

Alfresco Stress Relief



Ecola State Park,
Cannon Beach, Oregon

A dose of outdoor therapy is just what doctors order

By Sarah Sekula

Irise with the sun on a brisk Oregon morning, in hot pursuit of puffins. Haystack Rock, directly in front of me, happens to be a very good place to find them. Each spring they nest here. It's a coastal game of *Where's Waldo* as I search for a bright orange beak and yellow eyebrow tufts amongst the rocks.

Lucky for me, I have easy access to pop out here any time. My home base is Surfsand Resort in Cannon Beach, so close to Haystack Rock I could lounge on my patio and spot the

birds with binoculars. But that defeats the point. I'm here to dig my toes into the sand, to hike Ecola State Park and trek up the dunes at Cape Kiwanda. I want to have s'mores by a beach bonfire while gazing at the stars. Or go crabbing and kayaking with a chance of seeing otters.

Good news: I did, indeed spot a puffin and walked to breakfast at Wayfarer Restaurant & Lounge with a sense of accomplishment and a renewed realization that we humans not only want time in nature, we need it.

To encourage Americans to get outdoors

more, doctors across the U.S. now prescribe time in nature. "Being outdoors helps in so many ways," says Stacy Beller Stryer, associate medical director of Park Rx America, a nonprofit that promotes nature interactions to reduce chronic health issues. "It helps not only mental and physical health but also social health. Because of this, it is prescribed for many reasons, including anxiety, depression, stress, hypertension, diabetes, weight challenges, sedentary lifestyle and loneliness."

Here are some memorable ways to fill a nature-focused prescription this year:



Sitka, Alaska



Four Seasons Resort, Jackson Hole, Wyo.

VISIT A PRIVATE ISLAND: Sitka, Alaska

When Sara Hadad-Dembs and her husband bought Mertz Island — a 3.75-acre oasis in Sitka — a few years ago, their goal was to share it with others. "Sitka's landscape is a canvas for adventure with endless possibilities," Hadad-Dembs says. "A simple boat ride can transport you to a new world in minutes."

So the couple launched Bumble Expeditions to provide land-based tours and boat tours for guests to stroll their island trails, search for sea stars in the tidal pools or while away the day kayaking among whales. Sea tours are limited to six people at a time and land tours can accommodate seven passengers.

"When my brain is ablaze with ideas, sounds, stress and lists of tasks, I find solace venturing out to the beach or the rocks overlooking Sitka Sound," Hadad-Dembs says. "Enjoying the sunsets has become a ritual that never fails to work magic and reset my brain with appreciation and peace."

WILDLIFE SAFARIS AND WIDE-OPEN SPACES: Jackson Hole, Wyo.

There's a lot to love about the Four Seasons Resort and Residences Jackson Hole. First, there's the irresistible views. You're smack dab in unspoiled wilderness — about a mile away from Grand Teton National Park. Second, it's a cozy respite after exploring Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. Think modern-mountain décor and leather chairs by the fireplace.

Start the day in Teton Village with a tram ride to the top of Rendezvous Mountain, where a 360-degree view from the Grand Teton Skywalk is a must, and extra fluffy waffles at Corbet's Cabin are an added bonus. In wintertime, Four Seasons has ski-in/ski-out access at the base of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort and, of course, some of the best terrain in the world. Not a skier? Snowmobiling, snowshoeing, fat-tire biking and dogsledding are also on tap. Come summer, take epic hikes (Four Seasons will set you up with a picnic-basket lunch), go

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fly fishing on the Snake River and conquer the via ferrata, a cable-assisted climbing route. Year round, sign up for a wildlife tour where a Four Seasons naturalist helps you spot moose, elk and bison. At the end of the day, unwind with hydrotherapy and a sports massage to prep those muscles for another day of outdoorsy pursuits.

SCORE OCEAN TIME:

Oahu, Hawaii

The Prince Waikiki, an upscale hotel on the Ala Wai Harbor, comes with dreamy views of the ocean. Whether you are resting in a poolside cabana, lounging in your oceanfront room or swimming at the beach nearby, it's instant relaxation.

"Stress chemicals are reduced, and feel-good chemicals increase and heart rate and breathing rate slow," says Dr. Wallace J. Nichols, author of *Blue Mind*, which extols the human benefits of being immersed in water. "Water is medicine."

Ocean Ramsey, owner of One Ocean Diving in Haleiwa, Hawaii, concurs. Being in the ocean is like meditation, she says. On any given day, you'll likely find her in the water with a GoPro in hand boldly documenting sharks. She invites people to join her by hopping in a boat

on Oahu's North Shore. Surprisingly, the sharks don't pay much attention to the swimmers, so the experience is more calming than you might expect.

HIKING IN MONTANA: Glacier National Park

A hike through Glacier National Park is such a treat. Erin Weger, a marketing manager for Danner — a company that has manufactured hiking boots for almost a century — can attest to that. Her home in Whitefish is a half-hour from the park's west entrance.

Weger recommends Clydesdale Outpost, a boutique guest ranch where the striking draft horses greet you each morning, and stylish cabins have full kitchens and outdoor cedar tubs.

"There's something that feels raw and untouched about Montana's landscapes and wildlife," she says. "Each adventure within the park gets better after a few miles in. Once you've outpaced the trailhead crowds, you rarely see another soul unless it's a moose, bear or mountain goat."

Her team encourages hitting the trail between meetings as a way to take a breather during the workday. "After all, that's where the best inspiration comes from," she says. "And I always come back recharged."



Prince Waikiki,
Hawaii



Glacier National
Park, Montana