

# MIND AT PEACE

Transformational coast and mountain retreats offer direction in navigating and accepting life's changes through mindfulness



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BAILA LAZARUS

**G**lobal spiritual leader and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that through mindfulness people can live fully aware of the present moment and in that way achieve true happiness and peace.

For retirees undergoing significant life changes or looking for a new direction or purpose in life, the practice of mindfulness can bring clarity. Thanks to a growing interest in self-awareness, retreats around B.C. are creating programs that embrace mindfulness as part of their courses and activities. While definitions of mindfulness vary, it tends to comprise elements of being alert to one's actions, feelings, thoughts and energy in the present moment and tuning in to positive thought

patterns that enhance energy and focus.

"It's is the practice of paying attention to the energy that you're radiating out into the world with thoughts, words and actions," says Cynthia Miller, owner of Pacific Peace Retreat on the Sunshine Coast. "Being present and intentional helps to keep me in line with what I want to create energetically, and we can train our brain to be that way."

Miller includes meditation, yoga, reiki, mindset



ABOVE: Haven faculty member Jo-Ann Kevala: “there’s still a need to find peace and make friends with that inner voice” | SUBMITTED

RIGHT: Set on the tranquil, forested shores of Gabriola Island, the Haven offers a variety of programs for transformation and growth | SUBMITTED



coaching, creative arts and hypnotherapy as some of the different modalities she offers to guests.

“I have some techniques to help someone look at their situation from a different perspective,” says Miller. “It’s about being present and seeing opportunity instead of a challenge, being expansive instead of limiting. Being mindful is removing the blinders and not being controlled by your beliefs.”

Miller cautions that mindfulness doesn’t stop at just-being self-aware.

“It’s putting awareness into action,” says Miller. “What am I creating in this moment? Is it really what I want to be doing?”

On Gabriola Island in the Georgia Strait, the Haven offers participants dozens of programs that deal with communication, conscious living, self-compassion and building relationships, among others. Each of its courses, which last several days to several weeks, have elements of mindfulness training, especially those focusing on self-compassion.

“It can be about finding your present state of mind, relaxing into the now,” says Haven faculty member Jo-Ann Kevala. “Because of higher stress in life, higher digital content, the pace has gotten so fast for people.



ABOVE: A sunset view from Hollyhock Leadership Learning Centre, Cortes Island | AMANDA MARY CREATIVE

ABOVE RIGHT: Participants take a meditative stroll at Hollyhock Leadership Learning Centre | AL WESTNEDGE

RIGHT: The garden and lodge at Hollyhock Leadership Learning Centre | AMANDA MCNAUGHTON

## Mind at peace



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Quantum Leaps Retreats in Golden combines First Nations spirituality, Buddhist teachings and other philosophies | SUBMITTED

At Quantum Leaps Retreats in Golden, a meditative walk in the transformational labyrinth encourages participants to reflect on their lives | SUBMITTED

Including First Nations spirituality in its programs, Quantum Leaps Retreats facilitates a sweat lodge ceremony for mental, emotional, physical and spiritual cleansing | SUBMITTED



Coming back to the present moment is not something that people are good at. People come to the Haven to quiet the constant internal distractions.”

Kevala points out that even in retirement, stress still has a hold on people, even if they’re not working daily.

“The inner critic, self-doubt, self-questioning tends to find new things to focus on,” she says. “There’s still a need to find peace and make friends with that inner voice.”

Farther north, on Cortes Island, Hollyhock Leadership Learning Centre offers 90 courses annually on wisdom, wellness, creativity and social innovation. From two-day courses on your life’s purpose to 14-day silent meditation, many of these embrace mindfulness as a key component, such as Mindfulness Meditation and

Mindful Self-Compassion.

Mindfulness courses “provide a deeper sense of awareness and presence of self and the way you relate to the world,” says Hollyhock communications manager Loretta Laurin. “For people looking for meaning later in life who tend to have more time due to less focus on work or kids and who can focus on themselves, the opportunity to know yourself deeply is a beautiful thing.”

Hollyhock also has programs specifically geared toward older age groups, such as Come of Age.

“It’s for people coming into their role in the community as elders and what that means,” says Laurin. “We look at traditional knowledge and see people in older age groups as being the keepers of knowledge and wisdom, so how do we reclaim that?”

Tapping into a wide variety of mindful activities, Brian Olynek and Annette Boelman have brought together First Nations spirituality, Buddhist philosophies and a host of other teachings at Quantum Leaps Retreats in Golden.

Visitors can participate in sweat lodges, vision quests, shamanic drumming, fire walks and various types of breathing and meditation techniques.

“It’s really about stepping out of our programming,” says Olynek, who has been an avid outdoor guide much of his life and used to run whitewater rafting companies in Golden. He’s also trained to lead visitors in fire walking and holotropic breath work. Boelman has also worked many years in outdoor recreation and practises massage and craniosacral therapy.

“The retreat can help people tap into their creativity and not be caught up in being a victim or be materialistic,” says Olynek. “Our society is based on stress, and when you get stressed out you get more selfish. If you can shift out of that into a more giving and sharing type of relationship with yourself, with others and with nature, that’s more heartfelt.”

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