

COMING HOME TO MYSELF

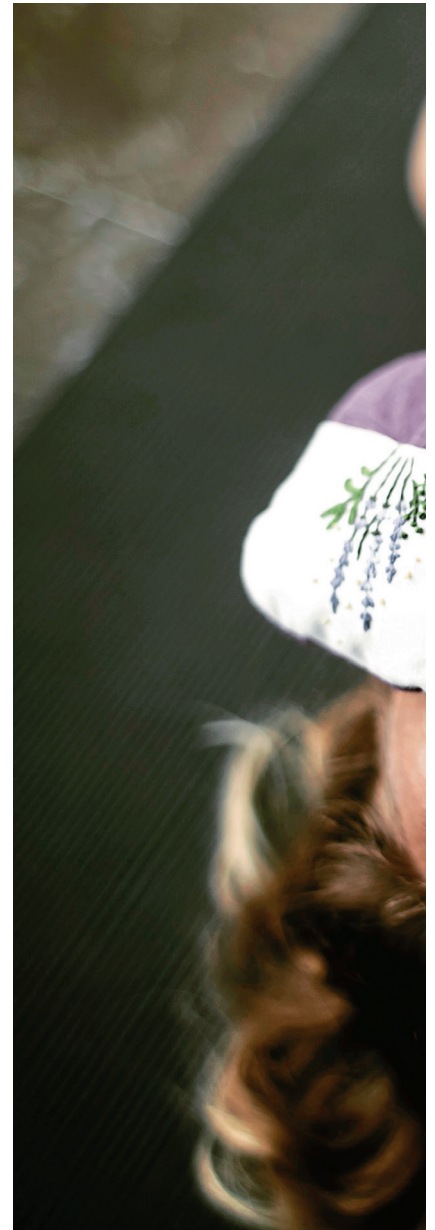
Feeling exhausted and jaded from life's ups and downs, writer Emma Coxon spends four days at a new bijou retreat in the Kent countryside to reconnect with herself and rediscover her zest for life.

WORDS: EMMA COXON. IMAGES: MOYA SLADE.





The tranquility of The Nest's location, including the secluded shepherd's hut accommodation (far right), helps you truly immerse yourself in your natural surroundings and disconnect from your worries.



THE LAST DECADE HAS BEEN A rollercoaster to say the least. Losing twin boys at 20 weeks pregnant tore my world apart at the age of 41, which then saw periods of debilitating anxiety and issues with binge eating. I lost a much-loved aunt and uncle to cancer, and my dad became seriously ill during Covid. But alongside the tough times, there were joyous moments including the birth of my beautiful daughter.

But, despite my resilience, I was left feeling exhausted both mentally and physically. The creative, fun-loving and adventurous woman I once was had gotten lost along the way.

So, when I had the opportunity to stay at The Nest, on their Healing Heart retreat, I knew this was a serendipitous call for some clarity and calm. It's a four-day, three-night, fully catered yet solo escape, designed to fit your individual needs, offering deep relaxation and tools to heal and rebalance.

Moya Slade, founder of The Nest, picks me up from the local train station; I immediately

feel at ease as we arrive at the venue and am struck by the peace that envelopes me. Situated in the heart of the Kent countryside, The Nest really is a haven of tranquillity.

I'm led to what I can only describe as a little slice of heaven. A shepherd's hut sits, secluded, overlooking fields with its own garden of wildflowers. Inside the hut is the cosiest-looking bed I have ever seen, complete with sumptuous blankets and pillows – it literally looks like a nest, inviting me to jump in and curl up.

A calming scent fills the space, and I spot a wood stove in one corner and a wonderful selection of books overhead. From the sheepskin rugs and subtle lighting to the wooden table overlooking the garden, the space has been thoughtfully designed and feels like a warm embrace.

Moya leaves me to settle in and I sit for a while, soaking up the silence that is unfamiliar but washes over me like a life-affirming tonic I've needed for so long.





'The Healing Heart Retreat at The Nest is a solo escape, offering deep relaxation and tools to heal and rebalance'

A SUPPORTIVE SPACE

After I've settled in and enjoyed a light lunch, I'm introduced to mindfulness coach Susie Asli (amindful-life.co.uk). We take a stroll to the local woods and find a quiet spot to settle under the trees. Susie leads me in an exercise that grounds me in the moment and wakes up my senses to the nature all around. The busyness of life feels like a distant memory.

Once back at the hut, Moya pops in to check on me and we chat like old friends for what seems like hours. Moya is an open, warm and intuitive woman who explains that although she likes to leave her guests to enjoy the solitude of the retreat, she is always on hand for whatever they need during their stay.

A former photographer turned restorative yoga teacher with a passion for nature and holistic wellbeing, Moya founded The Nest in September 2021 to offer a sanctuary to women. Having come through a difficult 10 years herself, Moya understands the needs of the women who visit her retreats. 'Every woman has a different need. We have worked with bereavement, life-changing illness, relationship difficulties and divorce. As well as women who are just weary and feeling a bit lost,' says Moya.

'Visiting The Nest is transformative... it offers a space to pause, breathe and come home to yourself. We are an all-female team and we journey by your side to nurture you, listen to you, empower you, celebrate you and offer powerful insights and wisdom to call you towards your fullest self.'

After a delicious homecooked, organic dinner delivered to my hut, Moya collects me and takes me to the custom-made barn onsite for a massage with beauty therapist Emma Glenn ([instagram.com/emmastreatments_bespokebeauty](https://www.instagram.com/emmastreatments_bespokebeauty)). I walk into a candlelit cocoon and am greeted by Emma who settles me in for a glorious massage that melts away any residual tension, ready for a good night's sleep. ▶



'Being calm and quiet among the trees can help you de-stress and boost wellbeing'



Above: Forest-bathing guide and life coach Tansy Jane Downman helps get you back to nature.

FOREST BATHING AND QIGONG

I wake up refreshed and welcome the day by throwing open the hut door, sipping herbal tea while enjoying the cool morning breeze. Today is reserved for time with forest-bathing guide and outdoor life coach Tansy Jane Downman (tansyinthewild.com). She greets me with a beaming smile and a warm hug and introduces me to the art of qigong, a system of coordinated body postures and movement with breathing and meditation, with roots in Chinese medicine, philosophy and martial arts. Looking out over the rolling hills we stand side by side, breathing deeply and working through a series of movements to enliven the body.

Then, after a brief stroll, we arrive at Staffhurst Wood where Tansy takes me on a forest-bathing journey. This Japanese practice, known as “shinrin-yoku”, is a process of relaxation. The simple method of being calm and quiet among the trees, observing nature around you while breathing deeply, can help de-stress and boost health and wellbeing.

I’ve always felt at peace among the trees, but with Tansy’s guidance I feel my senses heighten when we stop at various points to observe motion, sound and touch. I’m

amazed at all I can see, hear and feel when I stop to really notice my surroundings.

CREATING A NEW VISION

After lunch, Moya guides me in some mindfulness exercises. I find myself becoming tearful as I think about the past few years, but it feels cathartic to release these emotions in a safe place.

I then spend the rest of the afternoon creating a vision board, using magazines that Moya has provided to select pictures, words and phrases I’m drawn to. This will become a visual representation of my goals and intentions for the next phase of my life.

Over the next two days I continue creating my vision board, plus I take a deep dive into some more mindfulness practice with Susie. A calm and wise soul, Susie is an expert in asking questions that get to the heart of what I’m feeling. She listens without judgement, so I feel able to be open and honest about the challenges I’ve recently faced.

The afternoon ends with a restorative yoga session with Moya. I feel held as she leads me through a beautiful yoga nidra meditation, and I sink deeper into the transformative experience of the past few days.





Delicious organic meals (below and right) are cooked and delivered to your accommodation each day; the view over the fields (middle) from the cosy and inviting shepherd's hut (bottom).



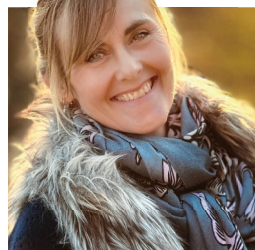
Above: Mindfulness coach Susie Asli guides you through your challenges.

My last night is with holistic massage therapist Joleene Gonzalez (findyourwild.love) for a Blue Lotus Flower Massage. I love chatting with Joleene, before I close my eyes and drift away into blissful silence.

A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

I've been on many retreats but none like The Nest. This place is special, not only because it's a one-to-one bespoke experience, but because of the women who run it.

Moya has created a truly transformative place and my time here has changed me for the better. I feel empowered to step into my 50s with more awareness of self and a desire to use the tools I've learnt, including more time in nature and present-moment awareness to stay grounded when life gets challenging. I depart with my vision board in hand and am excited about life once again.



Above: The Nest founder Moya Slade.

- The Healing Heart retreat at The Nest in Kent costs £2,595 for four days / three nights. Find out more about this and other retreats, including The Nest's new retreat space on the north coast of Cornwall, which is available to book at thenestlife.co.uk.

