

Forest Bathing

Turn off your devices to give yourself the best chance of relaxing, being mindful and enjoying a sensory forest-based experience.

Slow down. Move through the forest slowly so you can see and feel more.

Take long breaths deep into the abdomen. Extending the exhalation of air to twice the length of the inhalation sends a message to the body that it can relax.

Stop, stand or sit, smell what's around you, what can you smell?

Take in your surroundings using all of your senses. How does the forest environment make you feel? Be observant, look at nature's small details.

Sit quietly using mindful observation; try to avoid thinking about your to-do list or issues related to daily life. You might be surprised by the number of wild forest inhabitants you see using this process.

Keep your eyes open. The colors of nature are soothing and studies have shown that people relax best while seeing greens and blues.

Stay as long as you can, start with a comfortable time limit and build up to the recommended two hours for a complete forest bathing experience.

While we have our favorite spots, River Mountain is full of nature - 150 acres of it.

Roam, wander, and discover what calls you.

River Mountain

Campfire Conversations

As the day draws to a close, a campfire is the perfect nightcap. It's invaluable to take time to connect, communicate, and be present together. These campfire conversation starters are just a few ideas of questions to inspire conversation where everyone is acknowledged. Select a question and pass it around the group. You can even have a retreat guest begin the conversation and speak the question to the group. Reel the conversation back in if someone gets sidetracked, ensuring all voices feel equally heard.

A few sample campfire conversation starters:

What makes you feel alive?

What rejuvenates you?

What brings you here?

What's one thing you respect about yourself?

What quality are you most proud of bringing to a relationship?

What have your greatest successes been in the last year?

What's something that's incredibly valuable to your life that you don't do often enough?

What strengths do you possess that you'd like to cultivate?

What are some things you'd like to start saying no to?

How does living your life well look in your imagination?

What kind of self-care rituals would you like to incorporate into your life?

How do you want to feel in your own skin?

Think of the last time you laughed and let go – when was it and how can you cultivate that feeling more often?

What specific support or help do you need from those around you?

River Mountain

Give + Gather

Affirmations Loop

Begin at the Hiking loop trailhead between the Main Lodge and Main Camp Yurts. Share one of the affirmations below with the group. Ponder and walk together down the trail, following the signs for the River Mountain trail.

As you approach the creek, you will find a wooden stake with a box next to it. Open the box and have the group sign their name in the notebook and share their own positive thoughts for someone in the future, following in your footsteps.

After the group adds to the notebook, share another affirmation and proceed walking along the trail. Continue this process for the remainder of the trail – you will find six total wooden stakes and notebooks.

Sample Affirmations:

1. Trust the journey of your life, knowing that everything happens for a reason and that you're always where you need to be.
2. Smile, breathe, and go slowly.
3. You are exactly where you need to be.
4. May beautiful things fall into place in a thousand little ways you didn't expect.
5. Here's to learning to breathe freely, right here.
6. Every single breath you breathe is proof that you are finding a way through this.
7. Make time for the wildflowers. Make time for the unexpected joys that show up in the most ordinary places.
8. Discovering who you are beneath the layers is a lifelong journey. Be kind to yourself along the way.
9. Embrace the rhythm of each season.
10. May this be one of those seasons where you encounter beautiful things even in the smallest ways.
11. May you never discredit how far you have come, even while you are still on the journey.
12. Have gratitude for the little things even while you wait for bigger things to fall in place.

River Mountain

Plant a Tree

Clean Water Grows on Trees

Riparian buffers, also known as a vegetated buffer or forest buffers, are vegetated areas along a stream, usually forested, which helps shade and protect a stream. Forested riparian buffers filter pollution, prevent erosion, reduce flooding impacts, stabilize streambanks, improve soil quantity, and create habitat for wildlife. Trees also help address climate change by cooling the air and sequestering carbon. They have so many benefits.

Roughly 28,000 miles of Pennsylvania's rivers and streams are damaged by polluted runoff and the legacy of coal mining. Here at River Mountain, the Eastern Hemlock trees face serious threat from the woolly adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*). This non-native invasive insect has caused significant hemlock defoliation and mortality across Pennsylvania and the United States. It's important we plant trees today to strengthen the buffer to protect Sweet Root Creek and the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Community Connection

Nestled in the Alleghenies' Black Valley, River Mountain rests at the base of Tussey Mountain alongside Sweet Root Creek. Countless fresh water springs flow into the creek on the property, eventually flowing downstream into Town Creek, then into the Potomac, and finally into the Chesapeake Bay. At River Mountain, we feel fortunate to be a part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed community, and the stewardship of our 1.7 miles of springs, creeks, perennial streams, seeps, and wet- meadows is one of our top ecological and community priorities.

Tree Planting Instructions

1. Trees are located at Main Camp behind the barn - right next to the greenhouse.
2. Pick your tree(s). Grab a shovel. Pick your favorite spot.
3. Dig a hole about 1.5 times as wide as the tree and about 8-12 inches deep.
4. Remove your tree from the container by holding the trunk with one hand and pushing away or down on the container with the other hand.
5. Remove any excess soil that's above the top of the first woody root.
6. Carefully place the tree in hole, making sure it stands straight and the top of the first woody root is at ground level. Backfill hole with soil to the top of the first woody root, flat and evenly. ***You don't want the soil to look like a volcano around the tree trunk, this can rot the tree.
7. Water your tree using a bucket with water from the creek or water spigot outside the Main Lodge.

River Mountain

Stargazing

Start by Looking Up

The first step to stargazing is a simple one: look up. Take the time to gaze up at the sky. Notice the position of the sun or the moon or try to find the brightest stars or planets such as Venus, which is so bright it is occasionally visible in the daytime. You don't need any equipment, just your eyes.

Locate the Big Dipper

Most of us know how to find the Big Dipper, a bright star pattern that's easily recognizable in the Northern Hemisphere and is found within the constellation Ursa Major (Big Bear). You can find the Big Dipper in the northern sky pretty much year-round. The Big Dipper (handle and bowl) helps point you to the Little Dipper (aka Ursa Minor). Follow the two stars on the outer edge of the bowl and trace a line up to find the North Star, or Polaris.

Locate Other Bright Star Patterns

Next, try looking for Cassiopeia, a bright W-shaped star formation in the northern sky. Both the Big Dipper and the Cassiopeia circle around the North Star (on opposite sides) and you're likely to see them year-round. For Cassiopeia, trace a line from the last star in the Big Dipper's handle through and past Polaris.

Another formation to look for is the Summer Triangle—three bright stars that are almost as bright as planets and the first you'll see after sunset. Deneb, Vega and Altair are part of what's called an asterism, a group of bright stars that aren't an official constellation. You can locate the Summer Triangle most times of the year, but it is most prominent in summer. Spotting the Summer Triangle can lead you to other stars. For example, Deneb, Vega and Altair are the brightest stars in their own constellations.

Stargazing Apps

A stargazing app is also another great way to locate stars and constellations for beginner stargazers. You can hold your phone up and these apps will know where you are. Stargazing apps include Stellarium Mobile Sky Map, [Distant Suns](#), [Star Walk](#), SkyMap and [SkySafari](#).

River Mountain

How to Build a Campfire

1.

Grab all of your campfire kit items - the lighter, the firestarter, kindling (small wood pieces), and dry firewood.

2.

Firestarters - they look little pucks of wood chips and we've given you a few in your accommodation. You'll need one to start a fire - grab one and set aside for a moment.

3.

Build a log cabin with 4 pieces of dry firewood. Stuff the log cabin with shredded paper bag and kindling (small wood pieces). Make sure you don't "overstuff" the log cabin, oxygen and air flow are essential for a fire.

4.

Grab your firestarter and place it in the center of your log cabin with the shredded paper bag and kindling. Light your firestarter cup.

5.

Make sure the firestarter continues to burn. It should then ignite the shredded paper bag, then the kindling, and then the firewood. Once your fire is burning and strong, add another piece of dry firewood. Again, don't overload your fire - fire needs oxygen and air flow!

River Mountain Hiking Loop

Explore River Mountain! The River Mountain loop is an amazing way to discover and uncover nature - wildlife sightings, peaceful moments by the creek, and quiet hideaways are calling you.

The River Mountain loop is approximately 1.3 miles with a mix of open fields, shale, wood chips, creeks, and grassy meadow trail. It is suitable for beginner to advanced fitness levels. It may take a full day to really explore or be done as a quick morning jog.

We recommend finding an ENO hammock hung in the trees along the way and finding your own secret spot to relax, chill, and chat with friends. We love hanging along Sweet Root Creek, in the Secret Forest, or in the Cabin Woods.

Did you know River Mountain rests on 150 acres of land? There are over 150 species of plants and wildlife here at River Mountain.

Did you know Sweet Root Creek is apart of the Chesapeake Bay watershed? That means Sweet Root Creek flows all the way down to Washington D.C.

You'll find maps and signs throughout the property, wherever you are, pointing you in the direction to the River Mountain Hiking Trail Loop.

River Mountain

Scavenger Hunt

Ready to explore and have a little fun? Good. The River Mountain scavenger hunt is a bit of geocaching, exploring, wandering in nature, and problem solving. Follow the clues below to uncover some of our favorite hidden areas of River Mountain. Keep your eyes open and have fun!

Each clue leads you to a wooden stake in the ground.

Oh, and hey...we didn't get too crazy with this. All spots are near pathways. No need to climb Warrior Ridge like a mountain goat! Now, let's go...

Begin at the Hiking loop trailhead between the Main Lodge and Main Camp Yurts.

Spot 1

There's a quiet corner where the creek and the mountain meet - that's where you'll find your first treat!

Spot 2

Follow the Creek Trail, going left into the trees, soon you'll see a view of the creek, and a spot to enjoy the breeze.

Spot 3

Hey, since you're moving about, take a minute and go stretch it out.

Spot 4

Keep following the Creek Trail ALL the way down, until it bends right and heads up to the west, you'll then find a balance beam foot bridge, it's the absolute best!

Spot 5

Continue along the trail, up the hill and through the woods, soon you'll arrive at the upper meadow.

Spot 6

On your way back and near to the start - take a moment to sit after your wander, stare into the water and PONDer.

River Mountain