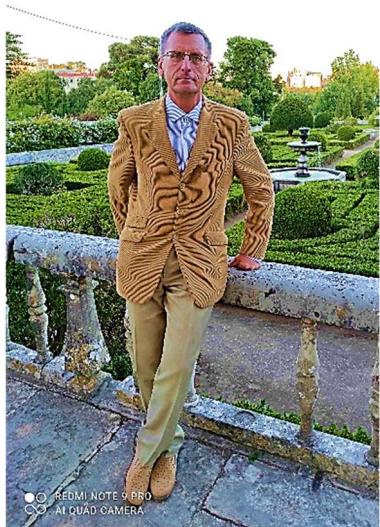


Nature Therapy, Nature, Tourism and Medicine

Interview with Linas Daubaras

Lietuvos inžinerijos kolegija Higher Education Institution, Lithuania

Interviewer: Miguel Castro



Please tell a little about yourself, your education and your connection with Nature Therapy.

I have a Master's degree in Forestry from Lithuanian Academy of Agriculture, which is now a part of Vytautas Magnus University. For a few years after graduating I worked in Forestry industry, and later I turned into Nature Tourism because already in my Degree Theses I tried to analyze possibilities of tourism in the landscape reserve. So even without a Nature Therapy term in existence in those old times, I was already engaged in it. And one more important thing is that in Lithuania we had never forgotten our ancient belief which was based on worshiping Nature – so it's like returning to our roots.

In 2022 Lithuanian Association of Nature Therapy was established, and I became a President of it.

In some European countries Nature Therapy is still not very popular. Could you please describe the situation?

Firstly, I want to emphasize that there are a few terms with very similar meaning: Nature Therapy, Forest Therapy, Forest Bathing, and all these activities are based on traditional Japanese Shinrin-yoku (Submerging in the Forest) practice.

Nature Therapy is defined as an evidence-based Public health practice comprising of complementary mental and physical exercises in forested surroundings.

In Lithuania we usually use Nature Therapy term as we believe it is wider than the others and more general.

Perhaps there are two main reasons for it still being not very popular – the first one is that there should be much diverse forest in a particular country/ area, and many

European countries do not have it anymore. The second reason is that it's quite young phenomenon. The term "Forest Bathing" was used in English scientific literature for the first time only in 2005, and in 2007 a new branch of medicine – Forest Medicine – appeared.

In Lithuania in 2024 we had 33, 8 % of the territory covered with forest, so we have perfect situation for practicing Nature Therapy.

You mentioned practicing Nature Therapy. So how can a person become a Nature Therapist?

There is no one universal standard for all countries. Quite often national and international associations distinguish two levels of qualification:

- a) Nature Therapist – a person having a medical or very similar degree, and having finished special Nature Therapy courses
- b) Nature Therapy Guide – a person with another type of degree (not medical), and having finished special Nature Therapy courses

In Lithuania we perhaps have one the mostly strict regulations: you can call yourself a Nature Therapist only when you have medical or very similar degree, special Nature Therapy courses certificate and when you get a license from State Accreditation Service for Health Care Activities under the Ministry of Health.

And our "special Nature Therapy courses" are of very high level. In the year 2022 a Post-graduate study program called Nature Therapy was launched at Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, it was prepared together with the Association of Nature Therapy. It lasts for one year (480 academic hours) and covers all main subjects connected with nature and medicine. It was the first Nature Therapy study program of University level in Europe. It suddenly became very popular (more popular than we could expect), and the numbers of students clearly show this:

In the teaching year 2022 - 2023 we had 52 graduates,

In the teaching year 2023 - 2024: 42 graduates,

And in the year 2024: 50 students joined the course.

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Numbers of the students and level of the Post-graduate program look impressive. How did it start?

It all began in 2020 due to COVID. You see, besides my lecturing at Lietuvos inžinerijos kolegija, I am also a professional guide and a bicycle tour leader in Lithuania and other countries. I like this job very much, and I succeed in this. And suddenly in 2020 there was not a single tourist arriving, and even we ourselves were not allowed to travel anywhere, except nature – forests, parks and fields. So, thinking what to do instead of my excursions, and seeing everybody going to the nature I recollect I was a forester, and I could help people to get maximum use of visiting a forest.

I found one of international Nature Therapy associations, and I studied there for one year (online because of restrictions and because it was based in Australia). Later I passed a training session in Germany, and I became a certified Forest Therapy Guide.

Can we measure the (positive) effect of Nature Therapy? What are the main healing factors?

Yes, in recent years very many different studies show positive results of Nature Therapy upon human body both in psychological and physiological health. It's proved that it regulates the blood pressure, heart pulse rate and reduces cortisol level. After the Nature Therapy session people feel less anxiety, enhanced energy level and increased happiness. Main healing factor of Nature Therapy is submerging into nature with all your senses, disconnecting from all mobile devices and allowing yourself to notice the smallest details of nature. Another very important factor is the influence of phytoncides – volatile compounds emitted by trees and other plants. They have anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial and anti-viral effect. In our climate conditions junipers and pines emit the largest amounts of the phytoncides.

How do you see the future of Nature Therapy?

I'm very optimistic about it. Highly developed countries like Japan, Korea, Germany (and Lithuania too) begin to integrate Nature Therapy into their state or regional health care systems, this way not only giving their citizens an additional natural healing instrument, but at the same time saving much public money which otherwise would be spent on chemical drugs.

Another very important thing is that it seems Nature Therapy does not have any negative influence upon human body – differently from many "traditional" pills.

I want also to express my belief in the future of Nature Therapy not only as a way to improve your health at the moment, but also as a tool for teaching our young generation, bringing them closer to nature, and ensuring understanding and protection of nature in the future.

Thank you for the interview.

Sobre o entrevistado:

Linas Daubaras atualmente é docente na Faculdade de Engenharia da Lituânia em Kaunas, na Universidade Lituana de Ciências da Saúde e na Universidade de Desporto da Lituânia. Neste momento é igualmente Presidente da Associação Lituana de Terapia Florestal, foi Membro do grupo de trabalho para a preparação do plano de desenvolvimento estratégico “Cidade de Kaunas 2030”, Vice-Presidente do Comité Profissional Setorial para o Alojamento, Alimentação e Serviços de Viagem, Atividades Desportivas, Entretenimento e Recreação (Centro para o Desenvolvimento de Qualificações e Formação Vocacional da Lituânia), é membro da União de Guias da Lituânia onde já exerceu os cargos de Vice-Presidente e Presidente, foi membro do Conselho de Turismo da Lituânia, membro do Grupo de Trabalho de Marketing Turístico do Ministério da Economia e Inovação da República da Lituânia, Membro do Comité do Programa de Estudos de Gestão Cultural e Turística da Universidade Aleksandras Stulginskis (hoje Universidade Vytautas Magnus) em Kaunas (Lituânia), Membro de comissões científico-artísticas de congressos de arquitetura paisagista e membro da União de Arquitetos Paisagistas da Lituânia.

Já recebeu vários prémios, nacionais e internacionais, na área do Turismo e é autor de várias publicações.

É um amigo de Portugal e deu-nos o prazer de partilhar connosco, neste número da Aprender, uma entrevista relacionada com a sua mais recente área de investigação que está relacionada no terapias naturais e turismo