

Forces of Nature



Wellness resorts around the globe are embracing the earth's power to fuel the body and spirit—offering unique, open-air experiences that restore, refresh, and thoroughly transport.

Long gone are the days when a vacation meant lounging by the pool with a trashy novel. Today's world wanderers are seeking something more profound from their getaways: a chance to reinvigorate, to shift their perspective, and to engage with nature in a whole new way. As such, outdoor wellness activities are not just an addition to the vacation itinerary; they've become a main draw. "Travelers are seeking experiences in natural environments that offer something beyond a break from the daily grind," says Lindsey Ueberroth, CEO of Preferred Travel Group, parent company to Beyond Green, a prestigious portfolio of hotels and resorts that demonstrate sustainable tourism leadership. "And hotels are providing— offering both creative and traditional ways to inspire a sense of awe, some learning, fresh thinking, and personal growth."

This is not some travel trend, it's a human need that is, thankfully, being newly acknowledged and addressed. Not only does participating in not-your-usual outdoor ventures excite, the natural world around us holds solid and long-lasting body and brain benefits that are vast and varied.

"Spend just twenty minutes outdoors, and stress hormones drop," says Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, MD. "The essential oils released by plants called phytoncides that we breathe in, vitamins we get from sunlight, and the calming sounds of birds singing and leaves rustlings are all scientifically proven to bring a more relaxed state, a better mood, and overall enhanced wellbeing." Perhaps, what's most surprising, according to Dr. Hackenmiller, is that a connection to nature can jumpstart our creativity and, even grander, inspire us to contribute positively to the world around us.

This is in stark contrast to our modern lifestyle, which keeps us indoors for the majority of our waking hours, making us stressed, rushed, and feel a general disconnect from a landscape that is unpredictable, with foreign residents (bears, moose, butterflies), and plays by its own rules. "It

just takes doing any outdoor activity to stimulate the brain in unique ways, and improve cognitive function,” says Tina Vindum, nature expert, founder and president of the Outdoor Fitness Institute. “There are so many unexpected benefits. For instance, activity that requires navigating different terrains—dirt, rocks, mountains—will actually activate acupuncture points in the feet that amplify all the health boons.”

The role that resorts play in facilitating these transformative moments is becoming increasingly vital, and their menus of plein air experiences give guests the opportunity to feel real wonder and be truly wowed. And to have the kind of fun in a verdant playground that normal life has dialed down. Ueberroth reminds us of the importance of sustainability in this context. “By being earth-friendly, resorts can better highlight every incredible thing the natural world gives us. They can create meaning and memories, and show why preserving the environment is so critical.”

These five innovative locales are broadening the boundaries of traditional spa and wellness practices, and redefining what it means to recharge wild style.



Animals and Art

The Bentwood Inn, located in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, leverages its setting at the edge of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to offer guests a deep dive into the healing wonders of the wild. “We believe a component of wellness is our relationship with wildlife...it’s a life-altering experience when we expose guests to the magnificence that is our valley,” says Keith Sproule, the Inn’s owner, who planted over 250 trees to support local wildlife, including willow for the moose and fruit trees for other animal neighbors.

The seasonal programs are designed to awaken an appreciation and understanding of the environment and its inhabitants, and to reap the mental and emotional rewards of doing so.

One such experience is the plein air Watercolor Workshop, which invites guests to engage with their surroundings through art, encouraging participants to slow down and observe the intricate details of the natural world around them. What people feel through painting is a deep relaxation and joy in the creativity the landscape inspires. It’s no pressure, and highly rewarding.

Fitting for the locale, they also hold a Predator Expedition that provides an extraordinary opportunity to witness North America's apex predators in their natural habitat. As Sproule explains, it's more than an adventure, it's an emotional journey into the heart of the wild. Guided by expert biologists, guests get a window into the lives of wolves and grizzly bears that would fully remove anyone from the stresses of their regular routines.

Silent Sunrise

Three Camel Lodge, right smack in the vast expanses of the Mongolian Gobi Desert, is a serene retreat that honors traditional nomadic culture but provides modern comfort. This is a unique destination for sure, and it offers guests an unparalleled opportunity to cut cords with daily routines and get reconnected with nature in one of the most breathtaking landscapes on earth.

With scenery like this, you don't need a lot of bells and whistles, and the lodge's standout open air wellness offering is the simple yet impactful experience of the Sunrise Walk. Guests are invited to start their day with a guided walk toward Ovoo atop Bulagtai Mountain to watch the sunrise, a daily ritual that is visually stunning, and comes with proven health and mental wellness benefits: When sunlight stimulates the retinas in your eyes, it triggers your brain to produce serotonin, the body's feel-good chemical.

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“The Gobi offers a unique serenity; with no buildings, people, cars, or any sign of human interference in sight, it feels as though the sun rises just for you,” says Undraa Buyannemekh, the resort president. “It puts one in a meditative state of mind—it's a reminder how small we are within the vastness of nature.”

These quiet moments surely contribute to a feeling of awe, which research has shown has an anti-inflammatory effect in the body, lowers stress, and enhances overall wellbeing.



Forest Bathing

An intimate retreat that sits in the picturesque setting of New England, the Mayflower Inn & Spa is a dead ringer for a traditional English country house. Beyond the cozy four-poster beds and crafted rugs, is a landscape of forest right out of a fairytale. It's an ideal backdrop in which to immerse yourself in the tranquility and beauty of another world.

And maximizing that outdoors is central to the experience at the Mayflower Inn & Spa. Forest bathing takes guests on a meaningful wander through the nearby Hidden Valley and Steep Rock Preserves.

But it's not just a simple hike, it is an education in how to wake up the senses and be fully present. Guides instruct how to walk through the forest like a fox, listen like a deer, and see like an owl, explaining how they're portals to a deeper sense of aliveness and awareness. By engaging with nature's five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and ether—guests explore various aspects of themselves: grounding, creativity, empowerment, self-compassion, and self-expression.

The health benefits of forest bathing are well-documented, drawing from a tradition that promotes the therapeutic power of nature. Similar to meditation, forest bathing enhances wellbeing that reduces stress, improves mood, increases focus, and boosts the immune system.

Grounding with the Earth

Aristi Mountain Resort + Villas is in the heart of Zagori, Greece, where the rugged beauty of the Tymfi mountain range meets the serene expanse of Vikos Canyon and the flow of the Voidomatis River. Breathtaking!

The exquisite setting is the gate to the Vikos-Aoos Geopark, making it a perfect destination to explore the geological connection between the earth's ancient past and the present.

Guests can be guided on the GeoTrails and get a unique education, both factual and spiritual, on the planet's heritage— exploring the rocky summits, and into the depths of Vikos Canyon, is basically a journey through time. Guests come to understand the intricate processes that have shaped the earth over millions of years. In doing so, they foster a deep appreciation for the natural world's beauty and complexity, and their place within the larger scheme.

The goal with this experience is met: enriching your soul.



Spirit Moon, Soulful Water

Buahan, A Banyan Tree Escape, is surrounded by the dense Balinese jungle and offers stunning views of rice fields. The accommodations, known as “Bales,” designed to foster community and connection with nature, invite guests into a new way of being where time slows down, and the focus shifts to the sincere meaning of life.

There's a lot of nature here to bring on its benefits. Moon Yoga has guests practicing under a full or new moon. It involves moon salutations, with poses inspired by the lunar phases, aimed at harmonizing with lunar energy.

Participants engage in a series of mindful activities, including silent breathing, lighting fires or candles to boost intuition, and setting intentions for release, all guided by a yoga guru with a sound bowl in the background.

The Soul Freedom Journey is a spiritual purification ritual that begins with the crafting of “Canang sari,” a symbol of gratitude in Balinese culture, and includes a serene hike to the

Tjampuhan Waterfalls. Here, participants engage in meditation, chanting, and flower release in the river, all designed to cleanse the body and mind, rejuvenate the spirit, and deepen the connection with nature and self.