

An aerial photograph of a coastal town in Jersey, featuring a harbor filled with numerous sailboats, a stone pier, and a lush green hillside in the background. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and the sky is clear and blue. The town's buildings are white and red-roofed, nestled against the greenery.

Forest Bathing in JERSEY

| By Antonia Windsor

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When I grew up in Jersey in the 1980s the offshore finance industry was all about boozy lunches of surf and turf (steak and lobster) washed down with litres of Chateau Neuf de Pape. These days you are just as likely to meet a banker at a local swim spot, or in a pop-up sauna, as you are to find them in the pub and you might even find one wandering in the woods.

Eco-therapist Amanda Bond began leading forest bathing walks in Jersey in 2018 and in that time she has really noticed a shift in the kinds of people embracing the art of shinrin-yoku, which was first developed in Japan as an attempt to revive burnt-out city dwellers. Although St Helier is a far cry from Tokyo, finance companies have begun turning to Amanda to fulfil their corporate wellbeing commitments. “You’d be surprised how many bankers come along,” she says. “It’s not the kind of thing the industry would have embraced back in the ’80s, but times have changed. People are looking for new ways to decompress – and this really works.”

I first met Amanda in 2021 when I joined one of her walks in Jersey’s ‘forgotten forest’; the Val de la Mare Arboretum. The trees there, which include giant American redwoods, Japanese cypresses and Australian bottlebrushes, were donated by the Moores family in the 1970s and planted in memory of their son Nigel who had died in a car accident. After several years they were completely forgotten and allowed to grow to full size without any human interference. Now the species, which span the continents, cohabit and interconnect in a peaceful wilderness that unites all corners of the globe.



During our two-hour walk I noticed the medicinal scent of the eucalyptus tree as it was brought to me on the wind, I was reminded of summer days in childhood while I sat among daisies and buttercups and I felt calmed by focussing my attention on the natural world around me. Amanda guided the attention of our group with her melodic voice: to notice, for example, how it feels to be walking among the treetop canopy on the higher path compared to being lower in the valley. At the end of each 15-minute meditation she invited the group to share their response, and so we moved gently between solitude and companionship in a way that made me feel contained in a virtual embrace, with both nature and the group holding me up.

I caught up with Amanda again to find out how her forest bathing sessions were going and the response she had from the local community and visitors who have joined her on her walks. Her initial training was with the Association of Nature & Forest Therapy Guides and now she tells me she’s midway through a diploma in herbal medicine with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and has recently become a Herb Society ambassador. “The more I work with plants,” she says, “the more I see how everything is connected – gut health, the nervous system, biodiversity, even the microbiome.” It’s a perspective increasingly supported by research. Scientists such as Dr Zach Bush have drawn links between soil health and human health, while studies show how exposure to diverse natural environments supports immunity and mental wellbeing. Amanda, though, has long sensed this on an intuitive level. “When your nervous system settles, it supports everything, including your gut. That connection to the land has a ripple effect.”

“Forest therapy is about opening up your senses – not turning inward like in traditional meditation,” says Amanda. “You begin to notice textures, movement, scent, and the feeling of the ground beneath your feet. Over time, it brings the nervous system out of the stressed fight-or-flight mode and into a more balanced state.”



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Forest bathing, she explains, is not just about walking in the woods. It's about slowing down, engaging all the senses, and stepping away from the pressures of productivity. "In a guided walk, people let go of responsibility, of timekeeping, planning, even knowing where they're going. It creates space to simply be. That's something many of us have forgotten how to do."

Her increased knowledge of plants means that she now includes foraging in her sessions, and participants join her in a foraged drink at the end of her walks, nettle tea, perhaps, or something made from cleavers, elderflowers or wild mint. Amanda might also share how to use certain plants for first aid, plantain to stem bleeding, yarrow to soothe inflammation. "These are every day, accessible herbs," she says. "They're growing all around us, we just need to start noticing them."



That act of noticing feels especially poignant in Jersey, where recent storms have reshaped the island's woodlands. "Storm Ciarán brought down thousands of trees," she says. "Places like Fern Valley became unrecognisable. But even in that destruction, there's regeneration. People are beginning to see saplings coming through, sunlight reaching new spaces. And that awareness of both grief and growth is something forest bathing really fosters."

Amanda regularly collaborates with the National Trust for Jersey and leads walks in areas like Fern Valley, Waterworks Valley and the arboretum. Her clients are wide-ranging, from solo visitors to private groups, charities like Mind Jersey and Macmillan, and those local finance companies. She recalls one walk where a talkative academic joined the group. "He couldn't stop asking questions at the start, I thought he might dominate the whole session. But after just two invitations, he fell completely silent. At the end, he said, "This has changed my life. For the first time I can remember, I don't feel the need to ask a question. I'm just happy to be here." Amanda pauses. "He was in his seventies."

People often return to walk with her again, not because they need the same experience, but because they crave that same sense of space and quiet transformation. "They realise how different it feels to be guided. Being in a group, too, invites conversations you might never have on your own."

When she's not guiding, Amanda is tending herbs for her new partnership with Joy Retreat, a new yoga centre and yurt glampsite in St Aubin where she is creating a therapeutic and medicinal herb garden. Jersey has been slower than some places to embrace the wellness tourism trend, but the development of Joy Retreat, which will open in 2026, is exciting for those wanting to come to the island and fully immerse themselves in wellness and the natural environment. ■



To book a forest bathing session on your next visit to Jersey contact amanda@wildedgewalker.earth
For further inspiration www.jersey.com/holidays/wellness-yoga/

