



# OUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO FOREST BATHING

## WHAT IS FOREST BATHING?

Forest bathing is the practice of taking in the forest - or any natural, outside environment - through all of the senses. But it's more than just soaking up the outside world; it's also about being mindful and interacting with your natural surroundings - the sites, sounds, smells, and textures - to absorb the scientifically proven benefits of spending quiet time in nature.

The concept of forest bathing originated in the 1980s in Japan, where it's known as shinrin-yoku. According to [Harvard Medical School](#), tech and industrial workers in Japan at the time were showing an increase in stress-related illnesses, which triggered leaders to create nature trails to entice people outside. Benefits ensued, including reduced stress, improved attention spans, boosted immune systems, and overall better moods.

## WHY FOREST BATHE?

Less stress. A sense of wonder. Experiencing natural beauty. Lowered blood pressure and a stronger immune system.

All of these benefits - and more - have been linked to forest bathing. Many of the positives may be anecdotal or subjective, but in recent years, scientific studies have shown that forest bathing actually makes measurable positive impacts. For example, higher stress means higher levels of cortisol, a hormone that can play a role in high blood pressure, heart disease, headaches, and other illnesses. Tests have shown that a calm walk in the woods reduces cortisol levels.

Another study in Japan showed that people who spent two nights and three days in a forest had an increase in the number and activity of certain immune cells that fight viruses and even cancer. People who spent the same amount of time in an urban setting didn't enjoy the same kinds of benefits.

Additionally, according to the [National Library of Medicine](#), trees emit natural oils called [phytoncides](#) that have been proven to enhance the immune system, lower blood pressure, ward off depression and help cut anxiety.



## WHO CAN DO IT?

The simple answer: anyone. Young, old, fast, slow, stressed, or carefree, forest bathing is something that everyone can do. It's not supposed to be strenuous. It is meant to help people slow down, relax, be mindful, and re-center themselves. Forest bathing also imparts the real benefits of time spent outside, which are physically and mentally good for anyone.

Those who are more adventurous may find themselves hiking deep into one of the towering forests on Oregon's Adventure Coast or making their way across the storied sand dunes. But forest bathing works just as well for those who want to walk just a few steps to a quiet greenspace, a peaceful park or a Pacific Ocean overlook, which are abundant on Oregon's Adventure Coast.

## HOW TO FOREST BATHE

One of the nicest things about forest bathing is that it's easy to do. Remember, it's all about being outside, in nature, quietly, slowing everything down and engaging all of your senses and being mindful, in the moment.

- Find a nice, natural place to go. (See a list of suggestions on Oregon's Adventure Coast below.) This can be a nature park, a wilderness area, a beach, a garden, a lake, a river, or even your own backyard.
- Turn your devices off. There's nothing more distracting than a smartphone. Forest bathing is all about getting away from constant noise and interruptions so that you can clear and focus your mind.
- If you're heading out on a trail, bring a small backpack with water, snacks, and other essentials like sunscreen.



- When walking, go slowly. Take note of your surroundings and engage your senses: smell and taste the fresh air, look at the trees and plants, listen and look for wildlife.
- If you find a comfortable place to sit, do so. Relax. Lay down. Close your eyes. Feel the ground beneath you, touch the forest floor, the trees, or the sand of the beach. Listen to the purling creek nearby; maybe even kick off your shoes and dip your toes in. Focus on your immediate surroundings and block out any negative thoughts.
- While it's best not to have distractions, writing in a journal about what you're experiencing can enhance your forest bathing experience by connecting you more closely with your surroundings. A small sketch pad or art set can provide a similar connection.
- Breathe deeply. Not only will it help you slow down and focus on the moment, but if you're in a forest full of trees, you'll enjoy some physical benefits as well. Trees and plants emit antimicrobial compounds called phytoncides that, when inhaled, have been shown to strengthen the immune system. Forests have higher oxygen levels than urban areas, so breathing deeply helps bring in oxygen-rich air that's good for the body and mind.

If you enjoy activities like yoga or tai chi, consider doing them outside in nature while you're forest bathing. The benefits of the movements and mindfulness will be multiplied.



## WHEN – AND HOW LONG TO FOREST BATHE

Simply put, anytime is the right time for forest bathing. That said, there are no doubt times that may be more enjoyable than others – largely when the weather is pleasant. While you can engage your senses and be fully present in the moment when you're outside in the middle of a rainstorm, you're more likely to feel the positive impacts from forest bathing if you're comfortably warm and dry.

Research has suggested that a minimum of two hours spent forest bathing will provide the biggest benefits, but don't discount a shorter stint. A 15-minute solo stroll through a wooded park will be much better for you than another 15 minutes of scrolling on your phone.



## WHERE TO FOREST BATHE

When the concept of forest bathing first came to light in the 1980s in Japan, stressed-out tech and industrial workers found respite on newly created nature trails designed to help them decompress. Since then – and since the health and emotional benefits of forest bathing have been researched and proven – it's become clear that just about anywhere outside can work: forests, beaches, nature preserves, mountains, coastal overlooks, riverside trails, lakes, even urban parks and greenspaces.



# WHERE TO FOREST BATHE THE OPTIONS ARE LIMITLESS. A FEW IDEAS:

- **Sunset Bay State Park** - Stroll across the sandy beach here, find a quiet spot to sit and breathe in the ocean breeze as it flows through the surrounding evergreens. There's also a series of hiking trails that lead through swaying coastal forests, past wildflowers and along stunning cliff-top viewpoints.
- **Cape Arago State Park** - The views near this Pacific headland are dramatic, wild - and just right for a long session of mindful contemplation. Watch and listen for offshore seals and sea lions as well.
- **Shore Acres State Park** - Shore Acres State Park offers forest bathing options of all kinds, from beautiful, landscaped gardens to jagged shorelines that erupt and thunder with the crashing waves to forest trails that connect Shore Acres to Sunset Bay and Cape Arago State Parks.
- **Horsfall Beach** - One of the area's pristine beaches, Horsfall Beach stretches north of North Bend. An easy walk can take you to a quiet hideaway surrounded by tall dune grass and far-off ocean views.
- **Golden and Silver Falls State Natural Area** - A combination of plunging waterfalls, meandering creeks, and windswept forests await the forest bather at this inland gem. Short, easy hikes through the trees lead to awe-inspiring views of the two waterfalls. Located near Coos Bay on the southern Oregon coast, not to be confused with Silver Falls State Park near Silverton.
- **Mingus Park** - It's in Coos Bay proper, but that doesn't mean Mingus Park isn't ideal for forest bathing. This park has a scenic pond and oriental garden with a quiet trail that winds its way through the grounds.
- **Simpson Park** - North Bend's Simpson Park is strewn with pretty trees, green grass, and a pleasant nature trail that offers forest bathing goodness not far off the beaten path.
- **John Topits Park** - With multiple peaceful lakes surrounded by protected coastal dunes and forest land, it's hard to find a better place for a nature escape in Coos Bay than John Topits Park. Wander the shores of the Empire Lakes across some 5.5 miles of trails or just find a quiet cove, pull up a seat, and let the bathing begin. Another option: Launch a kayak on Middle Empire Lake and soak in the meditative benefits of forest bathing from out on the water.
- **South Slough Reserve** - This is a valuable education center that's home to forests, salt marshes, mudflats, and water channels that all comprise habitat for a range of local wildlife. Easy trails meander through it, providing ample opportunity for quiet time in nature.

