

Book Review

The nature fix: Why nature makes us happier, healthier, and more creative

Williams, F. (2017). W.W Norton and Company Inc.

It's something that many of us intrinsically know – being outside in nature makes us feel good. But how?

In this informative and entertaining book, journalist Florence Williams sets out to uncover the science behind the feel-good factor of nature. She travels the globe to talk to researchers who are working at the cutting edge of nature neuroscience.

Williams certainly gets around experiencing the benefits of smelling trees amongst cypress forests in Korea, floating down a river with American war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and shinrin yoku (forest bathing) in Japan.

In Singapore she discovers that hospital inpatients get better faster if they can see the outdoors. The Finnish Government is funding a study that shows the economic benefits of people spending time in nature. It turns out spending time in nature is good for the bottom line too – happier, healthier people are more creative, take less sick leave, and get more work done.

Simple things make a difference

Through her research Williams reveals how time in nature is not just a nice thing to do, but is essential to our wellbeing as humans. It directly impacts our mental and physical wellbeing. With our increasingly sedentary lifestyles it's something we all need to take on board. But we don't have to go bush for months to get the benefits of nature. Something as simple as standing outside under a tree has been shown to increase mood and decrease blood pressure.

The award-winning journalist has an easy-to-read, accessible style. A mixture of science, wit and entertainment. It's like a chat with the author rather than a scientific tome. The bite-sized chapters make it good to delve into, but I found it hard to put down and read half the book in one sitting.

Williams sums it all up with a simple: "Go outside, often, sometimes in wild places. Bring friends or not. Breathe." It's advice we could all do with following.

Reviewed by Sorrel Hoskin, Visitor Information Ranger at the Department of Conservation New Plymouth

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