

A Memorable Walk in the Woods

FOREST BATHING OFFERS MEDITATIVE MEANDERING THROUGH NATURE

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On a balmy late-summer afternoon, a group of nine South Shore residents assembled at the entrance to Holly Hill Farm in Cohasset to dip their toes into the forest bathing experience. This little-known activity involves neither disrobing nor being submerged in a body of water: forest bathing offers an opportunity to become fully immersed in one's natural surroundings by temporarily disconnecting from the technological trappings of everyday life.

"I assist people in getting to that place where they can slow down and connect with nature and their inner selves," says Kirsten Snow, a Scituate resident who recently completed her forest bathing guide certification. "It's experiential and different for everyone."





Part nature hike and part meditation, forest bathing is an activity that encourages participants to slow down and be more mindful as they observe the splendor of their surroundings.



A Multisensory Experience

The participants who gathered at Holly Hill Farm had, for the most part, fled the confines of their offices to carve out an afternoon for forest bathing. The journey began with Snow leading the group into a grassy alcove just beyond the barns and stables, where she asked participants to form a circle, close their eyes and breathe in the splendor of their surroundings.

Calling attention to each of the five senses, Snow focused on the particular smells emanating from every direction—the grass below, the branches of nearby trees and shrubs, the treetops and sky above and the farmland beyond. She suggested that each individual open their mouth and stick out their tongue, in an attempt to taste the flavors of the forest and then invited the group to lis-

ten closely to the “symphony of sounds all around,” from the rustling of leaves to the chirping and buzzing of birds and insects. At the moment Snow’s voice trailed off, a chorus of cicadas filled the silence, rising to a crescendo before finally fading away.

Participants walked at an unhurried pace along a path that led to an open meadow. Snow encouraged everyone to stop whenever they felt compelled to peer more closely at industrious insects, reach out and touch the petals of wildflowers or simply stand beneath the shelter of a majestic tree. After a silent and leisurely exploration of the area, the members of the group ascended a small hill and a shimmering pond came into view, eliciting gasps and murmurs of awe.

At strategic intervals throughout the forest bathing excursion, Snow recited snippets of poetry and offered similarly inspirational words befitting the natural setting. Participants shared their thoughts and reflections on what they’d encountered and grew noticeably more relaxed as the afternoon continued.


The forest bathing expedition concluded with a period of individual meditation and introspection. Then, Snow invited the group to join her for some tea brewed from forest plants she’d harvested. Afterward, the participants maintained the mindful pace as they made their way back to civilization.

“I meditated without effort,” says Denise Bylaska of Hull. “I’m a city girl through and through and I have no desire to

be anywhere there are trees and bugs and isolation. But this was an amazing experience. I thought, heard and felt differently than I ever have before.”

Similarly, Michele Hubley of Cohasset noticed that the experience helped her to more observant. “I closed my eyes and listened to the leaves fluttering and stood amidst trees that have been here for decades and even centuries.”

Beyond the calming and restorative effects of the walk, Hubley also found that forest bathing renewed her appreciation and respect for the natural world. “It seems like the extent of our interactions with nature is to go through it to get somewhere, but today it was a destination. And that was a real gift.”



Forest bathing is a multisensory experience. Snow calls attention to the sights, smells, sounds and tactile feeling of the landscape.

Making an Impact on Many Levels


Snow, who previously worked in the photography and financial industries, discovered forest bathing essentially by accident. She first heard the term while attending a retreat two years ago, and mentally filed it away. In the months that followed, the subject of forest bathing came up over and over again, until finally, during a road trip to Nova Scotia last fall, she came to fully appreciate the concept.

"On the last night of our trip, we stayed at a lodge that offered stargazing and forest bathing. Of course, I had to see what it was all about," she recalls. "When I had the invitation to lie down on mounds of bright green moss,

the sensation brought me right back to childhood and gave me a sense of escape from all the noise of daily life. I knew right then and there that forest bathing was an opportunity for me to help people."

Snow later learned about the many health benefits of forest bathing, including lowered stress and blood pressure levels and improved relaxation and well-being.

In January, Snow embarked on a six-month certification course that began with a 10-day trip to Costa Rica. She is now one of only 300 certified forest bathing guides in the world.



When selecting forest bathing sites, Snow takes care to combine stunning vistas and natural beauty with practical considerations like accessibility.

"I want the terrain to be gentle and easy for all skill levels—this is not a hike," she says. "I visit the same locations again and again to get to know the land because it changes every week."

Among her favorite local spots to lead forest bathing walks are: Wheelwright Park in Cohasset, the Mann House Wildflower Garden in Scituate, Minot Beach in North Scituate and Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham. On her own, Snow enjoys wandering through the 251 acres at World's End in Hingham. 🌲

For additional information about Forest Bathing, call Kirsten Snow at 617-901-5367.