



IN THE KNOW

Whistler is 90 minutes' drive from Vancouver.

Transfer with VIP Whistler Car Service.

Four Seasons Resort is classic Canadian alpine – no razzle or dazzle, just stone, timber and enormous picture windows, and more than a third of its 273 oversized guestrooms are suites; from \$C450 (\$502) a night plus taxes and \$C65 resort fee.

Three-hour forest-bathing sessions with Society of Trees cost \$C150.

Scandinave Spa offers casual full-day bathing passes from \$C103, including two towels and locker.

Audain Art Museum is open Thursday to Monday 11am-6pm, adults \$C22.

fourseasons.com/whistler

societyoftrees.com

scandinave.com/whistler

audainartmuseum.com

Scandinave Spa, main; forest bathing, below; carved screen by Jim Hart at the Audain Art Museum, bottom

CALM FOR THE SOUL

Forest bathing is just one way to switch off among the cedars, firs and spruce trees in British Columbia

JEREMY BOURKE

Stress. Burnout. Anxiety. That's quite the hit list of conditions that Monica Sander Burns presents for alleviation in her forest-bathing sessions among the cedars, firs and spruce of British Columbia. She could add another: impostor syndrome. Because in the natural elegance of western Canada's swishest ski town, Whistler, I'm feeling all right.

It's ambient early autumn, and I seemingly have the place to myself in the lull between summer and the ski season. I'm in dreamy digs, the best restaurants have ridiculous deals to keep their kitchens ticking over, and the wildlife is out on a pre-hibernation feeding frenzy. Don't fix what's not broken, yet here I am, sitting in "council", a circle where Burns says we can communicate "evenly" and share "what wants to arise". Looks like we're about to talk to the trees.

Burns, an Australian, came to Whistler in 2019 chasing the snow. During Covid, "to stay sane" she'd go into the forest behind her home, which had a marked effect on her wellbeing. "It was a calm I'd not encountered before." She researched why, determining that while forest bathing is a modern concept, it's based on the ancient wisdom of paying intimate attention to nature. She calls her program Society of Trees, and we gather amid tall timbers in Lost Lake Park. A citrusy scent pervades as we meditate on a spongy carpet of cones. Then it's a senses walk, on which we listen to, touch and smell the forest, sticking our noses deep into the hemlocks. By a creek, flowing with its crystal-clear essence of life, we're to give it gifts of our thoughts and something from the forest. I toss in a twig.

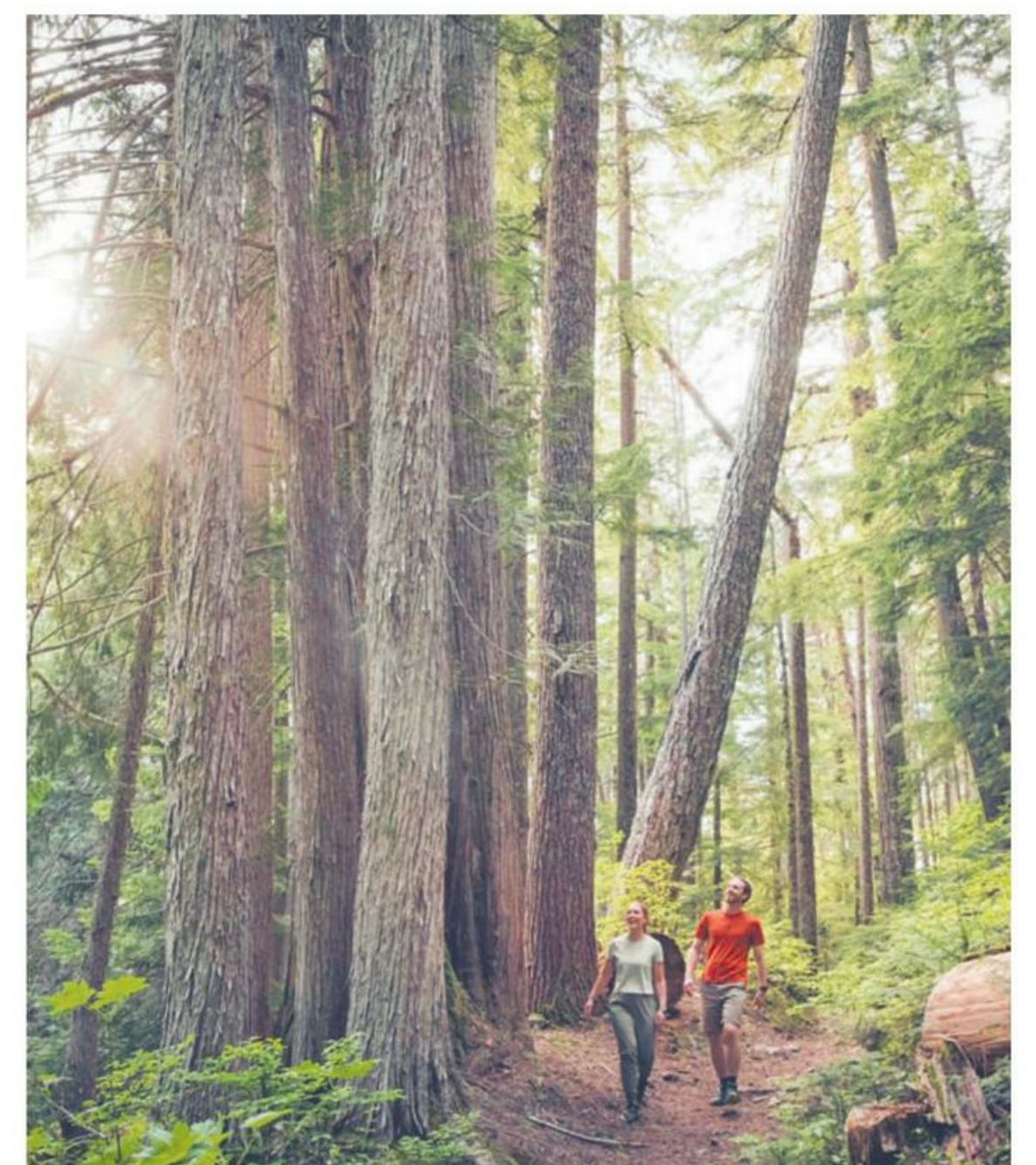
Then we're invited to sit/stand/walk around alone in silence, for 15 minutes, somewhere where the forest pleases. On this cool morning, I sit where the sun spotlights the ground. "The practice (of forest bathing) isn't imposing anything," Burns explains as we finish with First Nations herbal tea. "It's an invitation to step into the space."

Almost every step in Whistler takes you into wellness. Scandinave Spa has a network of pools, saunas and other therapeutic installations under the trees, so literally forest bathing. It feels like a genuine Scandinavian sauna experience, operating rain, snow or shine. And you're wallowing under the pine cones of silence, because devices and even

conversation are forbidden, although no T&Cs can regulate against snores from the terrace.

Whistler's Audain Art Museum taps into wellbeing with weekly yoga classes in its dramatic foyer, separated from the forest by a wall of glass. Established in 2016 by a gift of Vancouver philanthropists Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa, the permanent collection is exclusively BC artists from the past 250 years, the only museum in Canada devoted to a home province. The anchor tenant is an icon, Emily Carr (1871-1945). She'd document Pacific Northwest indigenous works that were either forbidden to be created or shipped to museums offshore, and in her own work she sought to capture the "dark vastness" of old growth rainforests. Also well represented is E.J. Hughes (1913-2007), a war artist who came back in 1945 and just wanted to paint beauty, around his home on Vancouver Island: modest buildings, ferries and natural surroundings. But all that is dwarfed by one work, commissioned by Michael Audain, a huge dance screen carved in cedar by Haida man Jim Hart. The artist has populated the screen with traditional beings affected by the critical loss of habitat of salmon, Haida communities' staple food source.

A neighbouring table at breakfast is excitedly discussing their day's jaunt, a 46km e-bike ride along the car-free Valley Trail. But to raise one's spirits body and soul, really the only way is up, to the town's twin mountains Whistler and Blackcomb. In no time at all



gondolas have you above the tree line and into the wildflower meadows and there's hikes for all levels. But being a lover of walking within forests, especially the giants this town provides, I take the challenge of the Blackcomb Ascent Trails, three connected routes that rise 1200m through the rainforest over 6.2km. The trails top out at Rendezvous Lodge, said rendezvous fortuitously being with the gondola for a download to the village.

A guaranteed mood-elevator is a good meal, and I experience restaurants in the hands of owners and/or chefs thinking outside their cultural squares. At Wild Blue, opened in 2022, Alex Chen, a former Iron Chef, champions BC seafood, whether in a wonderful fish soup Provencale, octopus with nduja sausage, or sablefish alongside turnip and radish. Mekong was opened in July 2023 by Pepe Barajas, a Mexican-Canadian who noted that Whistler lacked a Thai place. It serves a dish that should become famous: Plah Sam Rot sea bass served whole with three sauces: sweet, sour and savoury.

Lastly, it's the well-established and recently revamped Sidecut within Four Seasons Resort. Goanese executive chef Sajish Kumar Das's tasting menu is Canadian autumn on a plate: mushroom croustis, then chermoula-crusted lamb and ending with a pear and rum compote. And my smoky nightcap reaffirms Whistler's affinity with all things wood: Four Seasons' The Library bar has hitched its wagon to Scottish distiller Macallan and its mellow barrel-aged malts.

Jeremy Bourke was a guest of Tourism Whistler and Destination Canada.

whistler.com

hellobc.com