trees including reduced stress, lower blood pressure, improved mood, increased focus, and increased energy? Humans don't just feel good in nature...we need it!

- * **Stand still for a moment.**
- * **Immerse yourself in this place.**
- * **What are you seeing? Hearing? Smelling?**
- * **Walk this path slowly.**
- * **Notice the sensation of the path beneath your feet. Look for tiny things – flowers, leaves, and pebbles, patterns in nature. Pause along the trail: allow your eyes to gently wander over the landscape along the trail, beside the trail, and above the trail.**

Did you know that immersing yourself in a forest can improve your mood, reduce depression, and rejuvenate your mind?

- * Lean against a tree.**
- * Feel the texture of the bark against your back.**
- * Imagine that the tree is covering you with a safe dome.**
- * You are standing inside this tree's protective circle.**

Did you know that forest air is the epitome of healthy air? The air truly is considerably cleaner under the trees, because the trees act as giant air filters. Leaves and needles hang in a steady breeze catching floating particles.

- * Look at the trees around you.
- * Touch the bark.
- * Starting at the roots or base of the tree, let your eyes search up the trunk of the tree, follow the branches, and look up at the canopy of leaves.
- * This forest is alive and “breathing” or releasing healthy chemicals into the air around you.
- * Trees’ natural fragrance lowers blood pressure and decreases stress.
- * Breathing in phytonicides (Tree essential oils with medicinal properties and pronounced “Fy-ton-ih-sides”) increases your immune system and your ability to combat infections, autoimmune disorders, cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

Did you know that people who live or spend time in areas with a lot of trees have 82% better overall health and live 7 years longer than people who are disconnected from nature?

- * **Breathe deeply.**
- * **Stretch your arms up toward the sky.**
- * **Breathe intentionally: in and out, in and out.**
- * **Phytonicides are one of the greatest treasures of the forest.**
- * **A tree emits active phytonicides to create a field of protection around itself against harmful bugs, bacteria, and disease.**
- * **Just by BREATHING these into our lungs, our body is encouraged to produce natural killer (NK) cells that protect us from harmful diseases.**

Did you know that a two-hour walk in the forest increases NK cell activity that can last for days?

- * **Slow down.**
- * **Pretend you are a snail.**
- * **Slower.**
- * **Move through the forest, deliberately feeling the changes in shadow, sunlight, warmth, coolness, and texture of the terrain.**

Did you know that being busy can lead to burnout, anxiety, stress-related illnesses, weakened immune systems, and faster aging? If you want to be more productive, then take time to rest. Slow down. Allow your mind to ponder and to relax. This will improve your creative insight and problem-solving skills.

- * Sit quietly using mindful observation.
- * Don't think about your to-do list or other issues in your life.
- * You may be surprised by the number of wild forest inhabitants that you see when you think about being **RIGHT HERE** in this moment.
- * Keep your eyes open.
- * The colors of nature are soothing, and studies have shown that people relax most when seeing greens and blues.

Did you know that the human eye perceives green better than all other colors on the spectrum? Viewing the color green has a calming effect that helps relax the nervous system and can even help you live longer.

- * Feel your feet firmly planted on the ground.
- * Pick up a small rock, a twig, or a leaf.
- * Move this object around in your hands and concentrate on how you interact with this object.
- * Pay attention to your skin's contact with the object and how your muscles and bones change positions to adjust to its place in your hands.

Did you know that there is a specific soil bacteria that can lift your mood, make you happier, and strengthen your immune system? Called the *Mycobacterium vaccae*, this beneficial bacteria activates brain pathways that increase serotonin in your brain.

- * Become very still.**
- * Listen.**
- * What do you hear? Water? Wind? Birdsong? Crickets?**
- * Think less. Feel more.**
- * Relax your mind, close your eyes, and keep listening to the forest around you.**

Did you know that listening to natural sounds can improve both your physical and mental health? Listening to natural sounds can decrease distractions, stimulate memories, boost a positive outlook, and increase relaxation.

- * Recognize the air; it has fragrance and texture.
- * Ponder how it brushes against your skin and enters your body.
- * Breathe in deeply and exhale slowly.
- * Listen to your breath: gentle and even.
- * You are part of the forest.
- * Close your eyes and let your other senses have a chance to enjoy this trail.

Did you know that fresh air can help you lose weight by helping you digest food more effectively? Forest air is “more fresh” than any other natural environment because trees are converting CO₂ into fresh oxygen for our lungs.

- * **Speak softly to the forest.**
- * **Begin each sentence with “I am noticing...”**
- * **Direct your words gently to natural objects or creatures that may cross your path.**
- * **The forest will answer if you listen closely.**
- * **Connect with nature. Find your calm.**

Did you know that the experience of forest meditation is always unique for each individual? For some it is switching off unwanted thoughts. For others it is to increase self-worth and confidence. For most, it is finding peace and happiness in the present moment.

- * Find a comfortable sitting spot where you can relax: a large rock, a log, or a mossy patch on the forest floor.
- * Sit down and quietly observe the forest around you.
- * Create a tiny circle of awareness around you and become aware of all the beauty in the circle.
- * Slowly expand the circle of awareness to include a larger area. Repeat until you reach the edge of your imagination.
- * Take off your shoes and let the air embrace your toes, feet, and ankles. If you are comfortable doing so, walk barefoot on the path.

Did you know that walking barefoot is known as the art of grounding or earthing? Research has discovered that grounding helps boost immunity, regulate glucose, improve skin conductivity, and reduce stress and anxiety.

- * **Walk slowly along the trail.**
- * **Pause for a moment.**
- * **Turn around and look at the trail behind you.**
- * **Look up at the sky, noticing clouds and colors.**
- * **Slowly bring your eyes back down to Earth.**

Did you know that looking at the sky lessens distress, dismisses doubts and fears, consoles sorrow, builds gratitude, and increases optimism?

- * **Take 10 slow, deep breaths.**
- * **As you inhale and exhale, focus on the many different shades and undertones of greens or browns in the forest.**
- * **Listen to your breath as it goes in and out.**
- * **Let your breath become part of the forest and let the forest become part of your breath.**

Did you know that only three minutes of focused breathing can boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, reduce stress, improve mood, increase focus, accelerate recovery, and improve sleep?

- * Gently step off the path.
- * Move the leaves aside and scoop up a teaspoonful of soil.
- * Feel the texture.
- * Smell the fragrance.
- * Look closely at the tiny grains of dirt, sand, rock, and other debris.
- * This forest depends on this soil.

Did you know that there are more lifeforms in a handful of forest soil than there are people on the planet? A mere teaspoonful contains many miles of fungal filaments. All these work the soil, transform it, and make it so valuable for the trees.