



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Healing Trees: A Series of Free Forest Bathing Walks Launches in Maui

Guided Walks Offer Opportunities to Destress and Contribute to Research on Resiliency to Climate Trauma

MAUI, HAWAII (February 26, 2024) – To help support the mental health recovery of those affected by last year's tragic fires on Maui, Forest Bathing Hawai'i and Maui Forest Bathing are presenting "Healing Trees: A Series of Free Forest Bathing Walks for Maui." This series brings the nature therapy practice of "Shinrin-yoku" (translated from the Japanese, "forest bathing") to six of the island's healing green spaces. Healing Trees launches on March 16th and concludes on Arbor Day 2024, November 2nd, with monthly events as follows:

March 16	Maui Nui Botanical Gardens, Kahului
April 27	Pacific Biodiesel Sunflower Farm, Central Valley
May 18	Lumeria Maui, Makawao
June 1	Hui No'eau, Makawao
July 13	Idlewilde Farm, Olinda
August 8	Virtual Walk, conducted over Zoom
Sept 21	Lumeria Maui, Makawao
October 19	Maui Nui Botanical Gardens, Kahului
October 26	Hui No'eau, Makawao
November 2	Arbor Day location to be announced

Walks are free of charge and open to those 16 years of age or above. (There will also be two afternoon sessions at Maui Nui Botanical Gardens open to families with children at least 8 years old.) Advance online reservations are required. More information and registration links may be found at bit.ly/healingtreesmaui.

What is forest bathing?

Forest bathing originated in Japan in the 1980s as a public health measure to address an epidemic of stress-related diseases caused by the country's rapid urbanization. A growing body of evidence since then has demonstrated that spending time immersed in forested areas or other natural settings has wide-ranging health benefits for body, mind, and spirit. The American Psychiatric Association listed forest bathing as a mental health tool in a [2023 poll](#). On walks facilitated by forest therapy guides, participants are invited to engage with the environment with their senses, interact with others in the small group, and spend time in quiet contemplation.

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How did the Healing Trees series originate?

The Healing Trees series is an independent initiative and collaboration between two certified forest therapy guides: Phyllis Look, owner of Honolulu-based [Forest Bathing Hawai'i](#), and Maui resident Edward Baldwin, owner of [Maui Forest Bathing](#). Together with volunteer Joy Galatro, marketing director of Pacific Biodiesel and the project's strategist, they created Healing Trees out of an awareness of the healing potential of this accessible, science-based mindfulness practice as a response to what Maui mental health administrator [John Oliver](#) has called "the worst mental health disaster in our state's modern history."

"The participants who attended the pilot walks in November 2023 and January 2024 had never experienced forest bathing before," said Look, who facilitated those recent walks on Maui. "To witness their reawakened sense of aliveness and their heartfelt sharings, all a result of slowing down enough to pay attention, was like watching a thirsty plant finally drinking its fill of water. They asked for more forest bathing – so we had to return." See [video testimonials](#) of former participants.

Modeled after forest therapy program for California fire survivors

The idea of addressing the needs of a community that had experienced the devastating effects of a wildfire with this healing nature-based modality was inspired by similar work that has been ongoing since 2021 in [Chico, California](#). There, in a program managed by The Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve and Chico State Enterprises, a local cohort of guides has been trained specifically to provide forest therapy services to the survivors of the devastating 2018 Camp Fire, which destroyed the communities of Paradise, Concow, and Magalia. They reached 379 individuals impacted by the Camp Fire in their pilot year, and now in their third year of operation, have served over 5,500 individuals over the course of nearly 230 nature and therapy experiences.

Blake Ellis, California State University Chico's Ecotherapy Program manager, has observed that "especially for people that were impacted by the Camp Fire, place and place identity was so strong for them. It was a huge part of who they were. So when that place was lost, they lost a bit of themselves, too. Forest therapy can reground and reorient people, and rebuild their relationship to the land."

A far-reaching research component

Both the Chico, CA program and the Healing Trees series on Maui have come to the attention of UC San Diego's Department of Psychiatry. Under Dr. Jyoti Mishra, director of the Department's [NEATLabs](#) and co-director of the UC Climate Change and Mental Health Initiative, they are seeking to understand how forest therapy may relieve symptoms of climate trauma and rekindle the human-earth connection. Participants on Healing Trees walks will have the option of completing online surveys and cognitive tests. The data collected will inform future research and grant applications, and ultimately, ways to achieve resilience in the face of climate change.

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Dr. Mishra explains, “As the climate crisis worsens, there is high likelihood of weather extremes and wildfire-like disasters affecting our communities. How do our communities adapt and become resilient in this new world? This research is important because it creates the scientific blueprint for a successful community-led therapeutic initiative to benefit the mental health of the people. Uniquely, we are studying how ecotherapy can nurture us – including our cognition and brain biology – so that ultimately this approach can be acknowledged as a scalable community-led path to psychosocial climate resilience.”

Lasting community impact: tree plantings and guide training

The Healing Trees series will also provide several opportunities for participants to contribute to the reforestation of Maui, including planting koa trees on Upcountry lands and preparing seedlings to go into the ground in Kula and/or Lahaina at a time in the future when the ground is ready.

Another goal of the Healing Trees series is to attract and enlist Maui residents interested in training to become certified forest therapy guides. The training of this special Maui cohort in 2025 will be led by the leading international organization in the field, the [Association of Nature and Forest Therapy \(ANFT\)](#). This future network of locally based nature therapy professionals dedicated to the recovery of their community from the wildfire trauma will provide another alternative to those seeking mental health relief in the near- and long-term. A GoFundMe online [fundraiser](#) has been created to accept donations to a scholarship for the Maui forest therapy guide training.

“We have trained guides in the Chico, California region who are doing tremendous work supporting the healing of people traumatized by the 2018 Camp Fire,” said Jackie Kuang, general manager of the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy. “We are grateful that our own certified forest therapy guides Phyllis Look and Edward Baldwin have created the Healing Trees series. And we look forward to growing the guide pool on Maui with a new cohort trained in trauma-informed care who’ll be ready to offer forest therapy sessions to a community that will need their services throughout the recovery process.”

Sponsors

Healing Trees has received financial and in-kind support from Maui Forest Bathing, the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy, UC San Diego, and the partner locations.

Edward Baldwin, co-founder of Maui Forest Bathing, a Healing Trees sponsor, observes, “Maui’s beautiful ‘āina can be an integral part of its healing. There is no better time than now to renew our relationship with our forests, lands, and oceans. We are proud to support this project financially and invite others to join us by contributing to our expanded efforts in 2025.”

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About Forest Bathing Hawai'i

Honolulu-based [Forest Bathing Hawai'i](#) was founded in 2018 and is owned by Phyllis Look, Hawai'i's first certified forest therapy guide. She has facilitated forest bathing walks on Maui in 2020 under the auspices of Blue Zones Project Hawai'i, as well as in November 2023 as part of Maui Nui Botanical Garden's Arbor Day celebration, and again in a privately commissioned experience in January 2024. She regularly leads walks on O'ahu at the Lyon Arboretum and Camp Pālehua, and has guided more than 425 in-person and remotely guided walks. Her work has been recognized in The New York Times, National Geographic, Forbes, and was recently featured on Hawai'i Public Radio and in Hawaii Business Magazine.

About Maui Forest Bathing

[Maui Forest Bathing](#) was founded by Edward and Jennifer Baldwin who became ANFT-certified guides in 2021. They are both active in conservation efforts in the community, as well as at their Idlewilde Farm in Olinda. Edward and Jennifer have always believed in the natural potential for a Maui community of forest bathing practitioners.

[PHOTOS/LOGOS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD](#) (click here)

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