

Forest Wellness Walks: Mindfulness in Nature

Research has indicated that spending time in nature not only reduces stress, improves overall health and well-being, but also makes people more creative, mindful, and content with their lives. Forest Wellness Walks are a practice inspired by Forest Bathing, and follow the framework and ethos of Forest Therapy, a practice founded through the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides.

What is Forest Therapy?

Forest Therapy is a practice that supports health and wellness through guided immersion in forests and other natural environments to promote the well-being of both people and the land. It is inspired by the Japanese practice of *Shinrin-yoku*, a term that translates as *bathing in the forest*.

In the 1980s *Shinrin-yoku*, or Forest Bathing, was developed in Japan, bringing people into forested areas to enhance health, wellness, and happiness. It is now viewed as an integral part of the Japanese health care system. Over 40 years of research has demonstrated a wide array of both physical and mental health benefits of Forest Bathing.

In 2012 Amos Clifford founded The Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs (ANFT). He combined elements of *Shinrin-yoku* with his experience in wilderness guiding, Zen meditation, psychotherapy, and nature connection.

The core tenet of the Forest Therapy practice is that **“the forest is the therapist & the guide opens the door.”** Spending time in the forest brings participants the possibility not only to feel the health benefits of being in nature, but also the opportunity to improve their relationships with themselves, the natural world, and with each other.

Forest Therapy is a practice of building relationships. Jacques Cousteau once said, *“People will only protect what they love.”* A heartfelt relationship with nature naturally leads to a love of nature and a recognition that we are a part of nature, not apart from nature. Developing a meaningful relationship with nature occurs over time and is deepened by returning again and again throughout the natural cycles of the seasons.



What to Expect on a Forest Wellness Walk

Our Forest Wellness Walks are guided by Daniela Stuewer, Conservation Sudbury's Education Program Manager. Daniela is one of only five people in northern Ontario accredited by the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs.

A Forest Wellness Walk is a slow and gentle experience in nature. You will be guided through a series of invitations to slow down, to reconnect with your senses, and to experience and deepen your relationship with the forest. These slow, mindful walks are of no longer than one kilometer in length and are appropriate for all physical conditions.

A Forest Wellness Walk will typically last between two and three hours, depending on what participants prefer. Upon request, shorter walks of at least one hour or longer walks may be possible.

Why go on a Forest Wellness Walk?

Everyone can benefit from a Forest Wellness Walk. We know it intuitively -- time spent in nature, whether in our garden, near the water, or on a welcoming forest trail just helps us to feel good and to relax.

Now, scientific research is providing compelling evidence for the benefits of nature and especially the practice of Forest Therapy. This kind of slow, meditative time in nature is needed in our over-scheduled, on-the-go day to day lives.

Scientific studies show that nature and forest time can:

- Regulate blood pressure and decrease stress-related cortisol levels
- Boost immune system functioning
- Accelerate recovery from surgery or illness
- Increase the ability to focus, even in children with ADHD
- Increase energy levels and improve sleep



A Forest Therapy practice can also support individual and community health by:



- Enhancing creativity and innovation
- Improving mood and creating space to allow one to be present in the moment
- Improving confidence and self-esteem
- Strengthening a sense of connection and relationship with other people, and with the natural world
- Encouraging a sense of awe and gratitude
- Bridging the separation between humans and the rest of nature

Testimonials

"There are so many things going on all around us that, as adults, we don't take the time to experience. This experience gave me the opportunity and space to let my inner child come out and play."

"It was so wonderful to slow down and observe Nature and let her observe me!"

"It has been a great reminder and encouragement for myself to spend more time in nature - being able to intentionally have quiet time through the invitations being given and noticing so many both small and big things that I may not have ever noticed before."

"It is an experience that no matter how you feel going into it and where you're at, you'll leave with a new perspective of nature, leaving you relaxed and maybe even at peace."

"My experiences have impacted the way I want to spend time in nature and the amount of time doing so. Would 100% encourage others to try this!"



Our Forest Wellness Walks Program - What We Offer

Private Group Walks:

We offer sessions for groups with a minimum of six people and a maximum of 10. The cost is \$25 per person. We can accommodate smaller groups (two to five people) for a minimum group fee of \$150. Please fill out our Wellness Walk request form and we will be in touch with details.



Public Walks:

If you don't have a large enough group for a private booking, another option is available. We have walks scheduled throughout the year, open to all members of the community. Please check below for upcoming dates. The cost is \$20 per person.

Private one-on-one Walks:

Private walks are a great option for people looking for a deeper connection and a more personalized option. Fill out our Wellness Walk request form and we will be in touch to personalize a walk for you. Cost is \$75 per hour.



Retreat Walks:

Forest Wellness Walks are a great addition to special events, meetings, or retreats. Your guide will travel to your site and lead a walk for your participants. Please fill out our Wellness Walk request form with your event details and we will contact you with pricing options and more details.