

## A Story of Blue Space Bathing by Jamie Limond

Back in 2013, after my blood cancer prognosis had expired and our children were developing into young girls, I realised I needed a new sense of meaning in my life. Career-wise, I felt I had no direction—I wanted to be more than my illness.

After all, Viktor Frankl wrote that “suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning” (2020).

My parents took up sailing after we left home. I had visited them in the Caribbean, and being on the water felt incredibly comfortable—I loved the sound of waves splashing against the hull and the smell of the ocean.

So I thought, that's it: I'd be a sailor. I signed up for a Day Skipper course when I returned to the UK, and I was hooked. I loved not only the sailing but also the planning, maintaining and organising of the boat. Each year, I took up another course and sailed with different people.

Later, I learned that this practice can be called “blue space bathing.”

Some theorists suggest that being on the water—subject to the motion of waves and tides—triggers subconscious associations with being cradled and rocked by our mothers. This sensation evokes deep feelings of security and helps activate the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS governs two modes: the sympathetic system (responsible for the fight, flight, or freeze response and cortisol release) and the parasympathetic system (which enables rest and digest—the state in which the immune system functions properly).

This explanation resonated with me, as I've always enjoyed being in and around water. As a child, holidays meant spending hours snorkelling, swimming with my head underwater, and simply flipping around while looking for fish and crabs.

And the science: Edward O. Wilson (1984) hypothesised that ‘humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature’—including blue spaces—a concept he termed “biophilia.” Our evolution thrived near water because it provided abundant food, aided us to stay clean, and served as a barrier against foe. Rivers and lakes provided drinking water. Unknown to us then, the salt in the sea is sterile and rich in magnesium, zinc, iron, and potassium—which can help reduce inflammation and heal cuts and sores, something noticeable when you're on holiday and swimming every day. The sea contains essential trace elements (manganese, cobalt, sodium, calcium, and boron) that can be absorbed through the skin. Salt water also enhances lymph flow and is antimicrobial. Moreover, the sound of waves and the gentle rocking motion helps to balance your circadian rhythm by reducing cortisol levels, thus improving sleep (White, 2010).

Because coastal air has a high salt content, it helps clear your throat and respiratory system—much like how a grandparent might have you breathe in hot, salty water vapours when you have the sniffles. Coastal areas and sea water also contain higher levels of negative ions (Jiang et al., 2018), which can reduce oxidative stress by neutralising the positive free radicals associated with the formation of many cancers. My ENT consultant had me flush salt water up one nostril and out the other. Although I initially thought this was torture, I later learnt that salt water helps reduce inflammation and fight pathogens—the salt draws water out of bacterial cells (much like its use in curing meat or preparing aubergines for frying), which is how it acts as an antimicrobial (Leistner, 2000; Satomura et al., 2005). It also helps clear mucus (Ramalingham et al., 2019). All these physiological and psychological factors improve overall health and well-being (provided, of course, that the water is unpolluted).

Eventually, I bought a boat. Two summers ago, I circumnavigated the UK and Ireland, and last year I became an Ocean Yachtmaster by sailing across the Arctic Ocean using astronavigation—from Norway to Iceland.

I'm sharing this story because 19 years after my diagnosis and 11 years after my prognosis expired, I'm still here. I believe much of this is due to my blue space bathing: rebalancing my autonomic nervous system, enhancing my immune function, and reducing my cortisol levels—all benefits I attribute to embracing a life on the water. I'm keen to share this knowledge and offer you the opportunity to experience a fully immersive spell on the sea's swell, propelled by the wind while feeling the full presence of the ocean through all your senses.

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