**Forest Therapy**

Forest Therapy involves immersing oneself in a forest environment to improve both mental and physical health. The method was developed by the Forest Therapy Society, which was founded in 2004. The Forest Therapy Society’s Forest Bathing method has been proven to lower blood pressure and increase quality of life, while other positive effects have also been recorded. Akiota was the first town in Hiroshima Prefecture to have an official road registered for Forest Therapy. Ryuzu Gorge, Mt. Shinnyu, Sandankyo Gorge’s Kurobuchi and Sarutobi trails, and Mt. Osorakan are all registered Forest Therapy sites.

Unlike hiking, which is usually done purely for enjoyment, Forest Therapy expeditions are often done for health reasons. A certified guide leads tours and teaches participants how to reap the greatest benefits from the practice.

On Forest Therapy expeditions, participants might stand in the middle of a dirt path with their eyes closed in order to heighten their other senses. They might hear a white-water river raging by, feel the sticky, humid air, or smell the piney, sweet aroma of the forest. Participants learn how to breathe deeply using their abdominal muscles, and are taught to improve their blood circulation. The practice is said to bridge the gap between nature and the self.

Participants’ blood pressure may be measured at the beginning and end of each session to track the effects of the therapy. The sessions are customizable and can be shortened to fit participants’ requirements or focused on other activities, including yoga.