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By James D. Watts Jr. Tulsa World 20 hrs ago ☐ 0





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Need a break? These are Tulsa's most restful places — including a forest of peace

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The Osage Forest of Peace, a 43-acre patch of wilderness west of Sand Springs, has been a place of contemplative living since 1979, when a gro...



The Osage Forest of Peace is a little extra peaceful this time of year.

This 43-acre patch of wilderness west of Sand Springs has been a place of contemplative living since 1979, when a group of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration purchased the land to create a sacred place for prayer, study and peace.

But each August, the Forest of Peace is closed to the public to give the staff and volunteers a chance to do any repairs and in-depth cleaning of the cabins, chapels and other facilities interspersed among the trees.

“It’s a tradition that goes back to when this was still a Benedictine monastery,” said Don Chatfield, executive director of the Forest of Peace. “It gave the sisters the opportunity to travel. And August in Oklahoma is reason enough to want to take a break and go somewhere else for a while.”

When the Benedictine Sisters were no longer able to maintain the facility, it was purchased and repurposed as a spiritual retreat center open to people of all faiths and spiritual disciplines.

That was how Chatfield first discovered the Forest of Peace.

About the Osage Forest of Peace

The Osage Forest of Peace is at 141 Monastery Road in Sand Springs.

The facilities can accommodate about 25 participants at a time.

Standard fee for a private room is \$70 (\$55 per person for double occupancy).

Meals are included in the

price.

The Osage Forest of Peace will re-open to the public Sept. 1.

For more information: 918-245-2734, forestofpeace.org

"I grew up in Ponca City, and my wife and I had returned to Oklahoma for my high school reunion," said Chatfield, who has degrees in counseling, divinity, and human and organizational development. "Afterward, we were looking for a retreat center and came across the Forest of Peace. We ended up just falling in love with it."

Some eight months after that first visit, Chatfield learned that the executive director position was open, and he applied.

"My wife and I had been talking about starting a retreat center, so this sort of work was on our minds," he said. "We love the sense of tradition that is here and believe our principal job is to maintain what has been established, which is to provide a sacred space to nurture the spirit and help create a more peaceful world."

Thirteen cabins are scattered throughout the forest, linked by asphalt and gravel pathways. The cabins are simply but comfortably furnished with full baths. A 14th cabin is reserved as a chapel for the monthly Catholic mass.

Hiking trails take visitors farther into the woods, or to the Zen garden, where they can tie prayer flags to one of the trees. Flat rocks dug from the area form a special labyrinth visitors may follow; nearby is the Cave of the Mothers, an underground sanctuary that doubles as a storm shelter.

The main house serves as the primary worship-meditation chapel, library and media center, as well as the communal dining hall. A stay at the Forest of Peace includes three meals, with vegetarian and vegan choices available.

The chapel area reflects the center's interfaith ideals, incorporating designs and imagery from American Indian, Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as well as Jewish, Christian and Islamic

teachings.

While spiritual or meditative concerns might be the main reason people seek out the Forest of Peace, some people are after more earth-bound goals.

“We have some people come on creative retreats — authors, songwriters, artists — who need a quiet space to work on a project,” said Rachel Jones, an intern who is remaining on the property during August. “Some people stay as long as a month, while some people just come for the day, to hike the trails or just spend some time in silence.”

Jones has only been a part of the Forest staff for three months, but her enthusiasm for the place is evident.

“I’ve been involved in meditation for about 10 years, and I was always looking for ways to incorporate it into my life,” said Jones, who has worked as a farm laborer and freelance journalist. “I came across an ad for the Forest of Peace in a newsletter I get, and when I came here, immediately I knew this was where I had to be. The way they embrace all these different faiths and how they focus on the contemplative appealed to me.

“This place felt like home,” she said.

Finding peace, solitude

Here are a few other places where one can find some peace and solitude amid the hubbub of city life.

The Gardens at Philbrook Museum of Art, 2727 S. Rockford Road — This Tulsa landmark boasts some of the most beautifully landscaped and meticulously maintained 25 acres in the country. And don’t be surprised if you’re joined in your reveries here by one of the three cats who call the Philbrook grounds their home.

Turkey Mountain Urban Wilderness, 67th Street and Elwood Avenue — About 7 miles from downtown Tulsa is this 300-acre park filled with winding trails for hikers, bikers, climbers and those who just want to experience a bit of nature. The area is large enough that it's easy to find a solitary space.

Swan Lake, Utica Avenue near 19th Street — Swan Lake has been attracting Tulsans since the early 1900s, when it was the site of an amusement park. Now, the amusements in this mostly residential area are more solitary and contemplative, from observing the titular swans and other water fowl to enjoying the area's calm atmosphere.

Aquarian Age Massage and Peace of Mind Bookstore, 1401 E. 15th St. — This Cherry Street locale offers one the chance to explore one's inner self, find contentment or simply take a respite from the world through a wide array of books, classes and therapeutic massage techniques.

Tulsa Garden Center/Woodward Park, 2435 S. Peoria Ave. — Spend some time in contemplation of nature's beauty in this horticultural treasure, which includes the Linnaeus Teaching Garden and the Tulsa Municipal Rose Garden.

Gilcrease Museum, 1400 N. Gilcrease Museum Road — Of the museum's 460 acres, 23 have been transformed into themed

gardens that reflect aspects of the Gilcrease collection. Follow the trails north of the museum to Stuart Park to spend some quiet time by the garden's pond.

Central Library, Fourth Street and Denver Avenue — Libraries are by definition quiet places, but one can really escape by securing one of the glass-walled study cubicles on the second floor of the newly renovated Central Library.

Oxley Nature Center in Mohawk Park, 5701 E. 36th St. North — It's hard not to find a quiet, solitary place within the 800-plus acres that make up the Oxley Nature Center. Ten different trails wind their way through this home to more than 700 species of plants and hundreds of different birds and animals.

Tam Bao Buddhist Temple, 16833 E. 21st St. — This complex, which primarily serves the city's Vietnamese population, offers an English service Sunday mornings, but the temple and grounds are open daily for those wishing to find a quiet place to reflect and relax.

Braden Park, 5036 E. Seventh St. — Water has a way of calming just about anyone, and this small park, tucked away in a midtown neighborhood, can seem an oasis. A small pond equipped with fountains is the centerpiece of the park, which attracts a number of different waterfowl.

Tulsa Botanic Garden, 3900 Tulsa Botanic Drive — The Tulsa Botanic Garden will host a special "Yoga in the Garden" event Sept. 21 to mark International Peace Day, but one can find peaceful spots throughout this ever-expanding complex.

Memorial Park Cemetery, 5111 S. Memorial Drive — We know we're not the only people who, when we need a brief respite from the workaday world, pay a visit to a graveyard. Even the sounds from one of the city's major thoroughfares seemed to be muted

once one enters this space.



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