

12 Hotels Around the World That Offer Forest Bathing, Meditation, and Transformative Nature Activities

These resorts offer on-site staff that help guests connect with the world around them.



By [Perri Ormont Blumberg](#) | May 07, 2022



CREDIT: COURTESY OF MONTAGE PALMETTO BLUFF

When the going gets tough, the tough go back to their roots. The ones in the ground, we mean.

On-staff naturalists at luxury resorts are on the rise, and these 12 programs set the bar exceptionally high. Check out our favorite properties offering naturalist tours and activities, and learn what these offerings entail, from hanging with monkeys to stargazing to forest bathing.

Weekapaug Inn, Westerly, Rhode Island

Guests at this picture-perfect [coastal Rhode Island inn](#) will be treated to the deep knowledge and laidback antics of Teddy Beahm, the property's resident naturalist and director of recreation. At the Forbes Five-Star hideaway, naturalist experiences are available for year-round enjoyment and run the gamut from seal-spotting expeditions to Jeep tours on the beach to learn about Rhode Island's glacial formation. There are also stargazing sessions, private pond ecology lessons, and nautical knot-making workshops.

"Travelers are becoming increasingly interested in connecting with the destinations they travel to – beyond just the hotel. [They] are turning to nature to cultivate this deeper connection and establish a sense of place in the destinations they're visiting. Whether it be through salt marsh strolls to learn about local ecology, or guided tours to discover more about the natural world, it seems, to my delight, that the modern traveler is more eager than ever to ditch their cell phone for a pair of binoculars," Beahm tells Travel + Leisure.

"Attendance at our naturalist programs has grown by at least 68% this year. Guests and residents have been particularly interested in year-round programs, including wildlife and ecological education, nature walks, stargazing, and other experiences," he continued, noting that they are thrilled to see this reconnection and appreciation for the natural environment evolve. *(Book a stay starting at \$505 per night)*

Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, New York



CREDIT: COURTESY OF MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE

Travelers are in good hands with Michael Ridolfo, the naturalist at [Mohonk Mountain House](#), a soul-restoring retreat in the Hudson Valley located on a private glacial lake with views of the Catskill Mountains. During a stay, guests can spend time with Ridolfo on a birding adventure, take a lesson about edible and medicinal plants, or an astronomy class, among many other offerings. The Mohonk also offers a class in "lost-proofing" (how to navigate the natural world without a map, compass, or a smartphone), forest ecology, bear and rabbit tracking, finding potable water in the wilderness, and more. In June, August, and November 2022, Ridolfo is slated to host [The Art of Nature Awareness](#) retreats, where you'll learn survival skills, the tenets of tracking and nature observation, guided hikes, and more.

"I have served as Mohonk's Naturalist for 15 years. This position goes back 85 years – Daniel Smiley, a member of Mohonk's original founding family, was my predecessor, and he was the naturalist here for 53 years. He laid the groundwork for this position and recorded a wealth of information about the vast expanse of land surrounding Mohonk," Ridolfo says. "The biodiversity here is incredible – there are plants here that are endemic only to this ecosystem, which provides guests with countless opportunities for exploration. I take great pleasure in passing along knowledge of Mohonk's land to our guests to add an extra educational (and potentially unexpected) aspect to their stay." (*Book a stay starting at \$840 per night*)

Montage Palmetto Bluff, Bluffton, South Carolina



CREDIT: COURTESY OF MONTAGE PALMETTO BLUFF

It's easy to slip into a slower, more centered state of mind at this [idyllic resort](#) situated within a 20,000-acre nature preserve. The property even hired resident naturalist Brian Byrne to help guests deepen their experience. Byrne is ready to educate guests on local flora and fauna, birding and other wildlife, and sustainability through guided tours and special events in this outdoor classroom that is South Carolina Lowcountry. With more than 25 years of experience in horticulture, Byrne has partnered with the [Palmetto Bluff Conservancy](#) to create a series of group and private tours of the grounds' nature viewing areas such as Bird Island and River Road Trail.

Our personal favorite of his tours? The "Wild Fruits & Berries of the Bluff & Owl Prowl," a winter meander along the bluff trails that offer a chance to see and learn about the nocturnal world of owls at dusk.

"We've found that since the pandemic, guests are looking to tap into the environment even more than before. There's so much more appreciation for the outdoors and how it contributes to our mental wellbeing," Byrne says. "Growing up in Ireland, bird watching was a hobby. We would get up early and listen to the birds on hikes and walks...This would show how strong the bird population was in various areas, and a stronger chorus is directly correlated to a healthy ecosystem. These tours at Montage were the first time I've been able to implement this as a structured program, and they have been such a hit with guests." *(Book a stay starting at \$675 per night)*

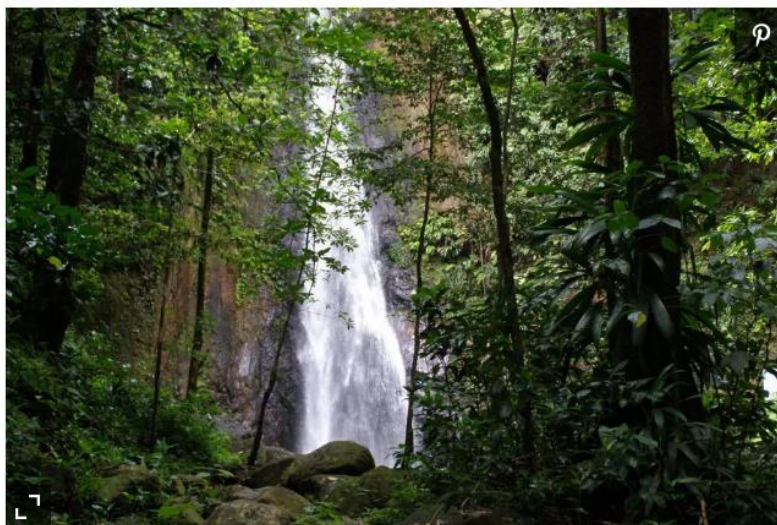


Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, Ninh Hoa, Khanh Hoa, Vietnam

Le Quoc Thuong, the resident biologist at Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, is the first terrestrial biologist within the hotel group, resulting from a long-term collaboration between the luxury resort and Vietnam's [GreenViet Biodiversity Conservation Center](#). While on vacation, guests have the unique opportunity to partake in guided hiking trips to learn about forest life and see firsthand how the resort is studying and protecting the langurs. Guests can even have a chance to observe the black-shanked douc langurs, a critically endangered monkey species. Monkey business aside, you'll take in soaring mountain vistas, a verdant forest, and beautiful hiking trails, all chased by a picnic breakfast at the hotel's private beach.

"Rather than trying to enforce conservation efforts at an international level, the use of responsible hospitality to change views at a local level can be far more powerful," Thuong says. "By viewing animals as a valuable commodity and a key component in this industry, rather than a pest, inconvenience, or foodstuff, it is more likely that conservation initiatives will be successful, ensuring that future generations can visit, watch and enjoy these wonderful creatures." *(Book a stay starting at \$870 per night)*

Secret Bay, Dominica



CREDIT: COURTESY OF SECRET BAY

Secret Bay, a top Caribbean hotel, is also the home of naturalist Terri Henry, who specializes in leading guests through a forest bathing experience in Dominica's dense rainforest landscape. On the Waitukubuli National Trail, visitors are given a guided tour and activities (think: breathing exercises, deep listening, nature observations). Guests are also gifted a journal to record what they see as they immerse themselves in all that this secluded Caribbean paradise has to offer. Unlike most forest bathing experiences which keep journeyers on dry land, guests bathe in the hot water sulfur spa of Ti Kwen Glo Cho at the end of the excursion, with pools, tubs, and waterfalls tucked into lush landscaped gardens.

"Dominica is the perfect paradise for forest bathing – the rugged trails are quiet and suitable for slow, meditative experiences. The trend for forest bathing is growing because the more high-tech we become, the more we need nature to reset our body and brains to a healthy rhythm," Henry shares. "People require the tactile and sensory experiences in nature as an antidote for touchscreens and automation, and nature, with all its diversity, helps to create greater levels of perception and mindfulness while easing the stresses of regular life." (*Book a stay starting at \$838 per night*)

Inns of Aurora, Aurora, New York

The Finger Lakes more than proves itself to be quite the magical place to unplug from everyday life and reconnect with nature. In this pastoral region of New York state, there's perhaps no better nook to do just that than this chichi lakeside resort on the shores of Cayuga Lake.

While there, guests can experience a host of outdoor activities with resident outdoorsmen Matt Stevenson and Mike Shaw. Book an entire day with them aboard the resort's new private fishing boat for a catch and release session while getting schooled on Cayuga Lake's ecology and the area's history. Or, opt for private wilderness identification lessons or archery classes along the resort's 3.5-mile outdoor trail system. Whatever you choose, don't miss their guided sunset lantern hike, where you'll build your fire together and roast s'mores while the sun paints the sky shades of melon and rose sorbet. (*Book a stay starting at \$270 per night*)

Okcs Retreat Iki Kairi on Iki Island, Kyushu, Japan



CREDIT: COURTESY OF OKCS RETREAT IKI KAIRI

Firefly tours? Fishing outings? Astronomy lessons? Look forward to all of that and more with [Retreat Iki Kairi's](#) naturalist, Shou Okubo, who's been with the property for 25 years and knows the island like the back of his hand.

Dubbed the "Sanctuary of the Gods" by locals, the island appears in Japan's oldest history book as being the fifth island created in Japan. Iki Island is also said to be the traffic route connecting heaven and the earth, and as a result, 150 odd shrines are on the island to this day. FYI: Iki Island is one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' future cities in Japan, which means that preserving nature and saving the island from pollution is a treasured endeavor here. (Book a stay starting at \$451 per person per night)

Greyfield Inn, Cumberland Island, Georgia

Greyfield Inn has a team of professional naturalists who offer a daily schedule of island tours, savored from the back of their custom naturalist's truck. The lineup includes Bird and Nature Outings, North End Natural and Cultural History, Dungeness Cultural History, Kayak Outings, and Shark Tooth Hunts. As you trek through dirt roads on this no-cars-allowed isle, you'll spot wildlife ranging from horses to foxes and perhaps get the chance to visit the grand 19th-century Plum Orchard Mansion.

The birding, in particular, is second to none, thanks to the remote location of the island, accessible only via ferry, and the fact that no one is allowed to live full-time on the island. Get excited to get up close and personal with the animals, and don't forget to pack your binoculars. *(Book a stay starting at \$695 per night)*

Sani Resort, Kassandra, Halkidiki, Greece

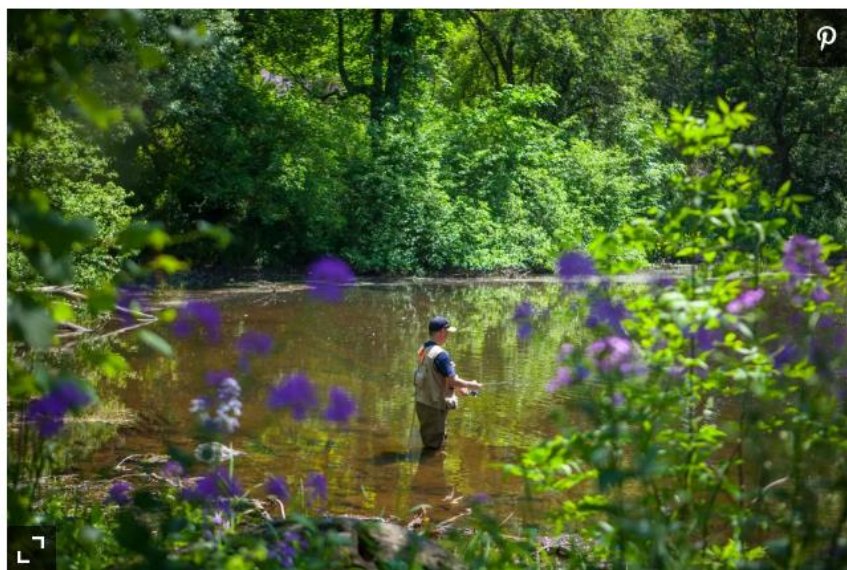


CREDIT: COURTESY OF SANI RESORT

Imagine this: You're in Greece. Life is good enough already, huh? Up the ante at the five-star [Sani Resort](#), where eco-guide Giorgos Andreou can dazzle you with group or private programs, including birdwatching, beekeeping, a wetlands walking tour, a forest stroll, and an olive grove excursion. The "Sani Explorers" program also has forest, birding, and sea and sand dunes activities on offer for youngsters ages four to 11, while the "Sani Adventurer" program for 12-17 year-olds has bike-and-bird outings, nature observation, and other outdoor activities.

"We're seeing more and more demand for our programs, especially from families...they're interested in exploring the Sani Resort ecological reserves, spending a lot of time learning about the topography and wildlife in the area," Andreou says, highlighting that the resort became Greece's first carbon-neutral resort last year. "Over 60% of the produce [used here] is from within 100 miles of the resort, and Sani supports various biodiversity projects, such as the local Sani Wetlands Project and tree-planting, and over 40 organizations, like schools and hospitals, as part of Sani Green. Home to 225 bird species, the resort's birdwatching tours in the Sani Wetlands have seen a 680% increase in participation since 2013." *(Book a one-week stay during June 2022 at Sani Dunes in a junior suite starting at \$5,913)*

Crystal Springs Resort, Hamburg and Vernon, New Jersey



CREDIT: COURTESY OF CRYSTAL SPRINGS RESORT

The Northeast's largest solar-powered resort consists of two hotels about five minutes away from each other, [The Grand Cascades Lodge](#) in Hamburg (*from \$419 per night*) and the [Minerals Hotel](#) in Vernon (*from \$249 per night*).

Collectively called the Crystal Springs Resort, in the Skylands region of Northern New Jersey, these properties are only about an hour from New York City but feel eons away. For guests, Sarah Berman has designed a thoughtful program to help people tap into the power of nature, with activities, classes, and workshops to engage and renew all your senses. Before this role, Berman was a forager for Crystal Springs' four-star [Restaurant Latour](#) for eight years, so you can relish the opportunity to sample some 350 edible, wild ingredients harvested in the Kittatinny Mountains and surroundings throughout your stay.

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That is, if you can pry yourself away from ever-popular goat yoga, forest bathing, sound healing, or stargazing through a high-powered telescope. There are also fermentation classes, kombucha-making, and essential oil workshops. Be sure to pack comfortable footwear for treading along more than 4,000 acres of hiking trails, forest – and yes, this is New Jersey, after all – handsomely manicured golf courses tucked into the ranges of North Jersey near the Appalachian Trail.

Banyan Tree Mayakoba, Playa del Carmen, Mexico

This [luxury resort](#) is all about sustainable tourism in the majestic Riviera Maya region of Mexico. Accordingly, visitors can learn more about these extraordinary environs by hopping aboard a boat with tour guide and naturalist Jesus Cervantes, who has led the eco-tour program for five years and was originally trained by a local biologist. During the eco-tour, you'll see the local flora and fauna, along with plenty of wildlife that calls these mangroves home, for many a fun photo opp. Birding enthusiasts rejoice: Mayakoba maintains 80% of its mangrove forests, which means that hundreds of species of birds can be found migrating here in a sprawling natural habitat that spans 240 hectares. *(Book a stay starting at \$649/night)*

Hidden Pond, Kennebunkport, Maine



CREDIT: JEANNE CHRISTIE

What's that, you hear, the sound of your thumping, awe-inspired heart? Indeed it is, as certified forest therapy guide, Jeanne Christie, helps you escape the stressors of everyday life and partake in forest bathing and therapy walks amidst the wilderness of trees, plants, and animals in this idyllic slice of coastal Maine. The walk includes a series of invitations that urge guests to be fully present with nature's splendor, and the three-hour experience (rain or shine!) wraps up with a special tea ceremony.

If you need more convincing to take part, consider that studies show there are immense physical and mental health benefits to [spending time in nature](#). It is perhaps because of this that Christie has seen the number of walks at Hidden Pond more than triple this year.

"The pandemic sent people outside, and they are eager to explore. They join a forest bathing walk out of curiosity or a desire to learn about nature. What they discover is their own amazing ability to connect deeply with the more than human world," she says. "Deep relaxation, wonder, and a sense of belonging are often part of their experience. It is deeply rewarding to be present when they realize they are part of nature, too." (*Book a stay starting at \$399 per night*)