

A DIFFERENT WAY TO THINK ABOUT TRAVEL

The Restorative Power of Place



How Travel and Hospitality Can Help Us
Rest, Recover, and Reconnect

CARLEY MONTGOMERY

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CHAPTER 1

How I Arrived at Sanctuary

I think this actually started in the lineup, waiting for a wave on my first trip to Costa Rica. I had been invited by my then-friend, soon-to-be business partner, Charlie, a real estate investor from Los Angeles who had surfed his way along much of the west coast of North and South America before buying oceanfront property in a very remote part of Costa Rica on the Osa Peninsula. He built a completely open-air house in a clearing in the jungle, right on the ocean.

That trip was the first time I really remember feeling the healing power of nature. There was something about being immersed between the ocean and the jungle, with so little separating me from either one, that affected me in a way I had never experienced before. I knew almost immediately that I needed more of that place, but my life back home made simply staying there impossible.

At the time, I had gotten myself into an incredibly stressful project through my woman-owned construction company, working at LAX under the kind of pressure that had a lot of zeros behind it—eight figures, to be exact. At the same time, my mom was in the late stages of a chronic illness, and I was the person making sure she was cared for. Between the business, the financial responsibility, the construction pressure, and what was happening with my family, there was very little room in my life where I was not responsible for something or someone.

Selling everything and moving to Costa Rica was not an option then, so for the next five years I did the next best thing. I worked my tail off and returned to that magical, medicinal place for two weeks at a time, using those trips to decompress between the ocean and the jungle before returning home and doing it all over again.

Looking back, those trips became a kind of lifeline. I did not yet have the language to explain what was happening to me there, and I certainly was not thinking about nervous systems or restorative environments. I simply knew that I felt different. The ocean had its rhythm, the jungle had its rhythm, and there was very little between me and the natural world. My body seemed to understand something about that long before my mind did.

Eventually, my mom passed. Later that same year, I lost my best friend from childhood to alcoholism. After years of being responsible for so much, something in me knew that it was finally my turn to leave. I sat down with my business partner and told her what I needed, and she fully supported my plans to travel. I went first to Bali, because apparently that is where you go in the middle of an awakening, and by the end of that year I was back in Costa Rica, where the jungle and the waves had been calling me for years.

The following year, I was stripped of almost everything, partly by choice and partly by chance. I lost my business after failing to headhunt properly, sold my real estate while making some deeply emotional decisions, and got ripped off on a deal I was doing in Costa Rica. By the time it was over, I found myself broke, bruised, and battered by life.

For the next couple of years, I scraped by, but looking back, something far more important was happening underneath the financial struggle. I was beginning to heal. My nervous system had been completely wrecked by years in construction, the pressure of running a business, and the financial, emotional, and physical responsibility of caring for both of my parents. I had spent so many years carrying so much that I had almost forgotten what it felt like not to be responsible for the next emergency.

Then, mostly because there was very little else going on and very little left for me to manage, I rested. I rested deeply and for long stretches of time, without an agenda, without trying to optimize myself, and without turning recovery into another project I needed to accomplish. Out of necessity as much as intention, I was given something I had probably needed for years: deep, uninterrupted rest.

I did not understand yet that this experience would eventually shape the way I thought about hospitality. I only knew that something was changing in me, and that much of that change seemed to happen not because I was doing more to heal myself, but because so much of what had been demanding my

attention had finally fallen away. I was beginning to learn that sometimes healing does not start with another intervention. Sometimes it begins when the conditions around us finally allow the body to stop fighting long enough to restore itself.

When I left Los Angeles for Costa Rica, the goal was to open wellness centers. At least, that was what I thought I was supposed to do. Like so many people in the middle of their own healing process, I was much more interested in helping other people than in fully turning my attention toward myself. In psychology, there is an idea often referred to as the wounded healer—the person whose own wounds draw them toward helping others heal. That was me.

Opportunities began presenting themselves almost immediately. There were guesthouses that could potentially become wellness properties and, at one point, a regenerative medical clinic centered around treatments such as stem cells and ozone therapy. I explored different ideas and different versions of what a healing destination might look like, convinced that eventually I was going to build one of my own.

But something more important was happening while I was trying to figure out what I was supposed to create. I spent years driving around Costa Rica, meeting people and experiencing the small properties, retreat centers, clinics, farms, guesthouses, and other places where people were actually coming to heal.

My network in Costa Rica became enormous, particularly among small independent properties and the people creating alternative approaches to wellness. There is almost a running joke within the expatriate community there that if you move to Costa Rica long enough, eventually you open some version of a wellness center. People arrive with their own healing stories, their own modalities, their own philosophies, and their own ideas about what others need.

Some were extraordinary. Some were well intentioned but disconnected from what people actually needed. Some had incredibly sophisticated treatments inside environments that did very little to support restoration. Others had almost no formal wellness infrastructure at all, yet something about the land, the people, the food, the simplicity, or the way the place was being held made you feel different almost immediately.

Without realizing it, I was doing field research.

I was seeing the difference between providing healing modalities and creating an environment that supports healing.

At the time, I was still looking for the treatment, the practitioner, the protocol, or the wellness concept that would become the answer. It would take me much longer to understand that the thing I was becoming most interested in was not necessarily what happened inside the treatment room.

It was everything surrounding it.

Costa Rica eventually led me to the shores of Lake Atitlán in Guatemala, then back to Costa Rica again, with even a stint back in the United States to complete a design-build project for a client who did not trust the work to any other contractor. But over the course of roughly seven years, the larger journey was inward. I went to the depths of my own soul, reinvented myself, discovered health in a completely different way, and slowly became the person I am today.

I became deeply connected to the earth and almost unrecognizable from the overly Type A, extroverted version of myself who had left Los Angeles. The woman who once thrived on pressure, deadlines, responsibility, and constant activity gradually became someone who values solitude, stillness, reflection, and long stretches of time spent observing both the natural world and the human condition.

Much of my life now is spent thinking about what actually supports health. Not what markets as healthy, not what looks like wellness, and not what gives us another thing to buy, track, schedule, or achieve, but the conditions that allow the human body and mind to return to something more balanced.

Along the way, I developed a deep respect for the body's ability to repair itself when the conditions around it are supportive. I also became increasingly aware of how modern environments work against that capacity. Artificial light, constant noise, screens, notifications, poor sleep, processed food, social pressure, overstimulation, lack of nature, and an endless demand for attention can keep people in a state of chronic dysregulation without them even realizing it.

In many ways, that dysregulated state also makes us ideal consumers. When we are disconnected from ourselves, exhausted, overstimulated, and unable to settle, we become much more likely to reach for the next product, treatment, experience, distraction, or promise of relief.

Nowhere is this contradiction easier to see than in travel and hospitality.

The industry is largely built around stimulation. More tours, more activities, more food and beverage, more nightlife, more programming, more entertainment, more things to see, do, taste, and consume. Even wellness travel often follows the same model, simply replacing traditional activities with classes, treatments, therapies, and schedules.

Meanwhile, the people arriving at these properties are often already exhausted.

They are depleted, overstimulated, dysregulated, sleep deprived, emotionally stretched, and disconnected from the rhythms that help the body recover. Many of them know they need rest, but they no longer know what rest actually feels like or how to create the conditions for it.

That is the contradiction that eventually became impossible for me to ignore.

The people who most need restoration are often entering an industry designed to give them even more to process.

And that is where the idea of restorative hospitality began to take shape.

CHAPTER 2

Learning What the Body Needs

My journey into wellness started long before Costa Rica. I was a very intuitive and sensitive child, so much so that I gave up eating meat as young as my mom would allow me. I simply could not reconcile the idea of killing another living organism in order to eat it, and once I was old enough, I began cooking for myself rather than eating what everyone else was eating.

By high school, I had discovered Taoist philosophy, and by my early twenties, nutrition had become one of the central pillars of my life. I was fascinated by the relationship between food, energy, health, and how we feel in our bodies. That curiosity eventually took me to French culinary school, where I learned the technical side of cooking and developed a deep respect for food as craft.

I eventually left before completing the baking and wine portions of the program. At the time, I struggled with what felt like a lot of ego around food and very little responsibility for nutrition. I remember thinking that I should have gone to Ayurvedic school instead. Interestingly, with the benefit of time, I can now see that much of the traditional French way of eating contains principles that are actually deeply supportive compared with the highly processed modern diet. Real food, slower meals, butter and animal fats rather than industrial oils, seasonal ingredients, and a stronger relationship with the act of eating itself all look very different to me now than they did then.

What I continued to wrestle with, especially during my years in Costa Rica, was the question of the optimal diet for healing. I studied, tried, and contemplated almost every nutritional philosophy that came across my path. I went deep into macrobiotics, raw food, paleo, carnivore, Pritikin, Atkins, and countless variations in between. Each approach seemed to have a compelling explanation for why it worked, and each had people who were convinced they had finally found the answer.

Over time, what became increasingly clear to me was that there may not be one perfect diet that applies equally to every person, every body, or every stage of life. The more I studied, experimented, and paid attention to my own body, the more interested I became not only in what we put into the body, but in what happens when we stop putting things into it altogether.

That is what eventually led me to fasting.

Fasting changed the way I thought about healing because it removed the endless question of which food, which protocol, which supplement, or which dietary philosophy was the answer. Instead, it introduced the possibility that one of the most powerful things we can sometimes do is stop adding and allow the body to redirect its energy toward processes that are already built into it.

Whether through intermittent fasting or longer periods without food, I became fascinated by the profound changes that could happen when digestion was no longer the body's constant priority. Fasting gave me a completely different lens through which to think about metabolism, inflammation, energy, repair, mental clarity, and the body's innate capacity to adapt.

More importantly, it reinforced an idea that had already been emerging through my own recovery: healing is not always about finding the next thing to add.

Sometimes the most healing intervention is the removal of demand.

That idea would later become central to how I think about restorative hospitality. The same pattern I was seeing with food began appearing everywhere else. We are constantly asking the body to process something: food, information, noise, light, movement, stress, conversation, stimulation, decisions. Fasting taught me that sometimes the body does something extraordinary when we simply stop feeding one of those streams for a while.

It made me ask a much bigger question.

What else might the body be capable of if we created enough space for it?

The Nervous System

Lately, much of my contemplation has led me to the nervous system and the role it plays in our ability to heal. The more I have studied my own experience and watched what happens in other people, the more I have come to believe that we cannot separate healing from the state of the body that is trying to do the healing.

The autonomic nervous system is constantly responding to what is happening around us. It helps regulate functions such as heart rate, breathing, digestion, blood pressure, and many of the processes that happen without our conscious direction. When the body perceives stress or threat, sympathetic activation helps mobilize us for action. When conditions feel safer and quieter, parasympathetic activity supports many of the functions we associate with rest, digestion, recovery, and returning toward baseline.

What has become especially interesting to me is how much of this regulation happens in relationship with the world around us. We are not sealed systems moving independently through our environments. We respond to other people, to sound, to light, to pace, to facial expression, to whether a room feels safe, to whether someone around us is calm or agitated, and to countless cues we may never consciously identify. Ideas around co-regulation and safety have become increasingly important in nervous-system research and therapeutic practice, even as some of the specific theories used to explain these mechanisms continue to evolve.

This gave me another way to understand what I had already experienced intuitively for years. There are environments where my entire system seems to soften, and others where I never fully settle. There are people whose presence seems to give everyone around them permission to relax, and others whose anxiety fills a room before they have said very much at all. There are places where the body seems to receive repeated cues that it is safe enough to stop scanning, and places where even subtle things keep demanding attention.

That matters because restoration requires resources. A body that is continually responding to perceived demand is doing something very different from a body that has enough safety and spaciousness to devote more of its energy toward sleep, digestion, repair, immune function, and the ordinary maintenance required to keep us well. I do not think this means that human beings should live permanently in a parasympathetic state. We are designed to move through activation and recovery. The problem is when we become very good at activation and increasingly poor at returning from it.

When I look at modern Western life through this lens, chronic activation begins to make a lot of sense. We have created environments filled with

artificial light, traffic, phones, constant information, financial pressure, deadlines, noise, social demands, poor sleep, and very little true emptiness. For many people, there is always something coming next. Even when there is no immediate danger, the body can spend an enormous amount of time responding to demand.

This brought me back again to the idea of healing spaces. What if one of the most useful things a hospitality environment could offer was not another treatment, another supplement, or another scheduled activity, but a place where the number of demands placed on the body was intentionally reduced? What if the environment itself could help someone begin moving toward a greater sense of safety, regulation, and rest?

At first, I imagined this quite literally. I became fascinated with the idea of recreating the old rest ranches and rest-oriented retreats that existed before modern wellness became an industry. I loved the simplicity of the concept: people leaving their normal environment for a period of time not to accomplish anything, but to rest. There was something almost radical about it in a culture that increasingly treats inactivity as a problem that needs to be fixed.

My version was not going to be another retreat packed with workshops and activities. I imagined places built around deep sleep, quiet, clean food, nature, sunlight, darkness at night, gentle movement, fasting when appropriate, and long periods where very little was required of the guest. The point was not to entertain someone into wellness. It was to create enough space that their own body could begin doing more of the work.

The more I thought about those rest ranches, however, the more I realized that the idea was much bigger than creating a new category of retreat. If environment and nervous-system state matter this much, why should those principles only exist in specialized healing destinations?

Why shouldn't a hotel understand them too?

That question began moving me from the idea of building a healing property toward something much larger: changing the way we think about hospitality itself.

What People Think They Need

There is an old saying about knowledge: there are the things we know we know, the things we know we do not know, and then there are the things we do not know that we do not know. When it comes to wellness, I think that last category is where we are most severely lacking as a collective.

Most people have never been afforded the luxury of spending a decade doing relatively little but contemplating health, healing, the body, and the conditions that support wellbeing. I have, and I recognize what an unusual privilege that has been. What sometimes looked from the outside like years of wandering, starting over, or not doing very much was actually one of the most intense periods of study of my life. My curiosity would not leave the subject alone.

I read, experimented, observed, traveled, fasted, questioned, studied different healing traditions, watched what happened in my own body, and spent enormous amounts of time thinking about why some people recover and others do not. I followed ideas until they stopped making sense, changed my mind repeatedly, and learned to become suspicious of anything presented as the single answer for everyone. My curiosity demanded what felt, in practice, like a PhD-level education in natural healing, although it took place far outside a university.

What emerged from that education looked very different from the conventional medical model I had grown up around. I became increasingly interested in healing traditions that saw the human being as inseparable from environment, food, community, emotion, spirituality, and the natural world. During the years I lived around Mayan communities in Guatemala, I encountered ways of understanding health that felt much closer to this worldview than to the compartmentalized way modern medicine often approaches the body.

Interestingly, my study of Jesus led me toward many of the same questions. I do not identify strongly with the label Christian, but I have been fascinated by Jesus for much of my adult life and have studied his teachings through biblical texts as well as writings and traditions outside the conventional canon. I have spent an almost embarrassing amount of time dissecting the stories of healing associated with him and thinking about what they suggest about faith, belief, relationship, touch, forgiveness, community, and the state of the person seeking to heal.

What interested me most was never the idea of copying an ancient healing practice or rejecting everything modern medicine has learned. It was the much larger question underneath all of it: what does the human being actually require in order to return toward wholeness?

That question is very different from asking which treatment, supplement, procedure, diet, or wellness trend someone should try next.

We live in a culture that trains us to believe that when something is wrong, the answer must be something we are missing. We need another practitioner, another device, another protocol, another product, another test, another

supplement, another retreat, another expert, or another piece of information. Wellness has become extraordinarily good at monetizing that uncertainty.

But after years of studying healing, I began arriving again and again at something much simpler. The body is already doing an astonishing amount of work to maintain and repair itself every moment of every day. Much of the question is not how to force it to heal, but what is interfering with its ability to do what it is constantly attempting to do.

That was a profound shift for me.

Instead of asking only, What does this person need? I began asking, What can we stop doing to them? What can we remove? What conditions are preventing rest, regulation, nourishment, connection, and repair?

That same question eventually followed me directly into hospitality.

Guests often arrive believing they need a massage, a detox, a yoga class, a facial, a biohacking treatment, an itinerary, or some other intervention. Sometimes they may benefit from those things. But they may also be exhausted, overstimulated, underslept, overfed, disconnected from nature, chronically activated, and carrying more responsibility than their bodies have had time to recover from.

They may not know that what they need most is quiet.

Or darkness.

Or sleep.

Or space.

Or to miss a meal.

Or to walk outside without their phone.

Or to sit beside water for three hours with absolutely nothing scheduled afterward.

And why would they know? Most of us have been trained from childhood to respond to discomfort by doing something.

Very few of us have been taught how to create the conditions in which nothing needs to happen for a while.

That realization became one of the most important foundations of The Sanctuary Method. Hospitality should absolutely listen to what guests say they want, but it should also become more intelligent about the human needs underneath those requests.

Because sometimes the thing a person believes they need and the condition their body is asking for are not the same thing.

They may not know that what they need most is quiet, darkness, sleep, space, a period without constant eating, a walk outside without their phone, or three hours sitting beside water with absolutely nothing scheduled afterward. These things sound almost too simple to qualify as wellness because we have been conditioned to believe that healing must involve doing something. Yet for many exhausted people, the absence of demand may be exactly what has been missing.

Let's get real about what this often looks like. Someone is exhausted and knows they need a break from their life, so they begin searching for an escape. A wellness vacation seems like the answer. They find a beautiful yoga retreat in Costa Rica, book the flight, navigate airports, security lines, connections, transfers, and several hours of travel, and arrive more depleted than when they started. They check in and are immediately handed a schedule. Yoga at seven, breakfast at eight, breathwork at nine-thirty, a workshop at eleven, lunch at one, massage at three, sound healing at five, dinner at seven, and perhaps another class or gathering after that. The next morning, it starts again.

The guest does everything they are supposed to do. They get up for yoga even though their body wants to sleep. They make it to breakfast because meals are included and everyone else is going. They complete the massage, attend the workshop, eat three full meals a day, socialize with strangers, and keep moving through the itinerary. They may enjoy many of those experiences, and some of them may genuinely support them, but they have also remained completely occupied. Their attention has simply moved from the demands of normal life to the demands of wellness.

What they may never have been given is the thing they were actually trying to escape in order to find: enough space to stop.

This is where restoration becomes uncomfortable, because many of us have been distracted to death. We have become incredibly skilled at preventing ourselves from being alone with our own internal experience. We work, scroll, watch, eat, drink, exercise, listen to podcasts, answer messages, plan the next trip, take another class, start another protocol, and fill almost every empty space before we have to discover what is underneath all that activity.

When we finally stop, the first experience is not necessarily peace. Often it is discomfort. The thoughts become louder. The emotions we have been avoiding become harder to ignore. Boredom appears. Restlessness appears. Grief may appear. We may suddenly realize how tired we actually are or how unhappy, lonely, angry, confused, or disconnected we have become. The silence itself can feel threatening when we have spent years making sure there was always something there to fill it.

That does not mean the silence is harming us. It may mean we are finally noticing what constant stimulation allowed us not to notice.

Neuroscience has given us an interesting lens through which to think about what happens when external demands decrease. Researchers describe a collection of interconnected brain regions known as the default mode network, or DMN. Rather than simply switching off when we are not engaged in an external task, parts of the brain remain highly active during wakeful rest and internally directed thought. The default mode network has been associated with processes including autobiographical memory, thinking about ourselves and other people, imagining the future, meaning-making, and spontaneous thought or mind-wandering.

This is important because rest is not the same thing as the brain doing nothing. When we stop constantly directing our attention outward, the mind has greater opportunity to turn inward. Memories surface. Connections are made. We reflect on ourselves, our relationships, the past, and possible futures. Scientists are still working to understand the full role of the default mode network, and it would be an oversimplification to call it a single “healing network,” but research increasingly shows that internally directed cognition is an important part of how the brain organizes experience.

There is also an important complication here. Turning inward is not automatically pleasant or restorative. The same systems involved in self-reflection and internally directed thought have also been studied in relation to rumination, particularly when someone becomes trapped in repetitive negative thinking. That distinction matters to me because restorative hospitality is not simply about locking someone in a silent room and expecting healing to happen. The quality of the container matters. Safety matters. Nature matters. The people around us matter. The nervous system matters. There is a difference between being left alone in an environment that feels unsafe and being given space inside an environment that feels held.

This is why I believe healing spaces have such an important role. They can create enough safety and enough reduction in external demand for a person to stop performing without feeling abandoned. They can offer solitude without isolation, quiet without emptiness, and support without constant intervention. The environment can say, in effect, there is nothing you have to accomplish right now, but you are still being held.

That is a very different proposition from most wellness travel.

The point of restoration is not to keep someone successfully distracted with healthier activities. It is to create the conditions in which they can finally stop long enough to notice what their body, mind, and life have been trying to tell them.

Fasting From Everything

I have spent some time trying to trace the history of what I think of as the old rest ranches, particularly those from the early part of the twentieth century, and I have found surprisingly little documentation of them in the form I originally imagined. What we do know is that throughout history there have been places created specifically around convalescence and recovery. Sanatoriums, convalescent homes, health resorts, and other forms of retreat were often built around remarkably simple ideas: sunlight, fresh air, clean surroundings, good bedding, quiet, nourishment, and time. There is something almost nostalgic to me about the image of white linen sheets, open windows, sunlight streaming into a room, and a nurse in a white coat whose job was not to entertain you but to make sure you had what you needed while you rested.

Whether or not the exact version of the “rest ranch” I had imagined existed as widely as I once thought, the idea behind it continued to fascinate me. What if there were places people could go simply to stop? Not another retreat where the schedule begins at sunrise, but somewhere designed around the removal of stimulation. A place where you could sleep until you woke naturally, spend time outside, fast if that was appropriate for you, eat simply when you did eat, and allow entire days to pass without anyone expecting you to accomplish anything.

The more fasting became part of my own life, the more I realized that I had been thinking about the word too narrowly. Fasting is usually understood as the absence of food, but some of the most profound periods of healing I have experienced have come through the absence of much more than that. I have fasted from media, from conversation, from social interaction, from work, from entertainment, from constant information, and at times from almost everything that normally occupies my attention.

That kind of fasting creates a very different experience. When food is removed, the body no longer has the same constant relationship with eating and digestion. When media is removed, the mind is no longer consuming an endless stream of other people's ideas, crises, desires, and opinions. When conversation is reduced, we stop constantly orienting ourselves toward another person. When schedules disappear, we are no longer organizing the day around the next obligation. When entertainment is gone, there is nothing available to immediately rescue us from boredom or discomfort.

Eventually, there is just you.

That can be profoundly uncomfortable at first, which is part of why I think we resist it so strongly. We have built a culture with almost infinite ways to prevent ourselves from reaching that point. If we feel uncomfortable, we can

eat. We can pick up the phone. We can turn on a television. We can listen to something. We can call someone. We can work. We can shop. We can book an activity. We can find something else to consume before we ever have to sit quietly with whatever is underneath the impulse to escape.

But once enough of those inputs are removed, something changes. The body begins to slow down. Sleep can deepen. Thoughts that have been buried under constant activity begin to surface. Emotions we have been outrunning become available to us. Time starts to feel different. Nature becomes more interesting because our attention is no longer being continuously hijacked by something designed to be more stimulating than the tree, the clouds, or the sound of water in front of us.

This is where my understanding of fasting eventually merged with my understanding of restorative environments. I stopped thinking only about what a person should fast from eating and started thinking about what else they might need relief from processing.

Food is one form of input. So is light. So is sound. So is information. So is social interaction. So are decisions, notifications, entertainment, alcohol, work, conversation, and even wellness programming. The human organism is receiving and responding to all of it.

This does not mean that restoration requires total isolation, silence, or prolonged fasting, nor that every person should be subjected to the same kind of deprivation. The point is almost the opposite. The Sanctuary Method is about becoming discerning enough to understand how much input a person is already carrying and questioning the assumption that our job is always to give them more.

Sometimes the most generous thing a healing environment can provide is less.

Less to digest, less to listen to, less to respond to, less to decide, less to perform, and less to consume. Enough support that a person feels held, but enough emptiness that something inside them finally has room to emerge.

Over time, this became one of the most important lessons of my own healing: fasting can be much bigger than the absence of food. At its deepest, it can be the temporary absence of everything that keeps us from meeting ourselves.

Travel as Medicine

Over the years, I have come to believe that most of what we experience physically begins much deeper than the physical symptom itself. To me, symptoms are the body's language. They are physical expressions of something that has become imbalanced emotionally, energetically,

relationally, or environmentally, and when we look at them through that lens, the body stops appearing to be something that is betraying us and begins to look more like something that is constantly trying to communicate with us.

This is one of the places where my thinking has moved furthest away from the conventional medical model. Modern medicine is remarkably capable when it comes to acute intervention. If I am in a car accident, having a heart attack, need surgery, or have a life-threatening infection, I am enormously grateful that hospitals exist. They are designed to intervene quickly, stabilize people, diagnose acute problems, and keep us alive when something has gone terribly wrong.

But that is very different from creating the conditions for deep healing.

I have come to believe that suppressing a symptom without becoming curious about why it appeared can interrupt an important conversation the body is trying to have with us. From my perspective, the symptom itself is often part of the body's attempt to restore balance. Pain, exhaustion, inflammation, anxiety, grief, fever, digestive disturbance, or other expressions may be telling us that something requires our attention. When our only objective is to make those expressions disappear as quickly as possible, we may silence the messenger without ever understanding the message.

Dr. Gabor Maté's *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture* helped give language to much of what I had already been contemplating. Maté's work challenges the idea that health can be separated from the social, emotional, relational, and cultural environments in which we live. He argues that many of the conditions our society has normalized can place profound stress on both body and mind.

Louise Hay approached the same territory from a more metaphysical direction. Her work encouraged people to become curious about the relationship between physical symptoms, emotions, beliefs, fear, resentment, shame, and patterns of thought. I have always been drawn to the fundamental question underneath her work: what if the symptom is not simply an enemy to eliminate, but an invitation to look at what is happening more deeply within our lives?

That question became increasingly important to me because the environments we inhabit and the imbalances we carry are often deeply intertwined. Sometimes our environments contribute to our illness or dysregulation, and sometimes our unresolved patterns help create or keep us inside environments that continue reinforcing those same imbalances. We may choose stressful work because overfunctioning feels normal. We may remain in relationships where our needs disappear because self-

abandonment is familiar. We may create homes and schedules filled with noise and activity because stillness feels uncomfortable.

Eventually it becomes almost impossible to tell whether the environment created the imbalance or the imbalance helped create the environment.

This is one of the reasons I began to see travel differently.

Sometimes we need to leave the environment in which our patterns were formed before we can see those patterns clearly. Distance creates contrast. When we step away from the work, relationships, responsibilities, routines, media, social expectations, and physical spaces that define our everyday lives, we get the opportunity to experience ourselves outside of them.

That was certainly true for me. I did not understand how profoundly my life in Los Angeles had affected me while I was still successfully functioning inside of it. I was capable, productive, financially responsible, and handling enormous amounts of pressure. Those things looked like evidence that I was succeeding. It took leaving the environment and experiencing a completely different way of living before I could recognize what that version of success had cost me.

Travel can give us perspective because it interrupts familiarity.

When the familiar falls away, we begin to notice ourselves.

What are we like when nobody needs us? What happens when the emails stop? What comes up when the phone is turned off? What do we feel when we are not maintaining our normal identity? What do we know when we are no longer surrounded by people who expect us to remain the person we have always been?

This is where the idea of travel as medicine began to make sense to me.

I do not mean that a vacation cures disease or that a hotel replaces appropriate medical care. I mean that leaving an environment can create the distance and space necessary for a person to recognize what their normal life has made impossible to see.

Healing, in my experience, often begins with awareness. The things we are not aware of can continue controlling us. We repeat patterns because we cannot see them as patterns. We continue making the same decisions because they feel inevitable rather than chosen. Sometimes it takes silence, distance, and enough time away from normal life before we can finally ask ourselves what may be the most important question of all: What do I already know that I have been refusing to know?

This is where I believe a hotel can sometimes offer something that a hospital simply was not designed to provide.

Hospitals are designed primarily for acute medical intervention. They are busy, brightly lit, highly monitored environments organized around diagnostics, procedures, medications, safety, and clinical efficiency. That function is essential. But prolonged introspection, solitude, natural rhythms, sleep, silence, spaciousness, and the opportunity to rethink one's life are not generally what the hospital environment is built around.

A hospitality property can be.

A hotel can hold someone for days or weeks rather than hours between procedures. It can give someone a private room, darkness at night, nature, nourishing food, long walks, quiet, solitude, supportive human contact, and enough unstructured time for something deeper to emerge. It does not need to practice medicine in order to create conditions that support a person's process of reflection and restoration.

That distinction is enormously important to me. The hotel does not become the healer. It becomes the container.

Homeopathy fits into this worldview in much the same way. What has always appealed to me about classical homeopathy is its subtlety. Its philosophy is not primarily about suppressing an expression of the body but about supporting the person as they move through what the body is already attempting to resolve. Classical practitioners typically individualize remedies and often use one remedy at a time so they can observe how the person responds rather than continually introducing more inputs.

Homeopathy also contains the idea of what practitioners call a temporary “aggravation,” in which existing symptoms may intensify before improving. That concept is part of traditional homeopathic practice, although research has not clearly established how often such reactions occur. What matters to me philosophically is the larger idea underneath it: healing may not always look like the immediate disappearance of discomfort.

Sometimes moving through something is uncomfortable.

Grief may intensify before it resolves. Exhaustion may become more apparent once someone finally stops running on adrenaline. Emotions may become louder when distractions disappear. A person who has spent years functioning through stress may initially feel worse when they finally allow themselves to stop because they are at last able to feel how depleted they have become.

Whether someone believes in homeopathy or not, my relationship with it comes from lived experience and from what I have observed empirically over years of paying attention to my own body and the people around me. I value that kind of observation deeply. Science is one way of understanding human

experience, but it is not the only way humans have gathered knowledge throughout history.

Fasting eventually became another expression of this same philosophy, although I began thinking about fasting much more broadly than simply not eating.

There is a spectrum.

For some people, fasting from food may mean a medically appropriate prolonged fast. For others, it might simply mean eating within a shorter portion of the day rather than eating from early morning until late at night. Research on time-restricted eating suggests that limiting the daily eating window can have metabolic effects in some adults, although responses vary and the ideal eating window is not universal.

In my own thinking, many people may benefit from simplifying the constant cycle of eating, perhaps eating two nourishing meals rather than structuring the day around three meals plus snacks, and allowing a longer period in which digestion is not continually being asked to process something. But that is a conversation, not a rule. Prolonged fasting is a much more demanding practice and is appropriate for far fewer people.

The same spectrum applies to everything else we consume.

A digital fast might mean no phone or internet at all for several days. For someone else, it might mean being online for one hour in the morning and leaving the device off for the rest of the day. A social fast might mean complete solitude, while another person may simply need dinner alone rather than being expected to participate in group meals. A media fast may mean eliminating television, podcasts, news, social media, and music, or it may simply mean protecting several quiet hours each day.

The point is not deprivation for deprivation's sake.

It is relief from processing.

What are you already overloaded with? What is constantly entering your body and mind? What would happen if some portion of that input disappeared long enough for you to notice what remained?

This is why I do not envision restorative hospitality as a set of absolute rules. Sanctuary is not a prescription that says every guest should fast, every property should be silent, or everyone should spend three days alone in the woods. The Method is about discernment. It is about creating a conversation between the person, the place, and what that particular human being actually needs less of.

For one person, restoration may mean fasting from food. For another, it may mean fasting from their phone. Someone may need complete solitude, while someone who has been isolated for years may need safe human connection. One guest may need darkness and twelve hours of sleep. Another may need to walk for six hours through the forest and finally think clearly.

This is why healing environments cannot simply replace one rigid wellness program with another.

The goal is to create enough space for people to begin hearing themselves again.

Symptoms, in the way I have come to understand them, are part of that conversation. They are the physical body's way of saying that something deserves attention. We may not immediately understand the message, and the answer may not reveal itself in a neat or convenient way, but if we continually distract, suppress, consume, and keep moving, we never give ourselves much opportunity to listen.

A truly restorative property creates that opportunity.

It removes enough demand that a person can begin to notice what they feel. It provides enough safety that discomfort can surface without immediately needing to be escaped. It offers enough time that the guest does not have to arrive at an answer by Thursday because checkout is Friday morning.

And perhaps that is one of the most powerful forms of medicine travel can offer us: not another person telling us what is wrong or what we should do about it, but enough distance from our normal lives to hear our own deeper truth.

Sometimes the place does not give us the answer.

It simply becomes quiet enough for us to hear the answer that was already there.

CHAPTER 3

The Place Is Part of the Healing

For much of my life, when I thought about healing, I thought about what a person did. What they ate. What they stopped eating. What treatment they received. What practitioner they saw. What supplement they took. What practice they followed. Even the natural healing world, which has informed so much of my own thinking, can become focused on interventions. We are constantly searching for the next thing that might help us feel better.

Travel changed that for me because I began noticing that sometimes I felt different before I had done anything at all.

There were places where I arrived and something in me seemed to settle almost immediately. I could feel it beside the ocean in Costa Rica, in the jungle, beside water, among old trees and eventually in quiet rural places throughout my travels. I would sleep differently. My breathing would change. My thoughts would slow down. Things that had felt impossible to think through at home seemed less complicated once I had been somewhere else for a few days.

Nothing had been administered to me.

The place itself had changed the conditions around me.

That distinction became increasingly important as I began looking more seriously at hospitality. We have traditionally treated the hotel as the backdrop to the experience. The room holds the guest while the real

experience happens somewhere else: at the spa, on the excursion, at dinner, during the retreat program, in the treatment room or outside exploring the destination.

But what if the environment is not simply the backdrop?

What if it is participating in the experience every minute the guest is there?

We are always responding to where we are, whether we consciously notice it or not. Light enters the room. Sound travels through walls. Temperature affects comfort. Scent produces attraction or aversion. Clutter demands visual processing. People communicate safety or tension through their presence. A view pulls our attention outward. A locked door changes how secure we feel. Darkness changes sleep. Noise changes sleep. The softness of a bed, the pressure of a schedule, the availability of food, the way a staff member approaches us and even the feeling that we are being watched or expected to perform all become part of the environment we are inhabiting.

Hospitality therefore cannot separate the guest's internal experience from the conditions surrounding them.

This does not mean that every hotel needs to become a health facility. In fact, I am suggesting almost the opposite. Hotels possess an extraordinary opportunity precisely because they are not hospitals. They are places where people sleep, eat, bathe, walk, rest, sit by windows, spend time with people they love and temporarily step outside the patterns of ordinary life.

That is an enormous amount of human life to be holding.

The modern hotel has spent decades becoming better at entertaining people during that time. I think the next opportunity is learning how to better support them during it.

Nature makes this easiest to understand because most of us have experienced the difference between sitting beside a highway and sitting beside a river. We do not need a wellness consultant to explain why one environment feels different from the other. A forest does not ask us to complete an exercise. An ocean does not require an appointment. A mountain does not send a notification reminding us that our session begins in ten minutes.

We simply enter relationship with it.

Nature is therefore one of the most powerful assets in restorative hospitality, but I do not believe restorative hospitality belongs only in nature. That would make the idea far too small.

An airport hotel may never have a forest. It can still protect sleep. A city hotel may never achieve silence, but it can create rooms where the city recedes. A convention hotel may serve thousands of people, but it can still understand

that some of them will arrive depleted and need somewhere to decompress rather than another bar filled with televisions.

The question is not whether every property can become a sanctuary in the romantic sense.

The question is whether every property can become more intentional about the effect of its environment on the people inside it.

That is where restorative hospitality begins.

I have become increasingly interested in the idea of environmental load. Every environment asks something of us. Some places require constant navigation, filtering and vigilance. We process the traffic, the lighting, the music, the people, the signage, the screens, the scent, the decisions and the expectations. Individually, none of those things may seem significant. Collectively, they can create an environment in which the guest is never actually given the opportunity to settle.

The opposite is also true.

A room can reduce demand.

The directions can be obvious. The light can be gentle. The bedding can feel good against the skin. The temperature can be easy to control. The room can be dark at night. The person next door can be inaudible. The guest can understand what is available without being sold something every five minutes. They can walk outside and immediately encounter sky, water, garden, trees, weather or simply a quiet street.

When enough friction disappears, something else becomes possible.

This is one reason I care so much about small independent properties. Many of them already possess extraordinary restorative assets without realizing what they have. They may have a creek behind the inn, darkness that would be impossible to reproduce in a city, an owner who knows every guest by name, food grown nearby, twelve rooms instead of two hundred, an old garden, a porch, a fireplace or simply a part of the world where nothing much happens after dark.

Traditional hospitality marketing can make these properties feel inadequate because they do not have enough amenities.

I often look at them and see the opposite.

They have less to protect the guest from.

The work is not necessarily to turn these places into wellness retreats. It may be to recognize what is already working and protect it from being engineered away.

This is an important part of stewardship. Once a property understands that quiet is an asset, it may make different decisions about events. Once darkness is understood as part of the experience, outdoor lighting may be reconsidered. Once the sound of the river is recognized as more valuable than background music, someone may decide not to install speakers on the terrace.

The environment begins influencing business decisions because the experience has been defined more clearly.

Place also contains things that cannot easily be reproduced. History. Culture. Weather. Landscape. Community. Local food. Architecture. The person who has lived on the land for thirty years and knows where the elk cross in the morning. The grandmother whose recipe is still being served at breakfast. The path guests discover because the owner tells them where to turn at the old fence.

These things create a sense of place rather than a hospitality product that could exist anywhere.

And I believe belonging somewhere real is itself restorative.

One of the strangest developments in luxury hospitality has been the creation of extraordinarily beautiful places that sometimes feel almost completely disconnected from where they are. The same materials, fragrances, wellness language, cocktails, design trends and treatments migrate around the world until a guest could wake up and have difficulty remembering which country they are in.

Restorative hospitality moves in the other direction.

It asks the property to become more itself.

Because restoration is not necessarily found in perfection. Sometimes it comes from feeling that we have arrived somewhere real enough that we can become real again too.

That realization ultimately became the foundation for The Sanctuary Method. I needed a way to understand why certain places seemed able to hold people differently and why others, regardless of price or beauty, could not.

The answer was not a single amenity.

It was the relationship between the environment, the people holding it, the choices being made and the experience those choices created.

CHAPTER 4

The Sanctuary Method

By the time all of these ideas had begun to come together for me, I realized I was no longer simply thinking about wellness, healing, or even hospitality as separate subjects. I was looking at the relationship between the human being and the environment holding them. I had spent years studying what happens when we remove stimulation, when we give the body more time to rest, when we allow space for emotions to surface, when we step away from the environments that have shaped our patterns, and when we stop assuming that the answer to every form of discomfort is another intervention.

Eventually, I began asking a different question of hospitality. If a person leaves their normal life in search of rest, recovery, perspective, connection, or healing, what responsibility does the place they arrive at have in that process?

That question became the foundation of The Sanctuary Method.

The Sanctuary Method is not a checklist of wellness amenities and it is not a design style. It does not require a spa, a retreat center, a remote location, or a particular type of architecture. It is a way of looking at hospitality through the state of the human being inside it.

Every property is already creating an experience at the level of the nervous system, whether it realizes it or not. The architecture, lighting, sound, food, pace, technology, staff interactions, privacy, sleep environment, landscape, programming, and leadership all contribute to what the guest is being asked

to process while they are there. Some environments increase vigilance, stimulation, and demand. Others reduce them.

The Method is built around seven principles: Holding Space, Creating the Container, Safety, Attunement and Intuition, Discernment, Stewardship, and Coherence. They work together, and although each can be considered separately, none of them functions particularly well in isolation.

Holding Space

The first question is also the most important: what is this place here to hold?

Before a property thinks about programming, amenities, branding, or even design, it should understand what kind of human experience it wants to support. That may be rest, recovery, connection, creativity, celebration, transition, belonging, deep sleep, or simply the opportunity to step outside the demands of everyday life for a while.

Rest is not only sleep. It is a reduction in demand. It may mean fewer decisions, fewer interruptions, less stimulation, more spaciousness, and permission to stop performing. A guest arriving after an exhausting journey may not need another experience. They may need an easy arrival, a quiet room, simple nourishment, low light, and the freedom to disappear into privacy without being asked to do anything else.

Connection can take many forms. A property may be holding space for partners to reconnect, for families to spend meaningful time together, for someone to reconnect with themselves, or for a guest to feel connected to nature, culture, place, or something larger than themselves. Connection cannot always be programmed, and often it emerges precisely because enough space has been left around it.

Recovery is another form of holding. Many guests arrive depleted from work, caregiving, travel, illness, stress, grief, or prolonged overstimulation. A restorative property understands that recovery is not something it can force, but it can create conditions that make recovery more possible. Sleep, quiet, nourishment, privacy, nature, reduced decision-making, and a lower sensory load may do more for a depleted person than a full itinerary of wellness activities.

Hospitality can also hold celebration, but even celebration can be approached with discernment. Joy does not always need to mean excess, amplified music, alcohol, late nights, and disruption. Celebration can also be intimate, beautiful, ceremonial, communal, and deeply memorable without overwhelming the people or the place.

Creativity is another experience that certain environments hold particularly well. When external demands decrease, internal thought often becomes more available. Quiet, beauty, boredom, solitude, walking, nature, meaningful conversation, and uninterrupted time can all create space for imagination to return.

Belonging is more subtle but equally important. A guest feels a sense of belonging when they do not have to constantly adapt themselves to the environment. They feel welcomed rather than evaluated, cared for rather than processed, and able to exist without needing to perform a particular version of themselves.

Hospitality also holds people through transitions. People travel during grief, divorce, career changes, new relationships, parenthood, recovery, spiritual inquiry, and periods when one chapter of life is ending before the next has fully begun. The property may know nothing about the guest's story, but it can still provide a temporary place where that person has room to move through it.

Deep sleep deserves to be considered as one of hospitality's primary responsibilities. Providing a bed is not the same thing as protecting sleep. Darkness, quiet, temperature, air quality, bedding, hallway noise, housekeeping schedules, mechanical systems, and nighttime lighting all influence whether the body is actually able to rest.

Safety underlies all of these experiences. Without enough safety, people cannot fully let go. For that reason, the first principle of the Method is not about what the property wants to offer. It is about what the property is willing and able to hold.

Creating the Container

Once a property understands what it is trying to hold, it can begin examining the container around that purpose.

The container is the total environment the guest enters. It is not one room or one department. Architecture, interiors, light, sound, air, temperature, scent, food, water, bedding, technology, landscaping, service pace, housekeeping, programming, privacy, policies, and communication all contribute to it.

The guest does not experience these things as separate operational categories. Their body experiences them all at once.

A property may have a beautifully designed guest room and still create stress through a confusing arrival. It may offer an exceptional spa while surrounding the guest with screens, loud music, and late-night activity. It may promote sleep while allowing housekeeping carts, hallway

conversations, and doors to disrupt the guest throughout the night. It may advertise connection with nature while amplifying music over the very landscape the guest came to experience.

The Method asks whether all of these elements are working together or working against one another.

Creating the container begins with vision, mission, and values, but those words only matter if they become operational filters. If a property says it values rest, that should influence its lighting, sound, event policies, housekeeping schedules, technology, food service, and staffing. If it values connection with nature, that should influence development decisions, landscape design, outdoor access, acoustics, and the degree to which guests are protected from unnecessary artificial stimulation.

The container also begins before arrival. Booking systems, confirmation emails, transportation instructions, check-in processes, and the amount of information a guest must process can either reduce friction or add to it. A guest can arrive already exhausted before ever reaching the room simply because the journey into the property has demanded too much.

Creating the container is therefore about intentionality. It asks whether the conditions surrounding the guest actually support the state the property claims to care about.

Safety

Safety is one of the most important and least fully understood parts of sanctuary.

Physical safety matters, of course, but people assess safety through much more than locks and security systems. A guest can be technically safe and still feel exposed, watched, pressured, interrupted, judged, confused, or unable to control their own environment.

Women in particular often carry a more complex awareness of safety while traveling. The route from the parking area to the room, who can access guest floors, how staff approach a door, whether windows feel exposed, how unwanted attention is handled, and whether employees appear aware and present can all influence whether someone feels comfortable lowering their guard.

Emotional safety matters too. Guests should be able to say no without resistance. They should not have to repeatedly decline activities, upgrades, alcohol, conversation, housekeeping, or anything else the property has decided they should want. Hospitality becomes less restorative every time the guest has to defend their own boundaries.

Agency is part of safety. People settle more easily when they understand what is happening and retain meaningful control over their experience. Privacy should be clear and predictable. Housekeeping should respect personal space. Staff should understand that attentiveness is not the same thing as intrusion.

The goal is not to eliminate all uncertainty from life. It is to reduce unnecessary vigilance.

One of the most useful questions a property can ask is where the guest still has to stay on guard. The answer often reveals far more about restoration than adding another wellness amenity ever could.

Attunement and Intuition

Hospitality has always relied on standards because standards create consistency. They help make sure rooms are cleaned, meals are prepared properly, information is delivered, and basic expectations are met.

But exceptional hospitality has never been entirely procedural because human beings are not standardized.

One guest wants conversation and another wants silence. One person wants recognition and another wants anonymity. One guest arrives excited and curious while another has spent the day navigating airports and simply wants to reach the room without one more interaction.

Attunement is the ability to notice those differences. It means paying attention to pace, tone, body language, boundaries, context, and subtle cues rather than waiting for every need to be verbally explained.

Intuition is part of this human intelligence. It does not mean abandoning professional standards or making assumptions. It means allowing experienced people to use judgment.

A front desk employee may sense that an exhausted guest does not need a long explanation of every amenity. A server may recognize when a table wants privacy. A guide may realize someone needs to move more slowly. A housekeeper may notice that a guest is spending far more time in the room than usual and adjust service accordingly.

Housekeeping is especially important in this conversation because housekeepers often have one of the most intimate relationships with the guest experience. They enter the space where people sleep, bathe, work, recover, unpack their belongings, and reveal through their environment what they may never say directly to anyone at the front desk.

They are often very perceptive readers of space.

The Sanctuary Method treats this kind of intuition as something to develop rather than something to train out of people through rigid scripting. Employees need clear boundaries and good training, but they also need enough trust from leadership to respond to the actual human being in front of them.

The goal is presence without intrusion. Good restorative hospitality allows the guest to feel that someone is paying attention without making them feel watched.

Discernment

Hospitality has become exceptionally good at adding things. Properties are continually encouraged to add more amenities, more programming, more technology, more entertainment, more lighting, more screens, more sound, and more activations because more is assumed to create value.

The Sanctuary Method asks whether every addition is actually helping.

The nervous system is constantly receiving environmental input whether or not the guest consciously notices it. Sound, light, movement, screens, notifications, conversation, temperature, scent, visual clutter, and operational noise all become part of the load a person is processing while they are there.

A property can look peaceful and still be deeply overstimulating.

Discernment means becoming aware of that accumulated load and deciding what truly belongs. It does not mean making hospitality sterile or sensory-deprived. The right sensory input can support the experience. Essential oils may create a calming atmosphere when they are subtle, natural, optional, and appropriate. Sound healing, singing bowls, or gentle instrumental music may support interior spaces where natural sound is unavailable or where outside noise needs to be softened.

But where nature is already providing the soundtrack, nature should generally be allowed to remain the soundtrack. Wind through trees, flowing water, rain, birds, insects, and fire do not need to be covered by amplified music in order to create an atmosphere.

Lighting deserves the same consideration. Many hospitality environments remain brightly illuminated long after the body would naturally begin preparing for rest. Warm, lower, localized lighting through lamps, sconces, incandescent bulbs, candles where appropriate, and firelight can create a very different experience from bright overhead lighting.

The question is not whether a space should be dark. It is whether the lighting matches the time of day, the activity, and the state the property is trying to support.

Screens deserve particular scrutiny because they have become so normalized that their presence is rarely questioned. Televisions appear in bedrooms, restaurants, lobbies, bars, and gyms, while digital signage, tablets, interactive displays, and notifications add additional visual input.

Technology is not inherently incompatible with restoration, but it should not be automatic.

A restorative property should be willing to ask whether a television needs to dominate the bedroom, whether it could be hidden when not in use, or whether guests could opt into screen access rather than having the screen become the visual centerpiece of the room. Public spaces can prioritize fireplaces, views, art, books, conversation, or nature instead of defaulting to another glowing rectangle.

Noise extends far beyond music. Housekeeping carts, slamming doors, HVAC systems, ice machines, kitchen equipment, pool pumps, leaf blowers, staff radios, traffic, hallway conversations, events, and early-morning maintenance all affect the guest's sensory environment.

Individually, these may seem like minor operational details. Together, they can prevent a property from ever feeling truly quiet.

Discernment therefore becomes one of the most practical tools in the Method. It asks of every new feature, amenity, sound, technology, or activation whether the addition supports the intended experience or simply adds more for the guest to process.

Sometimes restoration comes through experience. Sometimes it comes through absence.

Stewardship

Stewardship expands hospitality beyond the idea of managing a property efficiently for the people who visit it. A place also has responsibilities to the employees who work there, the local community, the landscape, the water, the culture, the history, and the generations that will inherit what happens there.

For this reason, The Sanctuary Method moves beyond sustainability alone.

Sustainability often asks how a business can reduce harm, conserve resources, or maintain current conditions. Regeneration asks something

more ambitious: because this hospitality business exists here, is the place becoming healthier?

A regenerative property seeks reciprocity with its surroundings. It does not simply extract beauty, labor, food, water, culture, and community in order to create an experience for visitors. It asks how hospitality can return value to the place that makes that experience possible.

That may mean buying from local farmers, supporting artisans, employing and developing people from nearby communities, restoring habitat, improving soil, protecting water, preserving traditional knowledge, strengthening local food systems, supporting conservation, or directing tourism revenue toward needs identified by the community.

There is no universal checklist because true stewardship must respond to the actual place.

A desert property has different responsibilities than a mountain lodge. An urban hotel relates to its neighborhood differently from an island resort. A historic property may have cultural responsibilities that a new-build retreat does not.

The same principle applies internally. Employees cannot be treated as resources that can be depleted in order to manufacture restoration for guests. A property cannot credibly create sanctuary while maintaining a chronically stressed workforce behind the scenes.

Appropriate staffing, fair treatment, respectful leadership, sensible scheduling, development opportunities, and a culture that values employees as people are all part of the restorative environment.

Housekeeping again offers one of the clearest examples of stewardship. Housekeepers are entrusted with the guest's most private space. They are responsible not only for cleanliness but for privacy, comfort, belongings, dignity, and the environment in which the guest sleeps and recovers.

They are not simply turning rooms. They are stewards of private space.

At the leadership level, stewardship means protecting the integrity of the place even when commercial opportunity pushes in another direction. An event may create significant revenue while disrupting every other guest. Additional development may increase room count while destroying the quietest area of land. A new activation may look impressive in marketing while undermining the experience guests actually came to find.

Stewardship is the ability to recognize those moments and protect what matters.

Coherence

Coherence is the point at which the entire property either comes together or falls apart.

A property can say all the right things about wellness, restoration, sustainability, community, or connection with nature and still feel completely wrong if the lived experience contradicts the promise.

Guests are extraordinarily sensitive to this, even when they cannot explain exactly what they are noticing.

A hotel may describe itself as peaceful while playing amplified music throughout the day. It may promote wellbeing while keeping guests under harsh artificial lighting late into the evening. It may talk about sustainability while importing most of what it serves and contributing very little to the surrounding community. It may claim to value people while the staff appear exhausted, rushed, or afraid to make decisions.

These contradictions matter because sanctuary depends on trust.

When the promise and the experience match, there is a sense of ease. When they do not, the guest is left reconciling conflicting signals.

Coherence begins with leadership because vision, mission, and values cannot remain words on a website or in an investor presentation. They need to become filters for everyday decisions.

If rest is a core value, then the event strategy, housekeeping schedules, lighting, noise, technology, and staffing should reflect that. If community is a value, the property should be able to show how the community meaningfully participates in and benefits from the business. If nature is central to the brand, the operation should protect the natural environment rather than simply use it as scenery.

The same coherence must exist internally. A property cannot sustainably create calm for guests through a workforce operating in constant stress. It cannot promise intuitive, personalized hospitality while removing all discretion from staff. It cannot speak about stewardship while repeatedly making decisions that prioritize short-term revenue over the long-term health of the place.

Coherence does not require perfection. Every hospitality operation contains compromises and every property will have areas that need work. What matters is whether the overall direction is aligned and whether the organization is willing to recognize and address its contradictions.

In many ways, coherence is what allows the other six principles to function as a Method rather than as disconnected ideas. Holding Space defines the

purpose. Creating the Container shapes the environment. Safety reduces unnecessary vigilance. Attunement and Intuition allow the experience to remain human. Discernment protects the guest from unnecessary stimulation. Stewardship protects the people and place. Coherence ensures that all of these things are actually moving in the same direction.

A coherent property feels whole. The branding does not have to convince you that the place is restorative because the experience already communicates it.

That is ultimately what The Sanctuary Method is trying to create.

Not a collection of wellness features, but an environment that knows what it is here to hold and embodies that intention through everything it does.

CHAPTER 5

The Guest Experience in Action

A method only matters if it changes the way a place actually feels.

The Sanctuary Method is not intended to sit in a strategy document while the guest experience continues unchanged. It should be visible in the decisions a property makes before the guest arrives, in the way they are welcomed, in the room they enter, in the pace of service, in what is offered, in what is intentionally withheld, and in the state they are in when they leave.

The most useful way to understand this is to follow the guest through the stay.

A restorative guest experience begins before arrival. The booking process is already part of the container. If a guest has to navigate confusing information, excessive upselling, too many choices, unclear transportation instructions, or a constant stream of pre-arrival emails, the property may be creating stress before the person ever steps through the door. A property that understands what it is holding begins reducing unnecessary demand early. Communication is clear, expectations are simple, and the guest knows what they need to know without being overwhelmed by what they do not.

This is also where coherence first begins to matter. If the property markets itself as quiet, restorative, nature-connected, or deeply personal, the pre-arrival experience should already feel that way. The language, photography, pacing, and amount of information should reflect the actual experience rather than create a completely different emotional tone.

Knowing the Guest Before They Arrive

Attunement can begin before the guest ever reaches the property. A thoughtful pre-arrival questionnaire gives the team an opportunity to understand not only logistical needs, but the kind of experience the guest is hoping to have.

The purpose is not to interrogate someone or turn a restorative stay into a medical intake. It is to gather just enough information to help the property hold the person more intelligently. A guest might be asked what brings them to the property, what they are hoping to experience while they are there, whether they are looking for solitude or connection, how much interaction they generally prefer from staff, whether they want a structured or mostly unstructured stay, what helps them sleep, whether they have sensitivities to scent, sound, light, or food, and whether there is anything the team can do to make the experience feel easier or safer.

Different people feel comfortable in very different ways, and communication style is part of that. Some guests want information to be concise and direct. They want to know where to park, what time dinner is, how to reach someone if they need help, and what happens next without reading several paragraphs of explanation. Other guests feel more comfortable when they have more information. They want to understand how the property works, what the options are, what is nearby, and what to expect at each stage of the stay. Neither preference is more restorative than the other. Restorative hospitality means recognizing that clarity itself may need to be personalized.

Rather than assigning guests personality types, the property can simply ask how they prefer to receive information. Would they like an essentials-only arrival guide or a more detailed orientation? Do they prefer staff to check in occasionally or wait until they ask for something? Would they like recommendations or would they rather explore independently? A highly independent guest may experience frequent check-ins as intrusive, while another person may interpret the absence of contact as neglect. One guest may feel overwhelmed by a long welcome explanation, while another may become anxious because they do not understand what is available or what is expected of them.

The information gathered should then follow the guest through the property in a respectful way. Relevant staff should know enough to create continuity without forcing the guest to repeat themselves to every department. A simple internal profile might note that a guest prefers minimal interaction, is primarily there to rest, does not drink alcohol, is sensitive to fragrance, prefers a dark room at night, and wants concise written directions.

That is a deeper form of personalization than remembering someone's favorite wine or pillow preference. Restorative personalization asks a more useful question: what helps this particular person feel safe enough to settle?

Once the property understands that, the arrival experience can be shaped around the actual person rather than a generic service script.

Arrival is one of the most important moments in hospitality because the guest is crossing from one environment into another. They may have just driven through traffic, navigated airports, dealt with delays, carried luggage, managed children, answered work messages, or spent hours in transit. They are not arriving in a neutral state.

The property has an opportunity to recognize that transition.

A restorative arrival does not necessarily mean a ceremonial welcome or an elaborate ritual. Sometimes it means making everything easier. The guest knows where to go. Parking is obvious. Check-in is not another administrative obstacle. There is a bathroom available without having to ask. Water is offered. The employee greeting them is present enough to notice whether this person wants conversation or simply wants a key and a room.

This is where attunement matters immediately.

One guest may be delighted to hear the story of the property and receive recommendations. Another may have been traveling for fifteen hours and does not need a ten-minute explanation of the spa, restaurant, excursions, loyalty program, and activities before being allowed to put down their suitcase.

The Method asks staff to notice the difference.

Once the guest enters the room, the container becomes even more intimate. This is where the property has perhaps the greatest opportunity to either reduce or increase vigilance.

The room should make sense without requiring instructions. The lighting should be easy to control and appropriate to the time of day. The bed should feel like the central promise of the space rather than an afterthought surrounded by technology. Temperature should be comfortable and adjustable. The room should be quiet enough that the guest is not constantly aware of the building around them.

Screens deserve particular attention here. A television does not necessarily need to be prohibited in every restorative hotel, but its dominance should be questioned. Does it need to be the first thing the guest sees from the bed? Could it be concealed or visually minimized? Could a room communicate that entertainment is available without making entertainment the focal point of the environment?

The same applies to devices, clocks, indicator lights, digital panels, and unnecessary glowing technology. At night, small sources of light that seem insignificant operationally can become surprisingly intrusive in an otherwise dark room.

Sleep is where many of the Method's principles converge. Holding Space asks whether the property truly values rest. Creating the Container looks at darkness, sound, air, temperature, bedding, and interruption. Safety influences whether the guest feels comfortable enough to let down their guard. Discernment asks what can be removed. Stewardship asks whether housekeeping, maintenance, and other departments understand that protecting sleep is part of their responsibility. Coherence asks whether the reality of the night matches whatever the property said about rest on its website.

If deep sleep is part of what the property claims to support, that principle cannot stop at the mattress.

Hallway conversations matter. Door closers matter. HVAC equipment matters. Ice machines matter. Outdoor lighting matters. Events matter. Housekeeping schedules matter. The location of service areas matters. A guest's sleep environment is not contained within the four walls of the room.

Food is another place where hospitality often creates unnecessary demand while believing it is creating value. More choice is not always more generous.

A restorative property may offer exceptional food without making eating the central activity of the day. Some guests want three elaborate meals, and that may be completely appropriate for the experience. Others may feel better with two nourishing meals and a longer period between dinner and breakfast. A guest may want something very simple because their body is asking for less rather than more.

The point is not to impose one nutritional philosophy on every person. It is to create enough flexibility that food supports the guest instead of requiring the guest to organize their day around food.

This requires another kind of attunement. Staff should be able to respond naturally to someone who wants less without treating that choice as abnormal. A guest who skips breakfast does not necessarily need to be persuaded to eat. Someone who does not drink alcohol should not have to repeatedly explain themselves. Someone who wants a simple meal should not be made to feel that they are failing to take advantage of the experience.

Agency matters.

Programming follows the same principle. The Sanctuary Method is not anti-activity. Movement, hiking, swimming, art, yoga, cultural experiences,

conversation, and countless other forms of engagement can be deeply restorative. The question is whether the guest is being offered experiences or managed through them.

A schedule can become another form of pressure surprisingly quickly.

If every hour contains something, the guest may never reach the point where they have to decide what they actually want to do. They simply keep moving through what has been organized for them.

Restorative hospitality leaves room for choice and, just as importantly, leaves room for nothing.

A property may create one or two meaningful anchors in the day and allow the rest to remain open. It may invite rather than instruct. It may normalize opting out rather than making the person feel as if they are missing the experience they paid for.

This is particularly important in wellness environments, where guests can easily become highly compliant. They have traveled specifically to improve themselves, so they may attend every class and complete every treatment even when their body is clearly asking for sleep.

A restorative property should not require the guest to choose between listening to their body and being a “good” guest.

Nature can become one of the most powerful parts of the experience, but only when hospitality knows when to get out of the way.

If the property has wind, birds, waves, moving water, trees, stars, rain, fire, mountains, wildlife, or true darkness, these are not decorative amenities. They are part of the environment itself.

The role of the property is often to make access easy and then stop interfering.

A bench placed in the right location may be more restorative than an activity built around the same view. A trail that begins near the room may be more valuable than a scheduled nature experience. A fire may need no music. A sunrise may need no instructor.

This is one of the places where discernment becomes very practical. Hospitality has a tendency to believe that an experience has greater value when it is facilitated, branded, scheduled, narrated, or monetized. Sometimes the opposite is true.

The guest may need direct contact with the place rather than another layer between themselves and it.

Service throughout the stay should follow the same principle of presence without intrusion. The best service is not necessarily the service that appears most often.

A guest who wants solitude may experience frequent check-ins as pressure. Someone going through grief may not want repeated questions about whether they are enjoying themselves. A woman traveling alone may appreciate staff who are aware and available while also respecting her privacy. Another guest may be lonely and deeply benefit from a staff member taking a few extra minutes to talk.

There is no script capable of handling all of those situations.

This is why staff training within the Sanctuary Method cannot be limited to procedure. People need to understand the purpose of the property, the state it is trying to create, and the responsibility they have within that container. They need enough confidence and trust to use judgment.

Housekeeping is especially important because housekeeping enters the private environment of the guest. A traditional operation may think primarily in terms of service schedules and room turnover. A restorative operation also thinks about timing, privacy, sleep, and the possibility that someone may need their room differently from another guest.

A housekeeper who notices blackout curtains still closed at eleven in the morning may decide not to knock simply because the service window has begun. A guest who has spent most of the day in the room may need care and privacy in a different balance. A guest who declines service should not be repeatedly interrupted because a procedure says the room must be checked.

These are small decisions, but the guest experiences sanctuary through small decisions.

The public spaces matter too. A lobby can invite a person to settle or encourage them to keep moving. A restaurant can support conversation or make conversation difficult. A pool can feel peaceful or become an entertainment zone. A spa can feel restorative or function as another highly commercial sales environment.

The question remains the same: what state is this environment encouraging?

The answer may change throughout the property. Not every space needs to be silent and introspective. A bar may be social. A family area may be lively. A celebration may be energetic. The Sanctuary Method is not asking for uniform calm.

It is asking for intentionality.

A property should understand the role of each space and prevent one experience from unnecessarily consuming another. The lively part of the hotel should not destroy the sleep environment. The event should not take over the entire property unless everyone has come for the event. Music in one space should not erase natural sound in another.

This is where zoning, timing, architecture, operational policy, and leadership all become part of the Method.

There is also an emotional arc to a restorative stay that is easy to overlook.

A guest may not feel wonderful immediately.

If someone arrives deeply exhausted, the first thing they may notice when they stop is how exhausted they actually are. They may sleep for twelve hours and still feel tired. They may become emotional. They may feel bored or restless once their normal sources of stimulation are removed.

A restorative property should understand that this does not necessarily mean the experience is failing.

Sometimes stopping reveals what constant activity was covering.

This is particularly important for teams working in deeper restorative environments. Staff do not need to diagnose or counsel guests, but they should understand that a person moving through rest may look different from a person being entertained on vacation.

They may be quiet. They may want to be alone. They may sleep more. They may change their plans. They may suddenly decide not to attend anything.

The property should be able to hold that without making the guest feel like something has gone wrong.

Departure deserves the same level of attention as arrival.

Traditional hospitality often treats checkout as the end of the transaction. A restorative property can think of it as the moment when the guest moves from one container back into another.

If a person has spent several days slowing down, returning immediately to a chaotic travel day can be jarring. Clear transportation planning, reasonable checkout procedures, simple nourishment for the journey, and an unhurried departure can help preserve some of the experience.

The property can also resist the urge to turn the final interaction into another sales opportunity.

The guest does not necessarily need a loyalty pitch, an immediate request for a review, a dozen promotional emails, or pressure to rebook while they are still trying to process the stay.

Sometimes the best thing a property can do is let the experience settle.

This is where the final measure of restorative hospitality becomes important. The question is not simply whether the guest enjoyed themselves, whether they used the amenities, or whether the property achieved a high satisfaction score.

The more interesting question is what state the person was in when they arrived and what state they were in when they left.

Maybe they slept.

Maybe they made a decision they had been avoiding.

Maybe they reconnected with their partner.

Maybe they realized they needed to change their work.

Maybe they spent three days doing almost nothing and discovered how badly they needed that.

Maybe nothing dramatic happened at all, but they returned home less exhausted than when they left it.

That is enough.

The Sanctuary Method does not require every stay to become transformational. Transformation is not something hospitality should manufacture or promise. What it can do is create conditions in which restoration, perspective, connection, and sometimes transformation become more possible.

That is what the seven principles look like when they leave the page and enter the property.

They become a thousand small decisions made around one central question: does this help us hold this person well?

CHAPTER 6

Capturing the Essence

Once a property understands what it is here to hold and has begun aligning the guest experience around that purpose, the next question is how to communicate it.

This is where marketing and public relations enter the Sanctuary Method, but perhaps not in the way hospitality usually thinks about them.

Marketing should not be responsible for inventing the soul of a property. It should be responsible for recognizing it, distilling it, and communicating it clearly enough that the people who are looking for that experience can find it.

That distinction matters because hospitality marketing has become incredibly good at creating aspiration. Beautiful photographs, cinematic video, luxury language, influencer partnerships, carefully styled food, smiling couples, spectacular pools, and endless lists of experiences can make almost any property look desirable.

But desire and alignment are not the same thing.

A property can attract a guest with beautiful marketing and still disappoint them because the experience they were sold is not the experience that actually exists. Perhaps the imagery suggests solitude while the property hosts amplified events every weekend. Perhaps the website promises connection with nature while guests spend most of the stay inside highly designed spaces looking at that nature through glass. Perhaps the language

speaks about restoration while the actual itinerary is packed from morning until night.

This is an issue of coherence.

The marketing is part of the container because it begins shaping the guest's expectations long before arrival. It tells the guest what kind of place this is, how they are supposed to use it, what they should expect to feel, and what they should expect to do.

When the marketing and the lived experience match, trust begins before check-in. When they do not, the guest arrives trying to reconcile two different versions of the same property.

I have become increasingly interested in the idea that the best hospitality marketing does not sell everything a property has. It captures the essence of what the place holds.

That requires knowing what the essence actually is.

A property holding space primarily for deep rest should communicate differently from one built around celebration or adventure. A property whose greatest asset is solitude should not feel compelled to fill its marketing with activities. A wilderness lodge should not bury the landscape behind photographs of amenities. A small inn whose greatest strength is the warmth and intuition of the people running it should not market itself as though its primary value is thread count and marble bathrooms.

The Sanctuary Method gives us a different way to decide what story deserves to be told.

Holding Space tells us what the property is fundamentally here to support. Creating the Container shows us the physical and sensory conditions that make that possible. Safety reveals the details that allow people to relax their vigilance. Attunement and Intuition bring the human beings behind the experience into the story. Discernment shows us what the property has deliberately chosen not to add. Stewardship tells the story of the relationship between the business, the land, the employees, and the community. Coherence tells us whether all of those stories are actually true.

When the seven principles are present, marketing becomes less about manufacturing differentiation and more about noticing what is already distinctive.

This also changes photography.

Hospitality photography has traditionally focused heavily on the physical asset. The room, the lobby, the pool, the restaurant, the architecture, and the view are photographed beautifully because those are the things being sold.

But a restorative property is selling something less tangible.

It may be selling the feeling of waking naturally with morning light coming through a window. It may be the quiet of sitting beside a river with nowhere else to be. It may be the experience of eating food grown within a few miles of where you are sitting. It may be a housekeeper opening windows and preparing a room with care. It may be the property owner walking the land at sunrise. It may be a guest sitting alone rather than constantly performing enjoyment for a camera.

The challenge is to capture something that is difficult to photograph: how a place feels.

That requires a different kind of visual storytelling.

It means noticing the details that reveal the container. The lamp beside the bed rather than only the entire room. The fire at night rather than another photograph of a television. Bare feet on the ground. A window open to fresh air. The spaces between activities. Food in its relationship to the people who grew it. Staff in genuine interaction rather than staged service poses. The weather. The land. The silence. The imperfections that communicate that a place is alive.

Sometimes what is missing from the image is as important as what is present.

If a property is truly restorative, the photography should not need to prove that the guest is having fun every second.

The same is true of language.

Much of luxury hospitality copy has become interchangeable. Properties are described as immersive, transformative, curated, elevated, authentic, bespoke, and unforgettable with such frequency that the words often tell us almost nothing.

The Sanctuary Method asks for greater honesty.

What actually happens here?

Why was this place created?

What is protected?

What does the guest get access to here that is difficult to find elsewhere?

What are they allowed to stop doing?

Who are the people holding the property?

What does the land contribute?

How does the experience change between morning and night?

How does the property participate in its community?

The answers to those questions are usually more compelling than another collection of luxury adjectives.

Public relations should follow the same philosophy.

PR is often treated as the pursuit of coverage, but coverage without alignment can create the same problem as misaligned marketing. If a quiet restorative property suddenly receives attention primarily as a party destination or influencer hotspot, the publicity may drive demand while damaging the very experience that made the property interesting in the first place.

The goal should not simply be more attention.

It should be the right attention.

The right journalist, publication, podcast, advisor, creator, or community can help articulate what a property is doing differently and place it inside a larger cultural conversation. That may be about nervous-system health, regenerative travel, sleep, nature, longevity, local food systems, design, solitude, changing definitions of luxury, or the growing desire for travel that asks less of us rather than more.

Good PR can help a property understand its own significance.

Sometimes the people inside a business are too close to what they have built to see why it is remarkable. The owner may think the outdoor shower is simply practical, while the guest experiences bathing under the sky as one of the most memorable moments of the stay. The chef may think buying from neighboring farms is simply the logical thing to do, while it represents a profound relationship between hospitality and the local food system. The absence of televisions may seem like a missing amenity until it is understood as a deliberate protection of the guest's attention.

Part of capturing essence is knowing which details carry meaning.

This has increasingly become a large part of my own work.

Through Sanctuary Found, I have been traveling to, studying, and writing about properties where something deeper seems to be happening. I am interested in the places that change how we rest, recover, and reconnect, particularly those where nature and place are not simply the backdrop to the experience but active participants in it.

Sanctuary Found is not intended to be a directory of every beautiful hotel or every property with a wellness offering. I am looking for places that embody these principles in ways that feel authentic and unusually coherent, and I am interested in understanding why they work.

Sometimes that means staying at the property. Sometimes it means walking the land with the owner. Sometimes it means looking at the operation behind

the guest experience, talking to staff, understanding where the food comes from, noticing what happens after dark, or simply paying attention to how my own body responds to the place.

Over time, I realized that this process of discovering and documenting restorative properties had another side to it.

Some properties already possess extraordinary restorative assets but do not fully recognize what they have. The land may be remarkable. The culture may be deeply intuitive. The food may be rooted in place. The architecture may naturally support rest. The owner may understand stewardship instinctively. Yet none of that is clearly articulated in the positioning, guest journey, website, photography, public relations, or larger business strategy.

Other properties understand what they want to become but have not yet woven that intention through the entire experience.

That is where the broader work around sanctuary begins.

My role is increasingly not to walk into a property and impose a wellness concept on it. It is to discover what is already there, identify what the place is capable of holding, notice where the experience is coherent and where it is not, and help bring the property into greater alignment with its own potential.

Sometimes that work involves strategy. Sometimes it is design. Sometimes it is guest experience, operations, storytelling, photography, public relations, or the way the property presents itself to the world. Often it is a combination because the experience and the story cannot really be separated.

That is the thinking behind Sanctuary Services.

The work begins with essence rather than marketing.

What is this place?

What is it here to hold?

What is already working that should be protected?

What is interfering with it?

Who is the guest who will understand and value what is being created here?

Once those questions are answered, the branding, marketing, PR, content, and partnerships become much clearer because they are no longer trying to invent a story. They are translating something that already exists.

This also changes the idea of the “ideal guest.”

Traditional marketing tends to ask which demographic is most likely to book. Age, income, geography, interests, and travel patterns all have their place, but alignment goes deeper.

The right guest understands the proposition.

A guest who desperately wants nightlife may not be the right person for a property protecting silence after dark. A family looking for continuous organized entertainment may not appreciate a retreat intentionally leaving most of the day unstructured. Someone who expects a television in every room may not understand why a property has chosen not to provide one.

That does not mean the property has failed.

It may mean the marketing succeeded by helping the wrong guest self-select out.

There is tremendous value in attracting people who want what the property genuinely does well.

Aligned guests require less convincing once they arrive. They are less likely to pressure the property into compromising the experience. They are often more appreciative of details that another guest might see as limitations. Most importantly, they reinforce the identity of the place rather than slowly pulling it away from its purpose.

This is why marketing and PR become part of stewardship.

The stories we tell determine who arrives.

Who arrives influences what the property becomes.

If marketing continually attracts people who want something fundamentally different from the experience being created, commercial pressure will eventually encourage the operation to adapt to those expectations. The quiet property adds entertainment. The nature retreat adds televisions. The simple food program becomes an elaborate restaurant operation. Empty time gets filled with programming because guests have been conditioned to expect more.

The container begins changing long before anyone formally decides to change it.

Protecting the essence therefore includes communicating it clearly enough that the guest understands what they are choosing.

There is another economic implication here as well. When a property can clearly articulate what makes its experience distinctive, value no longer has to depend entirely on the quantity of amenities included in the stay.

A guest may pay more precisely because a property has less.

Less noise. Less interruption. Less crowding. Less technology. Less programming.

But what appears to be “less” from an amenity perspective may actually represent greater investment elsewhere. Better staff training, more thoughtful architecture, quieter mechanical systems, better beds, higher-quality food, more space between accommodations, protection of undeveloped land, lower guest density, stronger community relationships, or simply the financial discipline required not to monetize every available square foot.

The Sanctuary Method begins changing where value lives.

That is a conversation we will return to because the economics of restorative hospitality matter. A model cannot be truly regenerative if it is not financially viable.

But before we talk about value in financial terms, we first have to understand what the guest is actually valuing.

Increasingly, I believe many travelers are not looking for more things to consume.

They are looking for relief.

They may not yet use that word. They may search for wellness, escape, nature, luxury, a retreat, a digital detox, a romantic weekend, or simply somewhere quiet.

Our job is to understand the deeper need underneath the search and communicate honestly when a property is capable of meeting it.

That is what capturing the essence means to me.

It is not creating desire around something that does not exist. It is seeing clearly what a place already holds, helping it embody that purpose more fully, and telling the story well enough that the people who need that particular kind of place can recognize it when they find it.

CHAPTER 7

The Value of Restoration

One of the assumptions I want to challenge is that becoming more restorative automatically means spending more money. Sometimes it will require investment, but often the real issue is not the total amount being spent. It is where the value is being placed and whether the things a property is investing in actually support the experience it says it wants to create.

Traditional hospitality has become very good at demonstrating value through abundance. More amenities, more food and beverage, more programming, more technology, more entertainment, more design features, and more services are often used to justify the room rate. The Sanctuary Method asks whether all of those things are contributing equally to the experience the guest actually values. In many cases, they are not.

A restorative property may spend less on televisions, screens, constant programming, oversized amenity packages, unnecessary technology, entertainment infrastructure, or food and beverage operations designed around continuous consumption. That does not necessarily mean the property becomes cheaper to operate. It means resources can be redirected toward the things that actually strengthen the container, such as better staff training, better beds, quieter rooms, improved acoustics, warmer and more thoughtful lighting, higher-quality food, cleaner materials, access to nature, stronger community relationships, more intuitive service, or enough staffing that employees are not rushing through every interaction.

For smaller independent properties, this shift may require surprisingly little capital because many of the qualities needed for restorative hospitality are already present. A small inn may already have quiet, limited occupancy, personal service, access to nature, locally sourced food, a strong relationship with the community, and an owner who knows the property intimately. The problem may simply be that none of those things have been clearly defined, protected, or communicated as part of the experience.

These properties often do not need to become something entirely new. They need to understand what they already are. A five-room guesthouse may not need a spa at all. Its greatest assets may be the absence of crowds, the owner who knows every guest by name, the garden outside the rooms, the local breakfast, the darkness at night, and the fact that nobody is trying to entertain you. Once those qualities are understood as part of the value proposition rather than as limitations, the entire business can begin to position itself differently.

This is one of the reasons I believe independent hospitality has an enormous opportunity in restorative travel. Small properties are often naturally closer to the ingredients of sanctuary. They tend to have fewer layers of management, greater flexibility, deeper relationships with place, and more opportunity for staff to use intuition. Decisions can be made quickly because the person who owns the property may also be the person walking the land, greeting the guests, talking to the farmer, and deciding whether music should be playing at dinner.

For these businesses, The Sanctuary Method may be less about major renovation and more about recognition, refinement, and coherence. The work becomes identifying what is already supporting restoration, what should be protected, what is undermining the experience, what unnecessary things can be removed, and how the story can be articulated so the right guest understands the value. A relatively modest investment in strategy, training, lighting, sound, sleep quality, marketing, or guest communication may be enough to dramatically change how the property is perceived.

Larger hotels face a different challenge. A large operation may have hundreds of employees, multiple restaurants, conference facilities, entertainment areas, a spa, housekeeping teams, engineering departments, revenue management, corporate standards, loyalty programs, and layers of leadership. In that environment, coherence does not happen accidentally.

The larger the operation becomes, the more important training, leadership, communication, and consulting become because the guest experience is being created by many different people and systems simultaneously. The front desk may understand the intention while housekeeping does not.

Marketing may promise quiet while events are selling amplified parties. The spa may be designed around nervous-system recovery while food and beverage is pushing alcohol late into the evening. Leadership may speak about wellness while the employees creating the experience are chronically exhausted.

The Method therefore becomes less about one person's intuition and more about teaching an entire organization to understand what it is collectively holding. This is where investment may shift toward leadership development, staff training, operational audits, cross-department communication, environmental assessment, service design, and the systems that allow guest preferences to travel intelligently through the property.

A large hotel may also need to work in zones rather than trying to transform every square foot into the same experience. There may be lively areas and quiet areas, social spaces and restorative spaces, conference programming and protected decompression areas, family environments and adult environments. The Method is not asking every part of the hotel to become silent. It is asking the property to understand how different environments affect one another and to prevent one use from unintentionally overwhelming everything else.

This can create new forms of value without requiring the business to abandon its existing model. A convention hotel, for example, may discover that one of the most valuable things it can offer attendees is not another breakout activation but a genuinely quiet recovery floor, better sleep environments, healthier late-night food, low-stimulation spaces between sessions, and programming that acknowledges how exhausting several days of constant human interaction can be.

An airport hotel may build its entire restorative proposition around recovery from travel. Fast check-in, exceptional soundproofing, true blackout conditions, nourishing food available at unusual hours, showers that feel restorative, simple rooms, and a departure experience that reduces friction may be far more valuable to that guest than another elaborate amenity. A resort may realize that its value is not in giving guests something to do every hour but in creating enough options that people can choose engagement without being surrounded by it.

In all of these cases, the property is not necessarily adding an entirely new business model. It is becoming more intelligent about the needs that already exist in its guests, and that intelligence can also open new markets.

One of the most interesting opportunities in restorative hospitality is that the guest does not always need the conditions associated with traditional peak-season travel. Many people travel because they want sunshine, nightlife,

activities, beaches, festivals, or a particular seasonal experience. Restorative travel can create demand for completely different reasons.

A guest seeking deep sleep, solitude, writing time, recovery from burnout, fasting, reflection, grief, creative work, or simply a break from their normal environment may actually prefer the quietest season of the year. The rainy season can become an asset, as can winter or the shoulder season when the restaurants are quieter, the trails are empty, the property has more space, and the staff has more time to genuinely care for the people who are there.

This changes the economics in a potentially important way for seasonal properties. Instead of asking how to manufacture traditional tourism demand during slower months, the property can ask whether those quieter months are actually better suited to a different kind of guest.

A coastal property may be most commercially popular in summer but most restorative in early spring when the beach is nearly empty and storms can be watched from a warm room. A mountain property may have obvious ski-season demand but discover another market in the weeks between winter and summer when the landscape is quiet and there is almost nothing to do. A tropical destination may view the rainy season as a commercial problem while a restorative traveler may experience rain on a roof, cooler temperatures, fewer visitors, and long unstructured days as exactly what they came for.

Restorative travel therefore has the potential to change how properties think about seasonality. The question is no longer only how to get more traditional guests to come during an undesirable season. It can become a question of who might actually prefer what that season offers.

That is a very different marketing problem, and it can also open travel to people who are not necessarily looking for what the industry traditionally calls a vacation. A caregiver may need five days where nobody needs anything from them. A founder may need a week to think. Someone moving through grief may want to be somewhere unfamiliar for a while. A couple may need time to reconnect without entertainment. A writer may want quiet and isolation. A person coming out of an intense period of work may not want sightseeing at all.

These guests may currently be searching under words like wellness, retreat, escape, burnout recovery, digital detox, solo travel, sleep tourism, nature travel, sabbatical, creative retreat, or simply somewhere quiet. The restorative hospitality opportunity is to recognize that many of these searches are expressions of the same deeper need for relief.

The industry has spent decades perfecting reasons for people to travel toward stimulation. There may be an equally important market in helping people travel away from it.

This is also where pricing becomes interesting. A restorative experience should not automatically be positioned as inexpensive simply because there are fewer things included. Simplicity can be extremely valuable when it is intentional.

A quiet room may require greater investment in construction and acoustics. True darkness may require better design. Lower density may mean fewer rooms on the same amount of land. Excellent staff may require better pay and more training. Local regenerative food may cost more than commodity purchasing. Protecting part of a property from development may mean deliberately refusing potential revenue.

A guest is not necessarily paying for the quantity of things they consume. They may be paying for the quality of what has been protected, including silence, privacy, space, darkness, time, intuitive staff, and access to land that has not been overdeveloped. The ability to sleep for ten uninterrupted hours may itself be one of the most valuable things the property offers.

Hospitality simply has not always been very good at pricing or communicating those things.

This is why the economics of The Sanctuary Method are ultimately tied to positioning. If a property removes amenities without explaining the intention, guests may perceive that as less value. If the property understands what it is protecting, embodies that intention coherently, and communicates it clearly to the right guest, the same absence can become part of the premium.

The difference is meaning.

There is also an operational advantage to knowing what does not belong because every amenity creates a cost somewhere. It has to be purchased, maintained, staffed, cleaned, repaired, marketed, scheduled, or managed. Discernment therefore has a business function as well as a restorative one.

A property can ask what it is maintaining simply because hospitality convention says it should have it, what is rarely used, what creates more complexity than value, and what could be removed while improving rather than diminishing the guest experience. Those savings can then be redirected into the parts of the experience the guest feels most deeply.

For a small independent property, that may mean recognizing the extraordinary value already present and investing selectively in the places where the container is weak. For a large hotel, it may mean a more

substantial process of training, operational alignment, leadership, environmental design, and organizational change. Neither one needs to become a wellness resort. Both can become more restorative.

That may ultimately be the larger opportunity of The Sanctuary Method. It is not a new amenity category that hospitality has to bolt onto an already complicated operation. It is a different way of deciding where value belongs.

When we understand what people are actually depleted by and what they are increasingly searching for, some of the industry's perceived limitations begin to look like advantages. A slow season can become solitude, a remote location can become relief from constant access, a small room can become simplicity, a lack of programming can become spaciousness, a small staff can become intimacy, and an undeveloped piece of land can become something worth protecting.

The value was often already there. We simply had not learned how to see it.

CHAPTER 8

The Advisor as Interpreter

Helping Travelers Find What They Actually Need

Travel advisors are in a unique position within restorative hospitality because they often hear the need before the hotel ever does. A traveler may not call and say they are looking for restoration. They may say they are exhausted, that they want somewhere quiet, that they need to get away from everyone for a few days, that they desperately need sleep, that they do not want to plan anything, or that they want to go somewhere beautiful and simply be left alone.

Those are very different requests from, “I want a wellness vacation.”

Yet the travel industry has become accustomed to translating almost any desire for health or recovery into the wellness category. Once that happens, the recommendation tends to move toward the same familiar collection of experiences: spas, yoga retreats, fitness programs, detox programs, longevity clinics, biohacking, medical wellness, elaborate treatment menus, and highly structured retreats.

There is nothing inherently wrong with any of those things. For the right traveler at the right time, they may be exactly what is wanted. The problem is assuming that they are interchangeable with restoration.

A depleted traveler may not need another intervention. They may need fewer demands.

This is why I believe travel advisors need a much more nuanced vocabulary around wellness, restoration, recovery, and transformation. If advisors can understand the difference between these experiences, they can become much better at identifying what the person sitting in front of them is actually asking for.

Someone looking for wellness may actively want participation. They may enjoy yoga classes, spa treatments, nutrition consultations, movement, therapies, workshops, and a structured program designed around wellbeing.

Someone looking for biohacking or optimization may want something entirely different. They may be interested in diagnostics, data, performance, longevity technologies, supplementation, sleep tracking, cold exposure, hyperbaric treatments, or other interventions intended to improve measurable aspects of performance or health.

Someone looking for restoration may not want either of those things.

They may need sleep, quiet, nature, privacy, nourishing food, low stimulation, an empty calendar, and enough time for their system to settle.

The language matters because the wrong recommendation can create exactly the opposite experience from the one the traveler needs. An exhausted executive who says, “I need to disappear for a week,” may be sent to an exceptional wellness resort and return even more depleted after attempting to complete a carefully designed schedule of treatments and activities. The property did nothing wrong. The advisor did nothing malicious. The mismatch happened because the industry lacked a better way to distinguish what the traveler was actually asking for.

This is where the advisor becomes an interpreter rather than simply a booking intermediary.

Instead of asking only where the client wants to go, an advisor working through a restorative lens can begin asking why they want to leave.

What has been happening in their life? What do they want less of while they are away? Do they want to be around people or away from them? Do they want an itinerary or do they want to wake up without knowing what comes next? Are they looking for stimulation, transformation, treatment, adventure, connection, recovery, or simply rest?

Even the question of activities changes. A client may say they want hiking, but what they may actually want is six hours alone in nature. They may ask for a spa hotel because “spa” is the closest travel language they have for wanting to feel better. They may ask for an all-inclusive because they are so tired of making decisions that what they really want is cognitive relief.

The advisor who understands restoration can listen underneath the request.

This becomes particularly important because the best restorative property may not be the most obvious wellness property. It might be a small inn beside a river, a farm stay with exceptional food and very little programming, a cabin in the forest, an off-season coastal hotel, a quiet historic property, or a simple lodge where darkness, silence, hospitality, and the surrounding landscape are the primary amenities.

These places can be difficult to sell through the traditional amenity-based language of travel because what makes them valuable is often what they do not have.

An advisor needs to understand why that absence matters.

The lack of a television may be intentional. Limited programming may be a benefit rather than a deficiency. A remote location may be exactly what makes the property restorative. Two simple meals may be preferable for a particular guest to an elaborate food-and-beverage schedule. An empty rainy-season beach may be more valuable to someone seeking recovery than the same destination at the height of its most popular season.

Advisor education therefore becomes one of the most important opportunities in developing restorative hospitality as a category.

The goal is not to give advisors another list of hotels to memorize. It is to teach them a different way of listening.

They can begin recognizing restorative signals in the client conversation and matching those needs with the right kind of environment. They can also help the client understand what they are choosing, particularly when the experience is intentionally different from a conventional luxury vacation.

This also protects the property.

A restorative hotel needs guests who understand its proposition. If an advisor sends a client expecting constant entertainment to a property intentionally built around quiet and unstructured time, neither side is likely to be happy. If the advisor understands the experience well enough to explain it beforehand, the client can make an informed choice.

That makes advisors part of the container before the guest ever arrives.

Their recommendations shape expectations, and expectations affect the guest experience. An advisor who tells a traveler, "This is not a place where you are going to have ten things to do every day. The whole point is to slow down," has already begun helping the guest enter the experience differently.

I also believe advisors can help introduce restoration to people who would never identify as wellness travelers. This may ultimately be one of the largest opportunities.

A business traveler does not need to become interested in wellness to understand the value of sleeping deeply after crossing several time zones. A parent does not need to identify as a wellness consumer to want five days without responsibility. A couple does not need a retreat program to know they need uninterrupted time together. A person facing a major life decision may simply need somewhere beautiful and quiet enough to think.

These are travel needs, not niche wellness identities.

Restorative travel gives advisors another way to serve them.

It also creates an opportunity to rethink the way trips themselves are designed. Restoration may begin before the hotel is chosen. It may mean fewer destinations, longer stays, less complicated air travel, slower itineraries, fewer transfers, and more time in one place. An advisor trained in this thinking may recommend seven nights in one location rather than three destinations in seven days because the goal is no longer maximizing how much the traveler sees. The goal is protecting the state they are trying to create.

That is a fundamental shift.

The best restorative itinerary may look almost empty on paper.

Yet for the right traveler, that emptiness may be the most valuable thing the advisor has designed.

This is why I see advisor education as an important part of the future of The Sanctuary Method. Properties can become more restorative, but the people guiding travelers toward those properties also need language for recognizing the difference between wellness, optimization, recovery, and restoration.

The advisor who understands that distinction becomes more than someone who knows where to send a client.

They become someone who understands why the client needs to go in the first place.

And that may be one of the most valuable questions in travel.

CHAPTER 9

The People Who Hold the Space

A beautifully designed environment can support restoration, but people ultimately determine whether the promise of that environment survives contact with the guest. This is one of the reasons I keep coming back to the language of holding space. A property does not hold itself. People hold it. The owner, the general manager, the front desk team, housekeepers, servers, maintenance staff, guides, cooks and therapists all participate in the emotional and operational environment of the property, whether or not they would ever describe their role that way. The guest experiences the result in how they are greeted, how much is asked of them, whether someone notices when they need help, whether their privacy is respected, and whether the people around them seem calm enough to actually be present.

Leadership therefore matters much more to restorative hospitality than I initially understood. A leader determines what is protected when there is pressure to compromise. They determine whether an employee is empowered to use judgment or required to follow a script, whether the team is constantly depleted, whether problems are addressed or quietly allowed to spread through the culture, whether the values on the website actually mean anything, and whether revenue opportunities are allowed to override the experience the property claims to create. A general manager walking quickly through a hotel while distracted, irritated and under constant pressure creates a very different atmosphere from a leader who is present, available

and capable of setting a steadier tone. Staff notice that difference, and guests often do too.

We tend to talk about hospitality service as something employees deliver to guests, but the condition of those employees matters. A hotel cannot continuously exhaust the people working inside it and expect them to manufacture restoration for everyone else. Eventually that contradiction becomes visible. It appears in turnover, in the quality of attention, in rushed service, in the way people speak to one another behind the scenes, and in the subtle feeling that nobody actually has the capacity to care.

That does not mean everyone working in restorative hospitality needs to move through the property in a state of perfect serenity. Hospitality is work. Things break, guests are difficult, someone calls in sick, a pipe leaks, a group arrives early, dinner service gets backed up, and any number of ordinary operational problems can happen in a day. The question is not whether tension can be eliminated. The question is whether the culture has enough capacity to respond to those moments without living in a constant state of reaction.

This is where operational excellence and restoration begin to overlap. Clear roles can be restorative. Adequate staffing can be restorative. Good internal communication can be restorative. Employees knowing what decisions they are empowered to make can be restorative. Management dealing with conflict rather than allowing it to infect the property can be restorative. The internal culture becomes part of the guest experience long before anyone consciously connects the two.

I am particularly fascinated by housekeeping because housekeepers may be among the least celebrated and most important people in a hotel. They are the stewards of private space. They enter the guest room after someone has slept there and see how the room is actually being lived in. They may notice that every pillow has been removed from the bed, that the curtains stay closed, that the guest has moved a chair beside the window, that someone is drinking enormous amounts of water, that the room is being used for work, or that the guest clearly does not want to be disturbed.

Those observations should never become surveillance. Protecting privacy is essential. But a thoughtful housekeeping culture recognizes that cleaning a room is not simply resetting inventory. It is caring for the temporary private environment of another person. That changes the quality of attention. It asks the housekeeper to notice without intruding and to understand that the room is not only a physical space to be restored to standard, but a place someone is using to rest, recover, work through something, or simply be alone.

The same is true at the front desk. Some guests arrive wanting conversation. Others have spent twelve hours traveling and can barely tolerate another question. A restorative service culture teaches people to notice the difference. This is where intuition enters hospitality, not as something mystical or separate from training, but as the ability to perceive what is happening in front of you and respond appropriately.

Intuition does not replace training. It becomes useful after people understand the purpose of the experience well enough to make good judgments inside it. A rigid service standard might say every guest receives a detailed property orientation. An attuned employee may realize that the exhausted person standing in front of them needs a key, three sentences and a room. Another guest may be anxious and feel safer with considerably more information. Both can be excellent service because the quality of the service is not determined by whether the script was delivered exactly. It is determined by whether the person was met appropriately.

This is why restorative hospitality cannot be implemented entirely through SOPs. Systems matter enormously, particularly in larger hotels, but systems should support discernment rather than eliminate it. A staff member needs to know what the property stands for, what it is trying to protect, what kind of experience it wants to create and what decisions would undermine that experience. Once those things are understood, judgment becomes much safer because employees are no longer improvising without context. They are making decisions inside a clearly held purpose.

It also changes the way people are trained. Instead of teaching only what to do, we can begin teaching what to notice. Is this guest seeking interaction or privacy? Are they confused? Are they rushed? Are we giving them information they do not need? Is the music helping the environment or simply filling silence? Is the guest declining an activity because they need encouragement, or because they genuinely want to be left alone? There will not always be a perfect answer, and that is precisely why discernment belongs inside the Method.

I sometimes think of the relationship between three of the pillars this way: intuition notices what may be happening, discernment helps decide how to respond, and stewardship protects what matters. Leadership is what makes that sequence possible. If employees are punished for using judgment, they will stop using it. If they are never told what the property is trying to protect, they cannot make decisions in alignment with it. If they are too depleted to notice anything beyond the next task, attunement becomes almost impossible.

The person ultimately responsible for a restorative property should also be willing to ask difficult questions about themselves. What does my presence bring into this place? What am I tolerating that contradicts what we claim to value? Where am I allowing fear, ego, revenue pressure or habit to override the experience we say we are creating? These are not traditional hotel KPIs, but they eventually show up in the traditional KPIs because culture affects turnover, turnover affects service, service affects reviews, leadership affects consistency, consistency affects trust, and trust affects loyalty.

The strongest restorative properties I encounter tend to have someone holding the center of them. It may be the founder, an innkeeper, a general manager, a family or a long-term team. There is usually someone who knows what the place is and what it is not, and who is willing to protect that identity even when there are easier or more commercially tempting options available. That person does not need to control everything. They need to understand what they are stewarding.

That, to me, is one of the most important and least discussed parts of restorative hospitality. A property can have the right design, the right food, the right landscape and the right language, but if the people holding it are exhausted, disconnected, inconsistent or unclear about what the place is meant to be, the guest will eventually feel that incoherence.

The people are not separate from the container.

They are part of it.

CHAPTER 10

What Restoration Is Not

As restorative hospitality becomes easier to name, it will also become easier to misuse. We have seen this happen with almost every meaningful idea in hospitality. Wellness becomes a menu. Sustainability becomes a card asking guests to reuse towels. Regeneration becomes a marketing word. Mindfulness becomes another scheduled activity between breakfast and lunch.

Restoration could easily suffer the same fate if the industry treats it as one more concept to package rather than a different way of thinking about the guest experience.

For that reason, I think it is important to be clear about what I do not mean when I use the word restorative. Restorative hospitality is not simply a quieter version of wellness theater. It is not taking an already overstimulating hotel, adding a sound bath on Wednesdays, changing a few words on the website, and deciding that the property is now restorative. It is not forcing guests into silence, removing every pleasure, taking away their phones, or prescribing a particular way of being. It is not austerity, deprivation, or a moral judgment about people who enjoy lively hotels, nightlife, television, cocktails, group activities, entertainment, or highly programmed travel.

Those experiences serve real purposes, and the Sanctuary Method is not about turning every property into the same kind of place. If a resort exists to create celebration, family connection, and joyful activity, it should do that beautifully. It can still become more restorative by protecting sleep, reducing

unnecessary sensory stress, improving lighting, creating quieter zones, giving guests more agency, and making sure that participation is actually optional. The point is not to strip away the identity of a property. The point is to understand where the property may be creating unnecessary load and whether that load serves the experience it claims to create.

Restoration is therefore not purity. It is coherence.

That distinction matters because I can imagine the word restorative eventually being used as another aesthetic. Soft colors, linen bedding, plants, herbal tea, muted photography, and a meditation cushion could easily become the visual shorthand for the category. Those things may be beautiful, but they do not tell us whether a place is actually restorative. A room can photograph beautifully and still have terrible soundproofing, harsh lighting at night, synthetic fragrance in the hallways, an intrusive housekeeping policy, and a guest schedule so full that nobody has time to sit still.

The real question is whether the total experience supports the state the property is promising.

Restorative hospitality is also not medical treatment, and that boundary matters enormously. People may arrive at hotels while grieving, exhausted, recovering from illness, facing burnout, caring for parents, going through divorces, making difficult life decisions, or simply feeling unlike themselves. Hospitality can create conditions that support those people, but it should not need to diagnose them in order to do so. A hotel does not need to tell someone what is wrong with them to create a dark room, nourishing food, quiet surroundings, compassionate service, privacy, and enough time to rest.

A retreat does not need to promise healing in order to create meaningful space for reflection, and a staff member does not need to become a therapist to recognize that a guest would prefer to eat alone or skip an activity. I actually think understanding this boundary can make hospitality more powerful because it removes the pressure to become something it is not. The hotel does not have to become the healer. It can become the container in which fewer things interfere with the guest's own process.

Agency is another essential boundary. I am deeply interested in fasting because it taught me the power of absence, but absence is only restorative when it is appropriate and chosen. A digital fast voluntarily entered into may feel liberating. Having connectivity withheld from someone who needs it may feel unsafe. Silence may feel like medicine for one person and profoundly uncomfortable for another. Solitude can create extraordinary introspection, but it can also become isolation. There is a meaningful difference between offering someone space and deciding for them what kind of space they should need.

This is why a restorative environment cannot be designed around the assumption that one prescription works for everyone. The guest has to remain a participant in the experience. The property can create invitations, options, and conditions, but it should be very careful about turning restoration into control.

I have become increasingly uncomfortable with wellness experiences that become excessively prescriptive for exactly this reason. When every hour is programmed, every meal is prescribed, every biomarker is analyzed, and every behavior becomes something to evaluate, the person can begin performing wellness rather than experiencing wellbeing. For some people, that structure may be useful and desired. Optimization has its own value. Medical wellness has its own value. Biohacking has its own audience. But restoration asks a different question: can we create enough space for the person to notice what they actually need?

That can be more difficult than it sounds because the first thing we encounter when stimulation disappears is not always peace. Sometimes we encounter boredom. Sometimes emotion. Sometimes we discover how tired we actually are. Sometimes thoughts surface that we have managed to avoid by remaining busy. A restorative property should understand that quiet and space can make room for real internal experience without feeling responsible for directing or manufacturing whatever emerges.

There is a subtle but important difference between creating the conditions in which something meaningful can happen and promising that it will happen. The first belongs comfortably inside hospitality. The second begins moving into territory that requires much greater responsibility.

This is also why I am cautious about the direction of quantified wellness in hospitality. Hotels will increasingly have access to sleep trackers, wearables, biometric information, personalized health data, and technologies that promise to measure the guest's state before, during, and after a stay. Some of those tools may be useful, especially when a guest actively wants them. But restoration should not require someone to outsource the understanding of their own body to a dashboard.

A guest may leave sleeping better, breathing more deeply, thinking more clearly, feeling more connected to a partner, or simply feeling more like themselves again. Those changes matter even if they are never translated into a score. It would be a strange irony if we created a category intended to help people reduce the amount of information they are constantly processing and then filled the experience with another layer of metrics to monitor.

Technology can support restoration, but it should not become another demand.

Ultimately, I keep returning to agency because I think it is the safeguard that prevents restorative hospitality from becoming another ideology imposed on the guest. The property can remove unnecessary friction, protect quiet, improve sleep, offer nourishing food, create space, and train people to be more attuned. It can invite the guest into a different pace. But the guest should still remain the authority on their own experience.

The goal is not to control someone into restoration.

It is to create conditions in which they may have more access to themselves.

CHAPTER 11

Applying the Sanctuary Method

Once I had named the seven pillars of The Sanctuary Method, the next question became obvious: how do we actually use them in a property without turning the Method into another checklist?

That is important to me because I do not believe a hotel becomes restorative by earning enough points for blackout curtains, organic breakfast, a meditation class, and natural materials. Those things can absolutely matter, but they tell us very little on their own. A property could meet every visible criterion and still feel chaotic, intrusive, depleted, or incoherent.

The Method is intended to look at the relationship between the entire property and the human being experiencing it.

That process begins with observation rather than intervention. Before changing anything, I want to understand what the place is already holding and what is already happening there naturally. Why does the property exist? What do guests come for now? What does the owner believe makes the place special? What does the staff believe? What do guests repeatedly mention without being prompted? Where do they naturally spend time? What parts of the experience seem to settle people, and where does tension appear?

This is often where the most valuable information emerges because a property's most restorative assets may not be the ones receiving the most investment or marketing attention. A hotel may believe its renovated spa is its greatest wellness asset while guests repeatedly photograph the chairs

beside the river. An inn may worry that it has too little programming while returning guests come precisely because nobody expects anything from them. A resort may be investing heavily in technology while the moment people remember most clearly is gathering quietly each evening to watch the sun disappear.

The first job is learning to see the property clearly before trying to improve it.

From there, the seven pillars become a way of asking better questions.

Holding Space begins with purpose. What is this property truly capable of holding for the guest? Is it rest, connection, celebration, recovery, creativity, solitude, family, transition, adventure, or some combination of those things? There is no correct answer, but there should be an honest one. A lively family resort should not pretend to be a silent retreat, and a quiet rural inn should not feel compelled to manufacture entertainment because traditional hospitality metrics tell it that guests need more things to do.

Creating the Container then asks whether the physical and operational environment supports that purpose. Lighting, sound, scent, materials, food, water, rooms, technology, landscaping, policies, communication, arrival, programming, and service all come into view. The question becomes less about whether any single element is good or bad and more about whether all of those elements are creating the same experience.

Safety asks where the guest still has to remain vigilant. That may involve obvious issues such as physical security, but it can also involve confusing arrival instructions, poor privacy, unpredictable staff interactions, overwhelming spaces, inadequate information, or a feeling that the guest's boundaries will not be respected. A person cannot fully settle if some part of them is still having to monitor the environment constantly.

Attunement and Intuition look at the human side of the operation. Do staff know how to notice the guest in front of them rather than simply delivering the same service to everyone? Are they empowered to adjust? Can they recognize the difference between someone who wants conversation and someone who desperately needs to be left alone? Are they able to provide presence without intrusion?

Discernment asks one of my favorite questions: what could be removed? What is in the experience simply because hotels are expected to have it? What exists because a competitor has it? What is adding sensory load, operational complexity, cost, or distraction without meaningfully improving the guest experience? This is where restorative hospitality often becomes economically interesting because sometimes the best improvement is not another capital expense. It is deciding to stop doing something that was never serving the guest particularly well in the first place.

Stewardship expands the conversation beyond the guest. What is happening to the employees, community, land, water, culture, food systems, and surrounding environment because the property exists? Does the business leave the place stronger, weaker, or essentially unchanged? This pillar is where restorative hospitality begins moving beyond individual wellbeing and toward regeneration because it becomes impossible to claim that a place supports human restoration while depleting the people and landscape that make the experience possible.

Finally, Coherence asks whether all of those things agree with one another. Does the property actually embody what it says it values? Does the experience match the marketing? Does the staff culture support the guest promise? Does the design reinforce the purpose? Does the leadership protect what the property claims matters?

I think this work is best done experientially rather than entirely from a conference room. If I am evaluating a property, I want to encounter it the way a guest does. I want to read the booking confirmation, figure out how to get there, arrive tired, understand where to park, find the entrance, check in, try to make the room comfortable, find food, take a shower, sleep, wake up, move through the public spaces, and notice every moment when something asks more of me than it needs to.

The operation often knows too much to see its own friction. The person who has worked there for five years knows which door to use, but the first-time guest does not. The employee knows the thermostat takes thirty seconds to respond, while the guest assumes it is broken. The kitchen knows breakfast ends at ten because lunch prep needs to begin, but the guest who finally slept until ten-thirty only experiences the fact that there is nothing to eat.

These moments may seem small individually, but they accumulate into the state of the stay. Restorative hospitality is often less about creating one spectacular intervention than about resolving dozens of small sources of unnecessary demand.

After observation comes prioritization. Not everything should change at once, and not every property requires the same kind of investment. An independent inn might discover that its highest-value improvements involve eliminating synthetic fragrance, changing a few lighting choices, protecting the quiet around the property, improving beds, and rewriting the pre-arrival communication so guests understand exactly what kind of stay they are choosing. A larger hotel may discover that the physical environment is already strong and the real work is cultural: staff training, leadership alignment, service pacing, guest profiling, quieter zones, and better communication between departments.

Some improvements cost money. Many require more thought than money.

This is one of the reasons I believe restorative hospitality is especially accessible to independent properties. The Method does not begin with capital expenditure. It begins with attention. Smaller hotels often already possess many of the things that cannot easily be built later: intimacy, place, quiet, flexibility, owner presence, local relationships, or access to nature. Their opportunity is often to recognize those assets before traditional hospitality thinking convinces them they need to replace them with more.

Only after the experience becomes coherent should the story be amplified through positioning, photography, marketing, and public relations. Otherwise, marketing simply accelerates the arrival of people into a promise the operation is not yet capable of keeping.

The Sanctuary Method therefore moves from purpose to environment, from environment to people, from people to operations, and eventually from operations to story. I think the order matters because restoration cannot be branded into existence.

It has to be experienced first.

CHAPTER 12

Sanctuary Found

Sanctuary Found began because I wanted to find the places where these ideas already existed in the wild. I was not interested only in properties that had adopted the right language or hired a wellness consultant. I wanted to understand what was actually happening in real places with real guests, and why some environments seemed able to hold people so differently from others.

As my travels became more intentional, I began looking at properties almost as fieldwork. I started paying attention to the places where the land seemed to be doing as much work as the hotel, where the food made sense because of where it was grown, where the owners understood the community around them, and where darkness, quiet, water, weather, landscape, and local culture had not been engineered out of the experience.

Some of the most memorable places were not particularly luxurious. What made them compelling was often harder to photograph and even harder to quantify. It might be the sound of rain on a canvas roof, the fact that nobody hurried breakfast, the way an owner talked about the surrounding land, a swimming hole guests could walk to, a room where nothing blinked after dark, or the absence of any expectation that the guest should be doing something more interesting with the afternoon.

These places are not necessarily perfect, and perfection is not what I am looking for. I am interested in coherence. I want to know whether the identity

of the property, the experience of the guest, the condition of the land, the behavior of the staff, and the way the place is communicated all seem to belong to the same story.

Sanctuary Found became my way of documenting the places where restorative hospitality is expressed most deeply, particularly where nature and place become active participants in the experience.

That distinction matters because The Sanctuary Method is broader than Sanctuary Found. The Method can improve an airport hotel. It can improve an urban luxury property. It can influence a convention hotel, a family resort, a hospital-adjacent hotel, or a large international brand. Any property can become more intentional about what it asks of the guest and what kind of state it helps create.

Sanctuary Found is more selective.

These are the places where I see the principles expressed in a particularly complete way, often because the relationship with landscape, food, architecture, silence, local culture, and stewardship is fundamental to why the property exists. In those places, restoration is not simply one feature of the stay. It is woven into the experience.

I sometimes think of Sanctuary Found as the field laboratory for the larger idea because every property teaches me something the framework alone cannot.

A breakfast basket left in a cabin so a guest can sleep through conventional breakfast hours teaches me about respecting biological rhythm and removing unnecessary schedules. A small inn with almost no programming teaches me something about trusting the place rather than constantly trying to entertain the guest. A farm where guests eat what was harvested nearby teaches me about nourishment and stewardship. A beautiful retreat where people cannot escape the schedule teaches me about the difference between care and control. A hotel surrounded by spectacular nature that plays music everywhere teaches me how easily a property can overpower its own greatest asset.

Fieldwork keeps the Method honest.

It is easy to create principles from behind a desk. It is much harder to see how those principles survive contact with housekeeping schedules, staffing shortages, food costs, seasonal occupancy, maintenance, guest expectations, and the endless operational realities of running a hospitality business.

That is also why I want Sanctuary Found to remain editorial rather than become simply another directory of attractive hotels.

Beauty alone is not enough.

A place can photograph spectacularly and still be exhausting. A remote resort can sit in extraordinary nature while filling every space with music and activity. A wellness property can offer exceptional treatments while giving guests no meaningful privacy. A simple cabin can look perfectly restorative online and feel poorly held when you arrive.

What I am interested in is deeper than aesthetic alignment.

I want to understand how the place makes people feel and why.

I also want to understand what happens after a property recognizes what it already has. Some of the places I encounter will not need to become something else. They may simply need language for something they have been doing intuitively for years. Others may have extraordinary restorative potential but also significant contradictions that keep the experience from becoming coherent.

That is where Sanctuary Found and the consulting side of my work begin to intersect. The editorial work allows me to discover and document. The Method gives me language for understanding what I am seeing. The consulting work allows a property to apply those insights intentionally if it chooses.

I expect all of this to continue evolving because restorative hospitality itself is not finished. I am still learning. Every place changes the questions a little, and every guest experience exposes something I had not considered before.

The Sanctuary Method gives me a framework.

Sanctuary Found gives me somewhere to test it.

And the properties themselves continue to be my education.

CHAPTER 13

The Future of Hospitality

I do not believe the future of hospitality will be defined simply by how many more things hotels can give us. We may be approaching the limits of more. More technology, more programming, more treatments, more experiences, more menus, more entertainment, more personalization, more content, and more ways to occupy every available minute have become part of how value is traditionally demonstrated.

The industry became extraordinarily good at answering a particular consumer desire: if I am paying to travel, give me as much as possible.

I think another desire is becoming increasingly important, and it sounds very different.

Please ask less of me.

That desire does not belong only to people who identify as wellness travelers. It exists in parents, caregivers, executives, entrepreneurs, couples, people grieving, people facing major life transitions, people who spend their working lives online, and people who simply cannot remember the last time they woke up without immediately being required by something.

Many of us are living inside environments that demand almost continuous response. Messages, alerts, decisions, work, traffic, screens, schedules, social obligations, information, noise, and the feeling of being reachable at all times

have become so normal that we may not recognize the amount of processing required until some of it disappears.

Travel offers one of the few culturally accepted ways to leave that environment temporarily.

That creates an enormous opportunity for hospitality because hotels influence almost everything that happens after someone leaves home. They influence where the guest sleeps, what they hear, what they eat, how much privacy they have, how much information reaches them, what is expected of them, how easily they can access nature, and whether the experience becomes another schedule to manage or a genuine interruption of ordinary life.

For decades, hotels have competed primarily on location, luxury, amenities, service, design, and experience. Restoration introduces another form of value: the state in which the guest leaves.

That does not replace the things hospitality already does well. A hotel can still be beautiful. Food can still be extraordinary. A resort can still contain adventure and celebration. A city property can still feel exciting and alive. Restorative hospitality simply asks the industry to become more intelligent about when stimulation serves the guest and when it has become another source of load.

Luxury may evolve because of this. For some travelers, luxury is becoming less about the number of objects or services placed around them and more about what has been protected on their behalf. It may be silence through the wall, enough space around the table, a dark room, privacy, good food, a landscape that has not been overdeveloped, or a staff member who knows how to care without hovering. It may be waking without an alarm, spending an afternoon without a reservation, or knowing that nothing on the itinerary is mandatory.

Time itself may become one of hospitality's most valuable amenities.

This creates a particular opportunity for independent properties because smaller hotels can often offer things large systems find difficult or expensive to reproduce: intimacy, flexibility, authentic connection to place, lower density, owner presence, local relationships, and a clear sense of why the property exists. Many of these businesses have spent years feeling that they need more amenities to compete. Restorative hospitality may allow some of them to recognize that what they have been calling limitations are actually part of their value.

Large hotels, however, may have even greater influence because of scale. If major hospitality companies begin thinking seriously about sleep, sensory

load, staff capacity, guest agency, environmental design, service pacing, and restorative zoning, the experience of millions of nights can change. A convention hotel does not need to become a retreat to create a genuinely quiet recovery floor. An airport hotel does not need a wellness center to become exceptional at helping someone recover from travel. A large resort does not need to remove its activities to make unstructured time feel equally legitimate.

This is also why travel advisors belong in the conversation. Hotels can become more restorative, but if the people helping travelers choose and design trips do not understand the difference between wellness, optimization, recovery, and restoration, many guests will still be sent toward experiences that do not match what they are actually asking for. Advisors can help translate needs that travelers themselves may not have language for, while also designing trips with fewer moves, fewer decisions, longer stays, and more intentional pacing.

Designers and architects belong in this conversation too, because many of the conditions that support restoration are determined long before the guest arrives. Sound transmission, room orientation, natural light, thermal comfort, access to outdoor space, materials, circulation, privacy, density, and the relationship between a building and its landscape all influence the experience. Restoration should not have to be added after construction if it can be considered from the beginning.

Destination marketers have an equally interesting opportunity. Tourism has traditionally treated shoulder season as a demand problem, but I increasingly wonder whether it is sometimes a positioning problem. Rain, cooler temperatures, empty beaches, quieter trails, dormant landscapes, and slower towns may be undesirable to the traveler seeking the conventional peak-season vacation. They may be precisely what another traveler is searching for.

Instead of asking how to convince traditional guests to visit during the “bad” season, a destination could ask who might actually prefer what that season offers.

That shift could create new travel markets without increasing pressure during the periods when communities and environments are already most crowded. It could also extend the value of tourism more evenly through the year while giving travelers access to a fundamentally different kind of experience.

This begins connecting restorative hospitality to regeneration because tourism cannot continue thinking only about what the guest receives. If travel asks communities, landscapes, food systems, and local cultures to hold

millions of visitors, those places should ultimately be stronger because hospitality exists there rather than progressively depleted by it.

That is why stewardship sits inside The Sanctuary Method rather than beside it as a sustainability initiative. The health of the guest cannot be separated forever from the health of the place hosting them, and neither can be separated from the people working there.

The future I am interested in is not one in which every hotel starts calling itself restorative. I hope that does not happen because categories lose meaning when everyone adopts the language without changing the experience. I am more interested in an industry becoming increasingly conscious of what it is asking the human being to process.

Some properties will go very far with that question. Others may make relatively small changes. Both matter.

Because beneath all of the language, restorative hospitality is based on a very simple idea: hospitality is always creating conditions around another person. We can become more intentional about what those conditions do.

CONCLUSION

Coming Home Different

For years I thought travel helped me because it took me somewhere else. I now think that was only part of what was happening.

The places that changed me most gave me enough distance from ordinary life to notice what was happening inside it. Sometimes that happened beside the ocean. Sometimes it happened in the jungle, in a quiet room, while fasting, driving alone, or sitting somewhere long enough that I eventually stopped trying to accomplish anything. The setting changed, but the pattern was remarkably consistent. The place did not necessarily give me an answer. It gave me enough space to hear one.

That is ultimately what I hope restorative hospitality can offer.

I am not interested in creating another industry that tells people what is wrong with them and then sells them the solution. I do not think hospitality needs to promise transformation, become more clinical, or add another layer of wellness technology in order to matter deeply in someone's life.

What it can offer is space.

Space to sleep long enough to realize how tired we are. Space to think without constantly reacting. Space to feel something we have been too busy to feel. Space to reconnect with another person without competing with a schedule. Space to notice weather, hunger, light, darkness, sound, and the natural

world again. Space to remember what our own thoughts sound like when nothing is demanding an immediate response.

I have come to believe that this kind of simplicity can be one of the hardest things to protect because there will always be pressure to add more. There will always be another amenity, another revenue stream, another technology, another activity, another reason to fill an empty space.

That is why discernment matters.

It is why stewardship matters, because places can easily be consumed in the name of improving them. It is why attunement matters, because people do not all need the same thing. It is why safety matters, because we cannot settle if some part of us remains on guard. It is why the container matters, because the environment is communicating with the guest long before anyone asks them how they feel. And it is why coherence matters, because nothing undermines trust faster than a place claiming to offer one experience while creating another.

Those became the principles of The Sanctuary Method because they were the patterns I kept finding beneath the places that affected me most.

I did not begin this journey intending to create a hospitality methodology. I was trying to understand healing. Then I was trying to understand why certain places seemed to support it. Eventually, I realized those were not separate inquiries.

Where we live matters. Where we sleep matters. Who surrounds us matters. What we hear, see, eat, breathe, and process matters. How hurried we feel matters. How safe we feel matters. Whether we are constantly being asked for something matters. Whether there is enough space in our lives to hear ourselves matters.

When we leave our ordinary environment, hospitality has the unusual privilege of influencing almost all of those conditions at once.

That is far more significant than providing a room, but I also think it should make us humble about the responsibility. Hospitality does not need to become medicine in the clinical sense. It does not need to diagnose or treat. The best hospitality has always understood something more fundamental about human beings: what it means to receive someone, feed them, shelter them, care for them, and make them feel that for a period of time they are safe enough to rest.

Restorative hospitality simply extends that idea of care into the complete environment.

It asks us to consider not only whether the bed was beautiful, the service efficient, or the meal memorable, but what the accumulation of the stay did

to the person experiencing it. Did they sleep differently? Did their pace change? Did they reconnect with someone? Did they feel less demanded of? Did something become quieter? Did they remember something about themselves they had not had access to in ordinary life?

Not every stay needs to produce some profound transformation. Sometimes a good night of sleep is enough. Sometimes an afternoon beside water is enough. Sometimes not having to decide anything for twenty-four hours is enough.

We should not underestimate those things simply because they are simple.

And perhaps that is where this entire journey has brought me. I began by searching for more ways to heal and eventually became fascinated by what happens when we remove enough for the body, the mind, and the person underneath all of the roles to become perceptible again.

Travel gave me access to that experience before I had language for it.

Now I do.

The Restorative Power of Place is not the idea that a destination magically fixes us. It is the recognition that the environments we enter can either add to the amount we are carrying or create enough space for some of it to be put down.

Hospitality gets to participate in that choice every day.

When it chooses carefully, protects what matters, and understands the extraordinary value of asking less from the guest, a hotel can become more than somewhere we stayed.

It can become somewhere we remember returning to ourselves.

About the Author

Carley Montgomery is a restorative hospitality strategist, writer, and the founder of Sanctuary Found and Sanctuary Services. Her work brings together decades of experience in construction, design, business strategy, travel, and wellness to help hospitality properties create environments that support genuine rest, recovery, and reconnection.

After years spent exploring independent hotels, retreat centers, farms, and healing destinations throughout the United States and Central America, she developed The Sanctuary Method, a framework for understanding how place, people, operations, and intention shape the guest experience.

Through Sanctuary Found, she documents the places, people, and ideas contributing to a more thoughtful future for travel and hospitality.

Continue the Conversation

If this book resonates with the kind of property, retreat, or hospitality experience you are creating, I would love to hear what you are working on.

Through Sanctuary Services, I work with independent hotels, retreat centers, land stewards, developers, and hospitality founders who want to create environments that offer people more than another place to stay. Together, we look at the full experience: the land, the physical environment, the people holding the space, the guest journey, the operational culture, and the story that brings it all into alignment.

You can explore my writing, learn more about restorative hospitality, and connect with me at:

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