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LET'S GET HEALTHY

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fighting inflammation
lectins 101

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superfood suppers
clean eating
chocolate!

TOXINS IN SKINCARE?

*the
health
& wellness
issue*



*Dark Chocolate Brownie
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explore



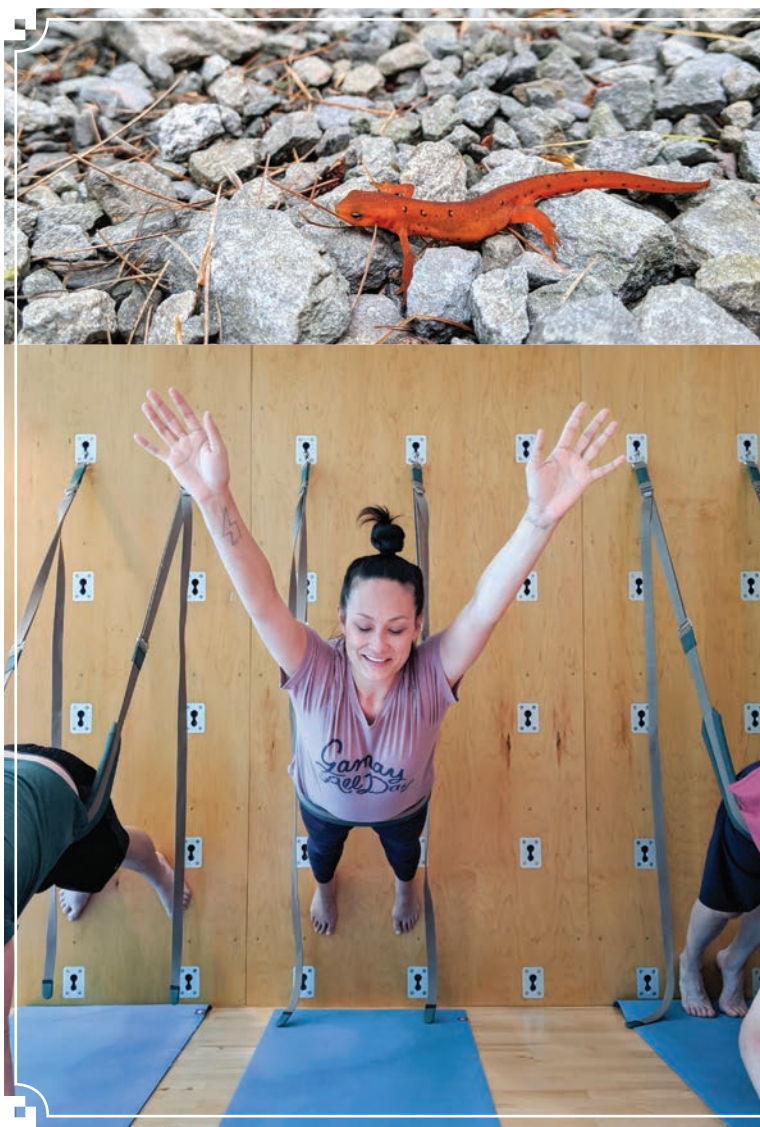
Let's Go into The Wild

WELLNESS BREAKS IN NATURE

Living in NYC has its perks, but easy access to nature isn't one of them. While the city's many curated parks and green spaces are a welcomed respite to the never-ending hustle and bustle, they lack the bliss found in bonafide nature. Around the world, as populations grow, towns are morphing into cities and city life is becoming more and more dense. No wonder we're seeing an uptick in interest in wellness experiences that allow us to reconnect with the outdoors. We're growing city stir-crazy.

We're also losing sleep. The Centers for Disease Control says 35 percent of adults don't get enough sleep and suggests that snoozing for an extra 60 to 90 minutes per night could make you happier and healthier. They estimate that around nine million Americans take sleep aids (which is correlated to higher morbidity rates), and 90 percent of people with insomnia are more likely to suffer from chronic pain and other ailments. It makes sense; sleep is when your body repairs itself.

In this article, I'm focusing on spas that address these two issues, as both are personal to me and likely resonate with many of you. How much of our daily routine is causing us sleepless nights, chronic pain, and other issues – and what happens if we surround ourselves in nature and allow ourselves to relax, even for a short time? Let's find out.



THE LODGE AT WOODLOCH **Hawley, PA**

From \$359 USD per night for all-inclusive packages
thelodgeatwoodloch.com

Forest bathing has become a hot trend in western wellness, though its roots can be traced back to 1980s Japan. The practice of *shinrin-yoku* (a.k.a. taking in the forest atmosphere) has been medically proven to increase T-cells, decrease cortisol, and improve sleep quality and mood. How much? Enough that medical doctors in Shetland, Scotland have begun prescribing 'time in nature' to their patients.

My relationship with sleep is a triple threat – I have trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep, and waking up for the day. I wake feeling truly rested maybe once a year, twice if I'm lucky. Fortunately, The Lodge at Woodloch, just three hours' drive from NYC or Philadelphia, is also a triple threat. The gorgeous Poconos property boasts forested surroundings, several nature-focused activities, and spa treatments targeted toward improving sleep.



What to Expect

The beds alone could coax anyone to sleep. However, combined with the after-affects of my first 110-minute guided forest bath and 50-minute Restful Retreat spa treatment (a head and foot massage given on a gravity-balancing chair), I was out so hard I stumbled and swayed, drunk with sleep, on my middle-of-the-night bathroom run. I awoke the next morning so fully rested it made me more aware of how *unrested* I usually feel. I tackled my full-day itinerary – terrarium building (extra charge), yoga, a forest wildflower walk, and trip through the spa amenities (hot tub, sauna, steam room, and pool) with no lag.

I also experienced a specialized spa treatment called The Sleep Ritual, a 75-minute treatment that includes a full-body massage with botanical oils and music to aid in restful sleep. It wasn't as wholly relaxing as the Restful Retreat, but the value comes in the take-home Dream Kit you're given at the end which provides a 30-day supply of the essential oil blend and pillow/face mist, plus music and instructions to create your own sleep ritual at home.

Most activities are included – archery, themed walks, forest bathing, access to the state-of-the-art gym and group exercise classes, and spa facilities, to name a few – and it's easy to excitedly cram your schedule so full you forget to relax. The foraging walk, wall yoga, spa, and forest bathing are musts. There are also friendly deer roaming the woods, just be careful not to pet or feed them.

What to Eat

Meals are taken in the main dining room, Tree, which has a full wall of floor-to-ceiling windows facing the forest. Gluten-free and vegan options are marked, though I found their knowledge of celiac details just slightly lacking (and definitely avoid the gluten-free bread, as it's toasted in the same oven as gluten-containing products). Still, there wasn't a dish I didn't devour – from my vegan tofu and turmeric egg scramble bowl to my chunky lobster cobb salad to my tender lamb chops. Overnight guests are privy to an all-inclusive package.



NORDIK SPA-NATURE CHELSEA
Gatineau, Quebec
\$68 CAD day spa rate
chelsea.lenordik.com/en

Nordic spa culture incorporates thermal water circuits and rest periods in outdoor environments and dates back centuries in countries like Denmark, Finland, Sweden,

Iceland, and Norway. Those who are brave enough to repeat the prescribed cycle of cold, hot, and rest, benefit with improved circulation, detoxification, and better sleep quality. Plus, Nordic spas are a fun way to spend the day.

Can't make it across the Atlantic to dip in a real Nordic spa? Eastern Canada's Nordik Spa-Nature Chelsea is easily the next best thing. It's the largest Nordic-style spa in North America



and is conveniently located 20 minutes from downtown Ottawa and 45 minutes from the Ottawa Airport (YOW). Surrounded by the Gatineau National Forest, it feels like a true nature escape.

What to Expect

Let's just say I planned on spending five hours hopping my way through the spa's 10 hot and cold baths and nine saunas, plus a few floats in the Dead Sea-inspired Kallä float pool. I was also booked for two treatments:

the new, absolutely heavenly Himalayan salt massage to aid relaxation and a lymphatic drainage "massage" to help stimulate the lymphatic system and curb inflammation. I was expected at an event that evening and, after eight hours, I begrudgingly forced myself to call it quits, still feeling like I hadn't taken advantage of everything.

I love a good thermal circuit, but this place blew all the others out of the water. The themed saunas reflect different rituals from around the world, including a complimentary German Aufguss (every hour on the hour) that uses wet towels and dance to move around heat and snowballs infused with essential oils, and a Banyä, a four-step, 1,000-year-old Russian exfoliation ritual involving intense heat and detoxifying birch broom whipping (it's worth the extra cost). Cold and hot pools are dotted across the property at varying temperatures, so feel free to work through the temperatures at your own pace.

Losing myself between headphones in the music cabin and the quiet-area cabana beds, lying down on a heated stone slab, putting my feet up in the woodfire relaxation hut, and the comforting hug of a forest hammock were my faves.

What to Eat

I was surprised to find three eateries, a beer garden, and a few cocktail bars onsite. The small health-conscious cafe by check-in was great for quick snacks, while the main restaurant, Restö, serves up tasty contemporary fare with gluten-free options like seared scallops, beef carpaccio, and risotto. Another cafe boasts a tapas/bar menu (which I did not try). The best part? You can dine in your robe at any venue. Since booze and hot tubs generally don't mix, I opted out of alcohol, though the large hot tub of folks enjoying drinks against the mountainside view over the city was hard to turn down. [SGF](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Katherine Alex Beaven is a travel and food writer and photographer. Whether on assignment or on vacation, Alex can usually be found at the nearest food cart or restaurant sniffing out the local gluten-free goodies. Her photography site, katherinealex.com, features some of the wildlife, landscapes, and portraits she's photographed along the way.