

# Wilderness & Wellbeing

## Silently Slowing Down

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*Nature is my true love*

*For love is my true Nature*

*There is something about the outdoors, the wild, which allures with its charm of awe, wonder and mystery. The wilderness is our one true home and in it we find oneness. Nature is not external but integral to all of us, we are all children of nature, no exceptions.*

*The wilderness and wellbeing program is an attempt to share our collective understanding, kinship and urgent need to reconnect and restore our relationship with nature.*

*The program is designed with three core elements*

- *reconnecting with nature through contemplative exercises, silent playfulness and forest meditations.*
- *Wellbeing practices and its relationship with wilderness. Yoga and nature*
- *Landscape and its importance in nourishment. Agriculture, food and communities.*

*Our goal is to come together to share our love, respect and understanding of nature, its role in our collective wellbeing and ways towards it.*

*We welcome you all on this retreat.*

## RETREAT ESSENTIALS



<i>Duration:</i>	<i>6 nights and 7 days (including travel time)</i>
<i>Dates:</i>	<i>16<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2023</i>
<i>Location:</i>	<i>Majkhali, and surrounding forests near Ranikhet</i>
<i>Accommodation:</i>	<i>Rural Homestays</i>
<i>Physical Grading:</i>	<i>Average</i>
<i>Altitude:</i>	<i>1800 mts</i>
<i>Climate:</i>	<i>Pleasant/sunny days with cold mornings/nights</i>
<i>Season:</i>	<i>Autumn (Temp. High 22 deg C, Low 15 deg C)</i>
<i>Precondition:</i>	<i>Ability to walk in silence</i>
<i>Nearest Railhead:</i>	<i>Haldwani</i>
<i>Nearest Airport:</i>	<i>Pantnagar</i>
<i>Facilitators</i>	<i>Ajay Rastogi (Foundation for Contemplation of Nature)</i> <i>Sunil Chauhan (Healing Walks)</i>
<i>Course Coordinator:</i>	<i>Vijetha Sanjay Mysoremutt</i>
<i>Registration Link:</i>	<a href="https://naturekids.in/majkhali">https://naturekids.in/majkhali</a>

## **Day wise details of the retreat**

### **Day 1 - Arriving in Majkhali**

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*Majkhali is a 30 minute drive from Ranikhet and easy to reach whether from the railway station in Haldwani (3 Hours) or from the Pantnagar airport (4 hours).*

*Participants are required to reach the location through self organised transport with directional assistance from the hosts.*

*The day is free to settle into ones homestays and get familiarised with the family and the landscape around. In the evening we shall all gather together for a brief introductory sitting followed by a welcome dinner.*

*Night: back in our homestays.*

### **Day 2 - Forest walk around Majkhali - Silence and Slowing Down**

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*Nature works slowly and quietly. There is no rush and there is definitely no race. The objective for the day is to be silent and slow.*

*We start the day with asanas and pranayama followed by a brief meditation.*

*Our core theme for the day is wilderness. We engage with the wilderness through some contemplative exercises along with a mindful walk. The objective is to set in a rhythm and pace that enables our ever fluctuating attention to become present in the moment.*

*Evening is reserved for brief discourses and discussions on the theme of wilderness & wellbeing.*

### **Day 3 - Reconnect**

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*There are some common threads to everyday: Food, Yoga, Wilderness Walks, Discourse and discussion.*

*We start our day with some yogic asanas, pranayama and a brief meditation.*

*Today is dedicated to reconnecting with the wilderness and deepening our awareness of how we are all interconnected with all life.*

*We shall be undertaking a forest walk with activities that reconnect us to nature.*

*Evening discourse and discussion on the importance of contemplation of nature and its role in reconnecting us with the wilderness.*

### **Day 4 - Landscapes and Communities**

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*Once again the morning is reserved for setting the rhythm between body mind and spirit through some asanas, pranayama and meditation.*

*Today we dive deep into the landscapes that we are reconnecting with and building a relationship to. We try and understand what comprises a landscape and how our engagement with it connects or alienates us from the very source of the foundations of life.*

*Food plays a very significant role today in enabling us to build upon our understanding of establishing the linkages between interconnectedness of life and its ability to thrive.*

*Evening discourse and discussion on the interconnectedness and inter-dependence of all life, especially water, earth, air, food and communities.*

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### **Day 5 - Harmony Peace and Nourishment**

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*The essence of diversity is amplified by a common thread, nourishment, upon which all life depends.*

*We dive deep into the essence of nourishment and how it plays an integral role in establishing the much needed harmony amongst all life.*

*We walk into the wilderness and ponder over impermanence, interdependence and peace. Our sharing circles help us to find varied perspectives amidst our common needs.*

*Evening discourse and discussion on wellbeing and nature, from the perspective of yoga.*

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### **Day 6 - Gratitude**

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*Wellbeing is the theme for the day as also for the whole retreat. This is the culmination of what we are trying to deepen within us as a means to reconnect with nature and at the same time reclaim our place in nature in oneness.*

*We delve into the importance of gratitude and reverence for the source of life and its ever-pertinent need to prompt us into meaningful action through active engagement as a collective.*

*Evening discourse and discussion is an open ended session with participant feedback, sharing insights and learning.*

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### **Day 7 - Onwards Journey**

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*The retreat culminates today and we wish the very best to those ready for their ongoing journeys.*

*Gratitude and blessings.*

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### **Culmination of Retreat**

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## **Retreat Registration Details**

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### **Participation Expenses**

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*INR 21,000 + GST/person*

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### **Inclusions**

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- *All accommodation for 6 nights*
- *All meals and tea*
- *Facilitator Costs*
- *All sessions and activities*
- *Yoga sessions and guided meditations*
- *Forest walks*

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### **Exclusions**

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- *Travel to and from Majkhali*
- *Expenses arising out of any unforeseen circumstances*

## Note on Sessions

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**Wilderness and Wellbeing** – Our broken relationships are at the center of our challenges and how we nurture and grow relationships is the key to finding some answers to our collective wellbeing. We shall engage deeply with the wilderness to find some of these answers through walks, games and activities in the woods.

- Sense Walk to bring our attention to the present moment and enable us to reconnect with nature.
- Nature Art Walk to enhance our awareness of the world around us and to enable us to engage with it creatively
- Writers Walk to further deepen our observation of the wilderness and subsequently help us to bring perspective on its role in our collective wellbeing.
- Sense Walk advanced to become more attentive, aware and find answers to bring more clarity
- Gratitude Walks to help us find humility, balance and action.

**Yoga and Nature** – The ancient systems of wellbeing that evolved over gradual phases of time and social change are more relevant today than ever before and Yoga as a practice and philosophy is one which has found resonance with people from all parts of the globe and all walks of life. In these sessions we will explore the core elements of Yoga that enable us to find collective wellbeing through such structured systems as also their interconnectedness to nature and how that learning has been manifested in certain practices which now need an urgent reconnection with nature.

- Asana session to activate the body every day followed by simple pranayama and meditation
- Discourse and discussion on Yoga philosophy and its role in holistic wellbeing

### Nature Contemplation sessions

There are a lot of challenges. Many of us are particularly concerned with loss in nature: the external natural world as well in the inner realm. We wish to see a radical change in the society seeking more nourishing and empathetic behaviours. But to transform society, we need to be able to transform ourselves; to heal our traumas, learn how to cope with stress and help heal nature and others proactively.

- Learning being a part of natural world and how to deeply connect.
- Inner resilience, what is it and why it needs to be cultivated?
- Connecting with different elements to feel a part of this beautiful intricate web of life: Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Space.
- Carrying the contemplation of nature forward as a guiding light to influence various activities of life

**Food and its role in wellbeing** (this is to bring perspective into land, water, air and its role in this regard both in the external landscape and in our internal landscape) The following sessions comprise this section of the retreat.

- Context setting on Bio-cultural Heritage and sharing experiences (ecology, culture, food, diversity, nutrition and celebration)
- Traditional seeds and community seed banks

## Facilitator Profiles

### Sunil Chauhan

*Sunil is a social innovator and a wilderness & wellbeing facilitator. His journey began in the high Himalayas amidst pristine forests of oak, cedar, spruce, chestnut, hazelnuts, birches and more. The mighty Himalayan peaks and rivers were and continue to be a regular source of inspiration. An early connection with the outdoors enabled to inculcate in him a deep love and reverence for nature. He considers the mountains, rivers and forests to be his school, university, ashram and home. His formal education includes degrees in Philosophy, History and Information Technology. He grew up with Himalayan Shaivism as a part and parcel of life besides being born into the tradition of bio-divinity. He is also a keen student of eastern mysticism.*



*His work spans across the Himalayas and other parts of the Indian subcontinent. He is engaged in various initiatives across the globe with organisations such as World Weavers, Unity Earth and UTSAAH to explore areas of wellbeing for all life, harmony, oneness and peace.*

*Sunil is also the co-founder of initiatives working on the quadruple bottomline approach of economics, development, conservation and wellbeing. He has set up organisations such as MUSE, Ecosphere, Healing Forest, UTSAAH. He is a mentor for ACT (Association for Conservation and Tourism) and a technical Advisor for EECEP CCA (community conservation area). He coaches and mentors various grassroots organisations, individuals and provides consultation to state governments on issues pertaining to our collective wellbeing through ecologically harmonious endeavours.*

*Currently Sunil works closely on issues pertaining to wilderness and wellbeing, water conservation, forestry, mental health, palliative care (end of life care), outdoor education and tourism education and its impacts. He wanders across the Himalayas collaborating and building networks of grassroots organisations and individuals for co-learning, co-creating and co-relating. In his spare time he wanders the woods to deepen his connection with nature and stay rooted to the very foundations of our life.*

- [www.spitiecosphere.com](http://www.spitiecosphere.com)
- [healingforest.org](http://healingforest.org)
- [www.utsaah.org.uk](http://www.utsaah.org.uk)

### Ajay Rastogi

*Ajay Rastogi is co-founder of the Foundation for Contemplation of Nature and Director of the Vrikshalaya Himalayan Centre based in Central Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India. Ajay's formal education is in the fields of Agriculture, Agro forestry, Environment and Ethics.*

*He is recipient of several awards: South Asian Youth Leader (1991); Erasmus Mundus European Union Fellow (2007); Nehru Fulbright Environmental Leadership Fellow (2010); and Global Maverick Teacher (2016). In 2020, the residential program on Resilient Leadership was conferred International Mountain Prize. In 2023, Vrikshalaya received national recognition for working on Integral Humanism.*



*Over a career span of 24 years, Ajay worked as a grassroots worker, coordinator for a Himalayan WWF/UNESCO/Kew garden initiative, Fair-trade Auditor, and led the Organic Agriculture Capacity Building Programme in India, jointly implemented by the Government of India and FAO of the United Nations. He was also India team lead for 'Indigenous Bio-cultural Heritage for Sustainable Development' in cooperation with the Lepcha and Limbu ethnic communities in the Eastern Himalayan region.*

*Over last 14 years, Ajay has been working towards mainstreaming values of deeper connection with nature. Targeting the youth, it offers customized residential courses, 'Resilient Leadership in the Himalayas' in association with Jagriti Swayam Sahayata (a women self help group) based in Majkhali. The course comprises transformative and experiential learning modules based on 3 principles: dignity of physical work, interdependence and interconnectedness. It helps students in recognising the vital bridge between inner and outer sustainability.*

*To promote mindfulness, Ajay also facilitates sessions in office/ group settings or offers side events in conferences/ workshops. In the past, sessions have been arranged at FAO HQ in Rome; World Parks Congress in Olympic Park, Sydney, Planeto Sostenible in Santiago the Chile, CBD COP event in Hyderabad; International Ethno-biology Conference in Bhutan etc. Known to provide personal health and wellbeing benefits, mindfulness is also proving to be effective in cultivating empathy and compassion for better team work.*

*Ajay is a member of the Association of Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) since 2010. His work has been translated and published in Spanish. The book, 'Contemplacion de la Naturelza' is available on Amazon.*

- [www.foundnature.org](http://www.foundnature.org)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxQu\\_gEYkxs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxQu_gEYkxs)
- <https://earthymatters.blog/2018/12/11/ep7-ajay-rastogi-the-pursuit-of-consumerism-and-science-of-happiness/>

Podcast on deep ecology <https://nordichynature.transistor.fm>

A film shot in Vrikshalaya on its efforts to revive local cuisine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMNgmNArnqE>