



calm





calm

secrets to serenity
from the cultures of the world



MELBOURNE | LONDON | OAKLAND



The Secrets

Introduction 6

Nature 9

Rhythm 41

Sharing 63

Focus 101

Index 126

Introduction



Shhh. Stop. Listen.

Do you hear it over the ringing of your phone? Turn off the television or pull over the car and listen. Do you sense it?


Now, breathe... Do you feel it? It's right there, both obvious and hidden: calm. Even in our noisy, modern world – more cacophonous than our ancestors could ever have imagined – it's still there.

In Western-influenced societies we've mastered technology but created a virtual hamster wheel of stress in the process. We've developed an almost zombie-like addiction to productivity, and researchers are starting to notice the toll on our health, leading to a resurgence in calls to step away from our whirlwinds of busy-ness.

So, is attainment of clarity and peace only possible via a 32-hour flight and a four-day trek to a mountaintop sanctuary?

Nope.

At Lonely Planet we're travellers, yet even we are telling you that you don't need to travel to find calm. Of course, you could go to Japan to study the ancient art of bonsai (p15). Or you could buy a single bonsai tree, or even a cactus, at your local nursery. You could study the ancient sport of archery in Bhutan (p103), take an archery lesson back home, or just become one with a pub's dartboard for half an hour.



We'll let you in on the overarching secret right now: serenity is nowhere and everywhere. It's not in a location but, rather, in the search itself. Calm is in the state of awareness some researchers call mindfulness, and that others know as flow.

The neuropsychological effect of contemplative states has begun to be tracked. In fact, meditating Buddhist monks and Carmelite nuns have consented to being studied inside an MRI machine where researchers watched their brains light up amid positive emotions. We now know that calmer brainwaves can elicit all sorts of desirable changes known as the relaxation response: lower blood pressure, less depression, reduced vigilance and fear, even a stronger brain.

The collection of traditions in this book is not definitive, but a sampling that showcases the diversity of the world's approaches to calm. It is also a practical ideas manual.

The lessons and secrets herein cater to our different needs as individuals, and show that there are a multitude of ways to find calm.

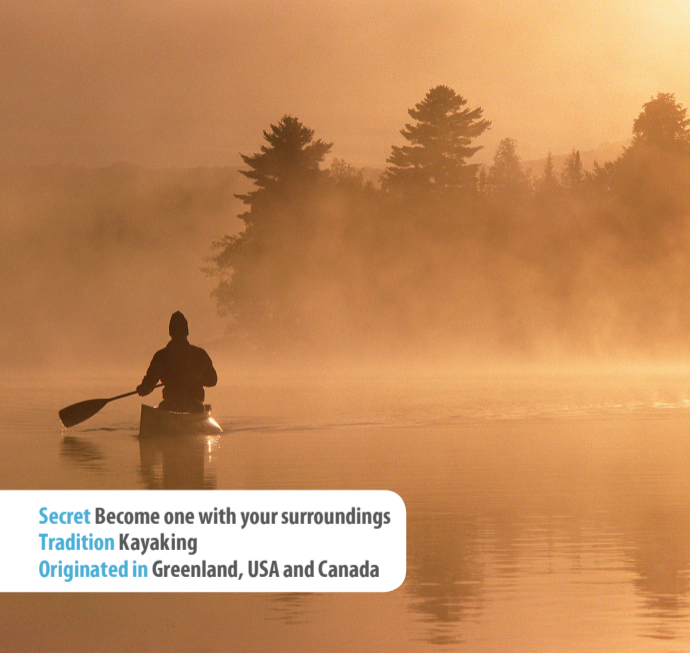
What our modern society has taken away, it can give back. We can read about and incorporate into our lives lessons in calm from around the world. And maybe, one day, we can travel to experience a few. There's nothing like a journey to put your own problems into perspective. And when you're in the airport security line? Just remember to take a moment, and breathe.





nature





Secret Become one with your surroundings
Tradition Kayaking
Originated in Greenland, USA and Canada

Glide into Nature

Western culture is remarkably removed from nature. Many modern people go weeks or months without interacting with the natural world.

Contrast this with cultures that have an intimate connection with Mother Nature. Arctic-dwelling Inuits have been using *qayaq*, or kayak, for at least four thousand years. These kayaks were a core part of daily life, used for transport, hunting and fishing.

Kayaking hits the stress-relieving jackpot, offering exercise, nature, water, relaxed repetitive movements and mind-body cohesion. In fact, trauma therapists have found that bilateral stimulation – such as the movement of kayaking, rhythmically and steadily rowing left, right, left, right – can shift perspectives and relieve long-held anxieties.

Today, this Arctic export is offered all over the world. Kayaking won't become your livelihood, but that feeling of becoming one with your boat and, by extension, the natural world...? Row with that.



Secret Make an animal friend
Tradition Bedouin horse-keeping
Originated in Arabian Peninsula