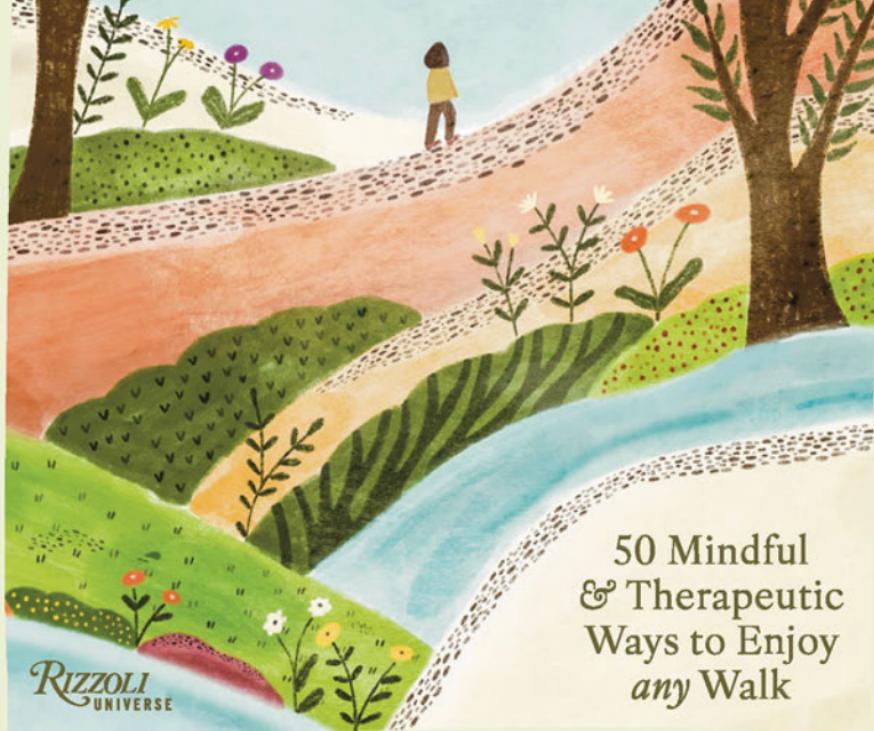


THE WISDOM OF

Walking in Nature

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50 Mindful
& Therapeutic
Ways to Enjoy
any Walk



CHAPTER ONE

Woodland Walks

A woodland setting provides a cloak of calm away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life; it is a leafy escape for walkers and offers the perfect backdrop to gather thoughts, clear the head, and trigger the imagination.

Here you'll find an array of mindful suggestions for woodland walks throughout the seasons.

WALK 1

Spring into Spring

A woodland walk is good for you. Being immersed in nature reduces stress and lowers blood pressure. The natural light boosts vitamin D, keeping the immune system in tip-top shape, while also regulating the body clock, which promotes a healthy sleep pattern. A brisk walk increases the heart rate and gets the blood pumping, so your heart will thank you too!

When you walk is just as important as where you take your daily stroll. Evidence suggests a spring amble is deeply therapeutic, thanks to the array of sights, sounds, and smells on offer. Those first stirrings of life, from the unfurling flower buds to the delicate chirp of birdsong, lift the spirits and induce a positive and relaxed mindset.

TOP TIP

Immerse yourself in the revitalizing energy of spring by taking regular well-being pauses as you walk. Use this time to stand in stillness and feel the peace. Position your feet hip-width apart. Place both hands over your heart in the center of your chest. Draw a long, invigorating breath in through your nose. Imagine you're drinking in the energy of this natural space, letting it permeate your being. Exhale slowly and relax your body.

WALK FOR WELL-BEING

Open your heart and mind and receive the gifts of spring by taking a leisurely stroll through the woods. Treat this as an act of self-care and a way to center yourself. Engage your senses and, most importantly, pay attention to how you feel before, during, and after your walk.

Before you begin, make sure you are wearing the right clothing and footwear. Spring weather can be unpredictable, bringing both sunshine, showers, and chilly winds. Dress in lots of layers, so you will be cozy when it's cold, but you can remove a layer if the sun comes out.

- Take in the general ambience of the woods as you stroll and notice how it makes you feel. Breathe deeply and elongate your spine to stretch out tired muscles.
- Look up at the sunlight filtering through the trees and notice the vibrancy it brings. Look down at the earth beneath your feet and take note of those small changes: how the stony, brittle surface seems to have softened with the extra light and warmth.
- Keep your eyes open for signs of new life. Look out for tiny saplings and new shoots that have emerged from cracks and crevices to greet the sun. See how many buds you can spot and how many flowers have started to bloom. Appreciate their color and beauty, and try to identify them.



- Make this a complete sensory experience by engaging each of your senses in turn. For example, once you've spotted a flower in bloom and studied its appearance, get closer and see if you can smell its sweet scent. What does it remind you of?
- Take in a deep breath of air: what do you taste on your tongue?
- Close your eyes and listen to the breeze as it blows through the undergrowth. What other sounds can you hear at this time? Know that there is no need to rush, that everything in nature happens at its own pace.
- As you wind your way through the woods, be sure to notice all the changes that come with this new season.



WALK 2

Tell the Trees

Trees have existed since before dinosaurs roamed the Earth. These silent sentinels provide oxygen, store carbon, and regulate the water cycle. They're also a safe haven for wildlife, supporting ecosystems, and providing us with a much-needed retreat from the stresses of daily life. The chemical compounds they release to protect themselves, known as phytocides, boost the immune system, and help to lower blood pressure and the stress hormone cortisol. No wonder a woodland walk makes you feel so good!

TOP
TIP

FIND YOUR TREE

Ancient peoples believed that trees were sacred. They thought of them as spiritual guardians with magical properties. The willow, in particular, was thought to be the keeper of secrets and the tree to share your problems with. All trees resonate with a peaceful energy and can help you feel calmer and adopt a more positive mindset.

During your walk, look out for a tree that calls to you personally. Whatever type of tree it is, sit or stand beneath its boughs and look up. Lean your back against the trunk and feel the bark support you. Take a long, deep breath in, and, as you exhale, release any fear or anxiety that you are holding on to. If you feel inclined, tell the tree a secret or a worry that is bothering you, then relax and enjoy spending time with this natural wonder.



CHAPTER TWO

Urban Walks

Cityscapes have much to offer, especially for those who seek stimulation. You may be walking solo, but you're not actually on your own—you are part of a community. And if you really want to get to know a place, then the only way to do this is on foot.

WALK 11

Conquer the Urban Maze

Serendipity plays a role in urban walking. There's the opportunity to learn and discover, to let intuition take the lead and seize the moment by taking a new turn, which might reveal something that you never knew existed. Even dead-ends have their beauty, giving the urban landscape the mystery of a concrete maze. Every avenue directs you to your destination and a new adventure. You're also less likely to get lost in a city as there are always landmarks and people on hand to help. This alone makes detours and flights of fancy possible.

TOP TIP

SHARE THE EXPERIENCE

If you enjoy your solo adventure, why not take a friend next time? Another person will have a different perspective and will notice things that you miss, so their input can enrich the experience. Exploring something together is a lot of fun; it gives you time to truly connect with your companion and learn something new about them.

URBAN RAMBLING

Get to know your city with an off-the-cuff ramble that takes you out of your comfort zone and into pastures new! Revel and reflect in the beauty of your city, by setting yourself a walking challenge that will broaden your horizons.

Take a bus or the subway to the outskirts of the city, to somewhere you don't know, then work your way back to the center. All you need is a sense of adventure, comfy walking shoes, and plenty of time. This is not something you can do in a limited time period; this is about moving freely in your space and going with the flow of urban life.

- It helps if you have a rough idea of the direction you'll be traveling, but there's no need to plan your excursion to the letter. This is about having an adventure and seeking out paths that you wouldn't usually follow.
- Remember that you can follow signs and use a map or navigation tool on your phone if you feel the need, or simply go with the flow, letting your intuition and word of mouth lead you onwards.
- Have fun exploring. If you see something you like, stop and take a closer look. If you're drawn down a road that isn't taking you to your final destination, don't worry. You're allowed to go off the beaten track and satisfy your curiosity, so check out that local park or city garden if it piques your interest.
- Engage your senses as you walk. Think about what you can see, hear, smell, and feel.
- Give yourself plenty of time for this, so you can relax and have a real adventure. By doing so, you'll discover that the place you thought you knew has so much more to offer.



Pound the Pavements

You might think city streets offer little to excite the mind. The sidewalk, whether uniform or uneven, is just a concrete walkway and a means of getting from A to B. However, even if the landscape is bland, the connection you form with the path that you walk can make a huge difference to how you feel. By shifting your perspective, you can bring the experience of walking the same route to life in new and engaging ways.

TOP TIP

CREATE YOUR OWN SOUNDTRACK

Combine the rhythm of your feet with some powerful affirmations to make the most of your walk. For example, if you'd like to feel energized, you could create a positive statement that embodies this, such as: "I am brimming with energy," or "I am energized." Then repeat this phrase in your head as you walk, timing it to fit in with each beat. If you prefer, you could simply focus on the word "energy" and what this means. Imagine being infused with energy as you walk, and increase the power of your steps and rhythm to promote this further. Remember, you are creating the soundtrack to your walk, so you can incorporate any movement or sound you like to enhance this.

FOOT-DRUMMING WALK

Combine the senses of hearing and feeling with your body's natural rhythm to develop your own urban-based symphony as you walk. It might sound complicated, but all it takes is a little awareness of the impact that you make as you connect with your environment and the imprint you leave.

- STEP 1** *Begin your walk as you would normally, but focus on the lower half of your body and the gentle rhythm that you make as you take each step.*
- STEP 2** *Bring your attention to the sole of each foot, and how it feels when you connect with the sidewalk beneath you, starting with your heel and rolling toward your toe.*
- STEP 3** *Notice the sound that your feet make as they hit the sidewalk. Is it an obvious thwack, a light tap, or a deeper thrum? Does the sound change depending on the surface you are walking on?*
- STEP 4** *Begin to tap out a rhythm by counting each step and feeling it resonate through your body. Experiment by changing the pace or putting more effort into your steps. Think of yourself as a musical artist composing your own theme tune as you walk.*
- STEP 5** *You may find that there are natural breaks, times when you pause or the rhythm changes—this is all part of the symphony that you are creating.*
- STEP 6** *Enjoy the experience and have fun switching things up by adding in more footsteps or even lengthening your stride. Know that even the dullest walk can provide an opportunity for you to be creative.*



CHAPTER THREE

Seaside Walks

Whether you're looking for a powerfully invigorating walk by the ocean, or a gentle beachside stroll to soothe the soul, you'll find everything you need at the seaside. Walks can be enjoyed at any time of year in this environment, and here you'll find a wealth of mindful and engaging techniques to help you make the most of them.

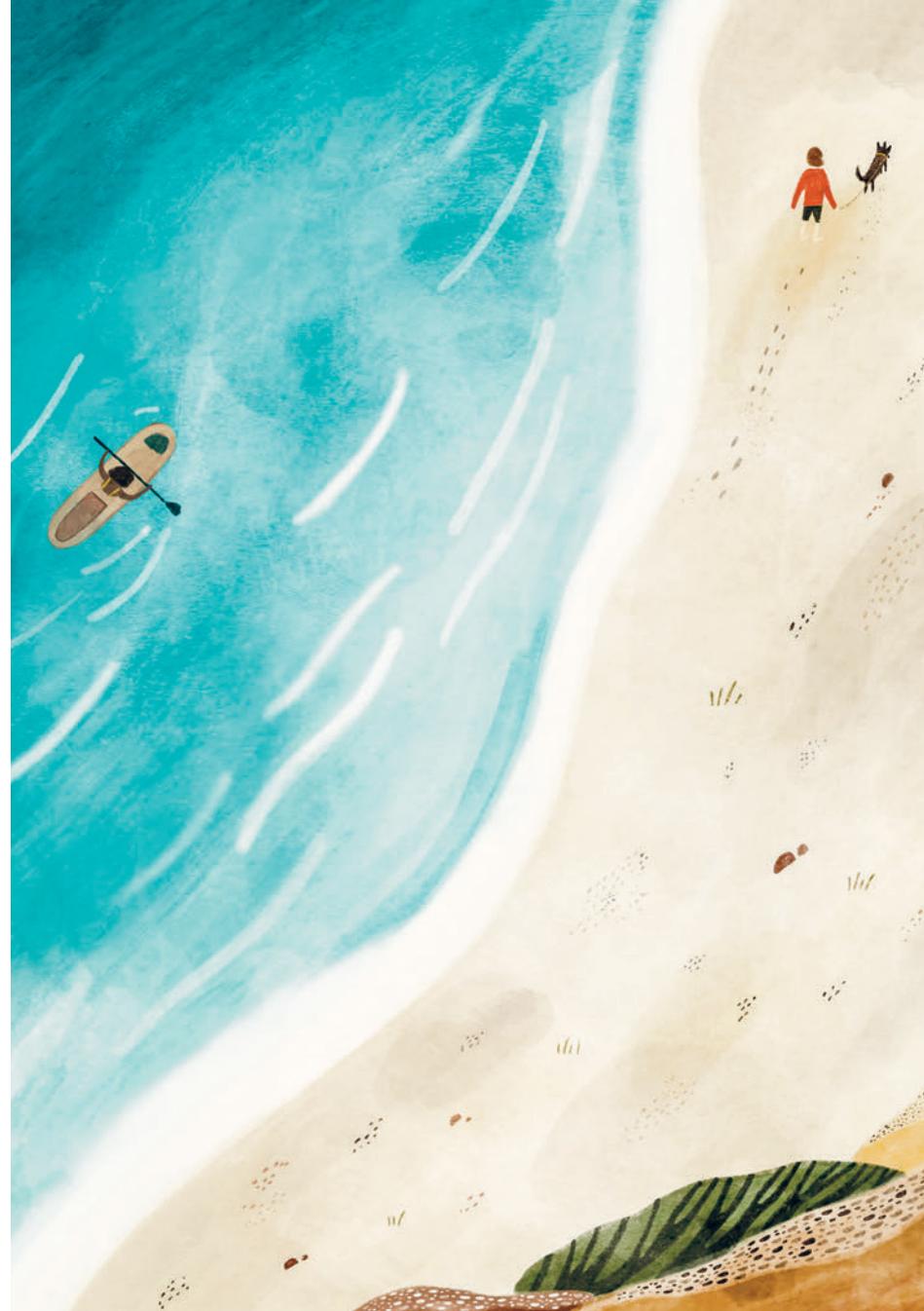
S A N D Y S U M M E R S T R O L L

Use a relaxing beach walk on a sunny day as an opportunity to rebalance body and mind and engage with the elements of Air, Water, Fire, and Earth. Use the time to reflect upon your journey in the present moment.

STEP 1 *Find a stretch of sandy beach that is safe to walk on barefoot, and take off your shoes.* Choose a pleasant day when the sun is out and it's not too chilly, so you can relax and enjoy the experience fully. If possible, begin your walk close to the sea where the sand is moist and you can see and hear the waves lapping upon the shore.

STEP 2 *As you walk, allow your feet to roll forward comfortably from heel to toe,* so they make an impression in the damp sand. Notice the sound of the sand as it envelops your feet. Feel the wet, grainy softness against your skin and let it squeeze up through your toes to fully engulf each foot. It might feel strange at first, but try to relax and go with the sensation; you'll soon get used to it.

STEP 3 *Let the elements embrace you.* Breathe deeply and let the sound of the sea relax you. Taste the salty breeze upon the tip of your tongue and notice how it awakens your entire mouth. Notice too how the air infuses you with energy and propels you forward on your walk. The rolling waves rush to greet you; the trickling sound as water seeps into sand is comforting and the movement spurs you onward. The heat of the sun, a fiery ball of energy in the sky, warms your skin and the light makes the sandy vista sparkle with a brightness that cheers you. Notice how the warmth and the sunlight lift your mood.



STEP 4

Close your eyes for a few seconds as you walk, and notice what you feel in your body. Perhaps the wet sand clinging to your feet holds your attention: the way it gives each step extra bounce and helps you feel grounded. It could be the breeze buffeting your body and tugging at your hair, or perhaps it's the smell, the scent of sea and seaweed, of salt and brine.

STEP 5

Cast an eye over your shoulder and look at the footprints you have left in the sand, a transient reminder of where you've been and how far you have come. Some may have already been stolen by the tide, but that doesn't matter because you know the steps you have taken to get to this point. You are fully aware and present for this journey.

STEP 6

Begin to walk farther inland, where the sand is dry, and notice how this shift in landscape feels. It's a different kind of softness, a powdery coarseness that exfoliates your skin gently as you stroll. Relax and sink your feet deep into the earth. Know that thousands of people have passed the same way, and that you are walking in their footsteps.

WALK 23

Promenade with Your Pup

Taking a dog walk by the sea benefits both owner and pet. The range of sights, sounds, and smells provide mental stimulation and the wide-open space is the perfect playground for excitable dogs to get plenty of exercise and have some fun. Many dogs love to paddle or swim, as the cool water helps to regulate their temperature on a hot summer's day, and it's a sensory experience. There's the opportunity for social interaction with other dogs, and a walk together is a bonding experience, which strengthens the ties between human and dog. It's also a great way for owners to get their daily dose of exercise.

TOP
TIP**BRING A BOTTLE**

The beach might be surrounded by water, but it's important for you and your dog to stay hydrated, so bring plenty of fresh drinking water with you. Encourage your dog to take regular breaks, especially if it's a longer walk in the heat, so you can both have a drink and a snack. Be aware of the weather. If it's a baking hot day, do this walk either early in the morning or later in the evening.

B E A C H D O G W A L K

Let your dog inspire you, as you walk along the shoreline. Watch how they act and engage with their surroundings and then follow their lead. Connect with your playful inner child and experience the beach through your dog's eyes.

- While you might usually use a leash to take your dog for a walk, get into some role reversal and let your dog take the lead in a beach adventure. Allow them to set the pace, and go where their nose takes you. If the beach is busy, you might have to put your dog on a leash, but, if possible, go early so they can run free.
- Appreciate your dog's sense of fun and watch what they're doing. Notice how their inquisitive nature takes over once they're given free rein.
- Get into the playful spirit and join your dog for a frolic by the water's edge. Let your dog's enthusiasm rub off on you by diving straight in. Plunge your bare feet into the water without hesitation and enjoy the refreshing rush of energy that you feel as you do this. Splash around and make some noise: remember what it was like as a child running through the sea and engage with that feeling.
- If your dog is sprinting ahead, match their pace with a brisk walk. Take long, purposeful strides to catch them up and notice how this changes your breathing pattern.
- When your dog pauses to check something out, take a minute to rest and soak in your surroundings.

- Notice what you can smell: are there any interesting aromas in the air?
- Notice too what you can see: do a slow spin around and get the full panoramic view.
- Notice what you can feel: perhaps you can feel the sand between your toes or your dog brushing against you. Enjoy these feelings of closeness.
- If your dog has found something interesting on the beach, check it out with them. If it's a piece of driftwood, you can use it as a toy to throw. Be inventive and create new games that you can play together using your beach finds.





CHAPTER FOUR

Short Strolls

A short walk replenishes the brain, and it also boosts attention levels, alleviates stress, and lifts the mood, according to scientific research. The fresh air, regular exercise, and social interaction, especially if you're walking with a friend, helps you feel more energized and increases self-esteem.

What's not to love?

Go Off the Beaten Track

A short stroll doesn't have to be boring. While there are many benefits to taking a well-worn route, especially if time is limited, you can mix things up by going off the beaten track. If something piques your interest, take it a step further. Stimulate your innate curiosity and peek down that lane that always catches your eye, or turn left when you would normally go right. You'll find out where the path leads and may even discover a secret garden or tree-lined track that adds a little extra magic to your day.

TOP TIP

TURN THINGS AROUND

Sometimes taking the opposite direction to your normal route will open up a world of new experiences. With this in mind, choose your favorite short walk and flip it on its head by doing it in reverse. Enter the park at the gate you would normally leave by, turn right around the pond instead of left, and so on. This might feel strange at first, but you'll be amazed at the difference it makes. Once you get into the habit of turning things around physically with a walk, you'll start to do the same mentally; this can shift your perception and help you think laterally.

DISCOVERY WALK

This type of walk will help you get to know your neighborhood. Even if you've been living somewhere for years, you might surprise yourself and find a patch with new delights to offer. All you have to do is keep your wits about you, stay present and open, and observe each walkway keenly. You'll need to keep an eye on time as this is only a short stroll, but if you do find something of interest you can always go back for a longer ramble.

- Set yourself a time limit. You may have a destination in mind, but don't be tied to it. Keep in mind that you are going on something of an adventure!
- Adopt a leisurely pace; you don't want to be rushing and miss anything of interest. This is about observing your surroundings and enjoying the sights and sounds that you see every day.
- Take time to appreciate the flowering borders that line the street, noticing how they frame the view with their pretty shapes and colors.
- Admire the sprawling canopy of a particular tree, as well as the intricate pattern of its branches.
- Gaze up into the sky and watch the birds soaring overhead.
- Look down at your feet and notice the contours of the path you are following.



- Survey your surroundings and watch the natural world unfold before your eyes. Even in the most urban environments, nature finds a way to break through. Wildflowers peep between the cracks in paving stones, moss gathers on stone walls, and bushes become homes for small birds, seeking refuge from the noise and bustle of the human world.
- Give yourself the permission and freedom to sightsee and have fun, even if it is for a limited time. In doing so, you'll open the mind and enliven the spirit.
- Look for openings and opportunities to explore—a rusty gate that leads to a tree-lined walkway, an avenue with blooming planters and hanging baskets. It doesn't matter if the route doesn't lead to your destination; you're allowed to be spontaneous and take a diversion.
- If you do find something of interest, make a mental note, so you can return and explore more fully on another day.



WALK 32

Clear the Path for New Beginnings

A bracing walk on a windy day is an effective way of exercising and ultimately strengthens the body and mind. When you walk into the wind, the resistance you feel forces the muscles to work harder, making it more of a challenge. The effort you put into each step means that a walk around your local park is not dissimilar to a hike across a rugged landscape or walking up a steep hill. Add to this the fact that wind accelerates the evaporation of sweat, which means you'll stay cool and clear-headed for longer, and you have a win-win situation when it comes to fitness and feeling good.

TOP
TIP

GIVE YOURSELF A PUSH

This is a brisk walk, so you'll need to increase the pace and length of your gait. It's a good idea to build up to this gradually during the walk. The more energized you feel by your surroundings, the more effort you'll put into each step. It helps to imagine that your feet are bouncing forward and that you're cushioned by the air. This will propel you forward and generate even more energy!