

## THE SCIENCE BEHIND OUR SAILING + MEDITATION RETREAT

### WHY BEING ON THE WATER FEELS SO GOOD

Every time I come back from a day of sailing I feel like a new person. It's almost magical about how the ocean washes away stress and clears my head. I've been fascinated by this phenomenon for years. Why does being out on a boat seem to hit a reset button in our bodies and brains? What is it about the combination of water, sky, and the gentle rocking of a sailboat that leaves us feeling so refreshed?

The answers to these questions span a range of scientific disciplines, from evolutionary biology to cutting-edge neuroscience. They reveal how deeply our well-being is connected to nature, especially to water environments.

Understanding the science and our deep connection to nature might just change how you think about your next day off - or even your mental health strategy.

#### ATTENTION RESTORATION THEORY: GIVING YOUR BRAIN A BREAK

Let's start with Attention Restoration Theory (ART), developed by psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan in the 1980s. The Kaplans noticed that people often reported feeling renewed after spending time in nature. They wondered: what if nature had a special way of replenishing our mental resources?

The core idea is that in our daily lives, we use a lot of directed attention. This is the kind of focus you need to write a report, drive in traffic, and scroll through your social media feed. It requires effort, and it's a limited resource. Use too much of it, and you end up mentally exhausted.

Nature, on the other hand, captures our attention effortlessly. The movement of leaves in the wind, the patterns of waves on the water, the vast expanse of the sky engage us without demanding our concentration. This allows the directed attention part of our brain to rest and recover.



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## The Ultimate Mind-Body Connection Fueled By Nature

On a sailboat, you're surrounded by the rhythmic motion of waves, the ever-changing patterns of light on the water, the distant horizon. Your mind can wander and explore without the need for intense focus. According to ART, this is the perfect environment for mental restoration.

### STRESS REDUCTION THEORY: NATURE'S CALMING EFFECT

While ART focuses on cognitive benefits, Stress Reduction Theory (SRT) looks at the emotional and physiological impacts of nature. This theory was proposed by Roger Ulrich in the 1980s, around the same time the Kaplans were developing ART.

Ulrich's work started with a simple observation: hospital patients with a view of nature seemed to recover faster than those without. This led him to investigate how nature affects our stress responses.

According to SRT, natural environments trigger a variety of positive emotional and physiological responses. These include:

1. Lowered blood pressure and heart rate
2. Reduced levels of stress hormones like cortisol
3. Increased production of feel-good hormones like serotonin
4. Improved mood and reduced feelings of anxiety

Ulrich proposed that these responses are, in part, evolutionary. Environments that provided food, water, and safety would have been crucial for our ancestors' survival. As a result, we may have developed an innate positive response to natural settings that signal these resources.

When sailing, we're surrounded by water (a vital resource), you have an open view that would have allowed our ancestors to spot potential threats, and the rocking of the boat might even mimic the comforting sensations of being cradled. From an evolutionary perspective, it's a perfect stress-reduction cocktail.





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## BLUE MIND THEORY: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF WATER

While ART and SRT apply to nature in general, Blue Mind Theory focuses specifically on the effects of water environments. Developed by marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols and introduced in his 2014 book "Blue Mind," this theory explores why water environments seem to have a particularly potent effect on our mental state.

Nichols posits that proximity to water can induce a mildly meditative state characterized by calm, peacefulness, and a sense of general happiness. This state, which he calls "Blue Mind," is the antithesis of the anxious, over-stimulated state he terms "Red Mind."

According to Nichols, water environments impact us in several ways:

- They inspire awe, which has been linked to increased life satisfaction and prosocial behavior.
- The color blue itself has been associated with feelings of tranquility in color psychology.
- The rhythmic nature of waves and water sounds can have a meditative effect.
- Water environments often involve multi-sensory experiences, which can help anchor us in the present moment.

When you're out sailing, you're immersed in this blue environment. The endless expanse of water, the rhythmic motion of the waves, and the salt air contribute to the "Blue Mind" state.

## BIOPHILIA THEORY: OUR INNATE CONNECTION TO NATURE

Underlying all of these theories is the concept of biophilia. Introduced by esteemed biologist E.O. Wilson in 1984, the biophilia hypothesis suggests that humans have an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life.

Wilson proposed that this affinity for nature is the result of our evolutionary history. For most of human existence, we lived in close connection with the natural world. Our brains and bodies evolved in natural environments, and according to the biophilia hypothesis, we still have a biological need for this connection.



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This theory helps explain why we often feel a sense of belonging or "rightness" in natural settings. It's not just that nature is pretty or relaxing - at a fundamental level, we might be wired to feel at home in these environments.

Sailing taps into this biophilic need perfectly. It puts us in direct contact with two of the most fundamental natural elements: water and sky. It allows us to experience the rhythms of nature - the wind, the waves, the changing light. In a very real sense, it reconnects us with our evolutionary roots.

## EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES: NATURE AS A RESET BUTTON

All of these theories touch on evolutionary explanations as to why we might have evolved to find nature, particularly water environments, so restorative.

Studies have shown that even brief exposure to natural settings can lower cortisol levels, reduce blood pressure, and decrease activity in brain regions associated with stress. Almost everyone has experienced a heightened state of well-being in nature.

When you're out sailing, you're immersing yourself in an environment rich with these ancestral safety cues. The open water provides clear sightlines. The rocking of the boat mimics gentle, repetitive motions that our brains associate with safety. The sound of water has been shown to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which controls rest and digestion.

In essence, sailing might be tapping into deep-seated, evolutionary pathways for stress recovery and restoration.

## WHAT A DAY WITH US CAN MEAN FOR YOU

So what does all this mean for you when you join our Meditation and Sailing Retreat? It means that your time on the water is doing more than just providing a fun day out. It's giving your brain a chance to rest and recover in ways that are deeply ingrained in our biology.

The theories all point to the profound impact that marine environments can have on our mental and emotional well-being.





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The Ultimate Mind-Body Connection Fueled By Nature

When you're sailing, you're:

- Allowing your directed attention to rest and recover (ART)
- Triggering positive physiological responses that reduce stress (SRT)
- Immersing yourself in a "Blue Mind" state conducive to calm and happiness
- Satisfying a deep-seated, evolutionary need for connection with nature (Biophilia)
- Providing your nervous system with cues that it's safe to relax and reset

If you need a reset, prioritizing this experience is not just an enjoyable day out, but crucial for your mental health and cognitive function.

We can also deeply understand how vitally important of protecting and preserving natural environments, especially water bodies is to our health and survival. They're not just beautiful - they play a vital role in human well-being.

So when you set sail with us you can appreciate the profound effects our Retreat Day is having on your brain and body. You're not just sailing - you're engaging in an activity that humans may have evolved to find deeply restorative. It's not just fun - it's a scientifically-backed strategy for mental health and well-being.

Now, isn't it time you signed up for our next [Meditation + Sailing Retreat Day?](#)