

Peaceful Places

From deer-filled mini forests to zero-gravity naps, bastions of quietude can be found even in the most hectic cities. *by Anne Ford*

When I was a kid, my mom occasionally used to fantasize out loud about being dropped off on a deserted island. No kids, no husband, no work, no house—just her and the palm trees.

To 12-year-old me, that plan seemed incredibly boring and dreary. (No Nintendo? Please.) But now that I've grown up and acquired responsibilities like my mom's, a deserted island sounds exactly like heaven. I don't need a hammock, a mango tree or even a cabana boy, just a whole lot of silence. Except for the slow lapping of the ocean waves, of course.

Like you, I've got enough on my plate for an entire buffet: work to complete, kids to drop off, kids to pick up, bills to pay, laundry to wash, pets to clean up after. All these logistics to tend, every single day, reminds me of a saying that hung on the wall of a publishing house where I used to work: "The process of publishing consists of an infinite number of details, no one of which is important unless it is overlooked or improperly executed." Seems like a good description of, you know, life.

I don't know anyone who's escaped the insanity entirely. Even a cloistered nun, I suspect, finds herself fretting occasionally about how she's behind on her rosaries. For that matter, after a few days on that deserted island, I'd probably create a strict coconut-collecting routine for myself and then start freaking out about how I'd never make quota by sundown.

Because the real insanity comes from within ourselves. We think we "have" to do this, we "have" to do that, when really all we have to do is breathe. Not even that because breathing happens on its own, without us doing anything. In the words of Byron Katie, we are being breathed.

I find—and you may find, too—that it's easier to remember that fact in quiet places. Sure, Zen masters can probably achieve a state of blissful calm in the front row of a heavy-metal concert. But for the rest of us, it's helpful to find surroundings that imitate the tranquility we'd like to mimic within.

That's why the *Peaceful Places* series of travel books exists: to help all of us find hidden pockets of quiet in everyday life. A deer preserve in the middle of Chicago? A New York City spa that offers zero-gravity naps? They exist. Think of them as your own private islands.

Here's a guide to some of the best.