

# How is Forest Bathing Different to a Walk in the Woods?

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[Forest Bathing](#) is a health-promoting practice that involves spending time outdoors in nature, sitting peacefully or walking slowly and leisurely through the woods or forest, immersing yourself in the natural environment and mindfully using all your senses. However, for most people it is not quite the same as a walk in the woods, although I'm sure that some people will gravitate towards aspects of it naturally and someone must have done it the first time ([it is usually said to have originated in Japan as 'Shinrin-Yoku'](#)).

## More Than Just A Walk In The Woods



The biggest differences between Forest Bathing and a more conventional walk in the woods are probably down to what you seek to achieve and what you do when you are there. Forest bathing is not about reaching a certain destination, such as the top of the hill, or completing a lap of the lake, it is more about reaching a relaxed state of being in which you mindfully notice what is happening around you using your different senses. You often don't cover much distance when Forest Bathing. It isn't about cardiovascular fitness either, although it can reduce your blood pressure and increase your heart-rate variability, so it does have some comparable health benefits to a more vigorous walk through the woods. When people go for a walk in the woods, they often spend a lot of time 'in their own heads', distracted by thoughts, maybe replaying things over in their heads, or thinking about what they need to do when they get home, or what they need to buy when they go shopping later in the day.

When people go Forest Bathing they usually seek to spend time 'in the moment' and connect to their surroundings through their senses paying attention the sights, sounds, feel, smell and tastes that they encounter. Forest Bathing is about intentionally engaging with nature in a mindful way. It is not uncommon on a Forest Bathing walk in an area that you very familiar with, to notice lots of things going on around you that you have never noticed before.

## Guided Forest Bathing

People are often first introduced to Forest Bathing through the experience of being led by Forest Bathing Guide, although you can just [take yourself Forest Bathing](#) if you understand what you should be trying to do. The function of a Forest Bathing Guide is to help you to slow down, both physically and mentally, and to support you to relax and let go of stress by offering structured nature-connection activities, known as Forest Bathing 'Invitations'. These are offered in a carefully designed sequence to create an experience that enhances nature-connection and boosts the therapeutic and restorative effects of nature for health and well-being. However, a fundamental concept in Forest Bathing is that it is the forest and the natural environment that facilitates the wellbeing benefits, and not the guide. As Amos Clifford, author of '*Your Guide to Forest Bathing: Experience the Healing Power of Nature*' describes: ***"The Forest is the Therapist. The Guide Opens the Doors."***

One of the things that really attracted me to Forest Bathing is that it is all about appreciating the wonder and beauty in nature and our surroundings, rather than about 'knowledge'. Whilst for some people, a walk in the woods is about identifying, and often recording on their phones, what they see, on a Forest Bathing walk it is all about shifting your attention and focus from learning about what something in the forest *is* to learning how something in the forest makes you *feel*.



## **The Forest Bathing Practice of Sit Spot**

Whilst Forest Bathing is often associated with walking in woodland, you can practice increasing your connection with nature in any kind of natural environment, and sitting still and quietly observing nature, such as with the Forest Bathing practice '[Sit Spot](#)' can sometimes be the most powerful. Very simply, find yourself a place in nature where you can comfortably sit and just 'be', immersing yourself in the world around you, engaging with it through all your senses and reconnecting with the rhythms of the natural world. Give yourself permission to simply sit, observe and be present. Start by taking a few deep breathes and then turn your attention to each of your sense individually. Notice what you can see, what you can hear, what you can smell, what you can feel and what you can taste. When thoughts arise, gently bring yourself back to your senses; to the sounds, sights, smells, and feel of your surroundings. Notice the specific qualities of the place in which you are and your place within it.