

# Your Happy Place

We all need a place to call our own — a place that makes us happy. Find out how one local resident found her happiness outdoors.



Attorney Paulá Montoya enjoys unwinding outdoors for peace of mind.

For centuries, much has been written and deliberated about finding our happy place in life, especially as humans became more enlightened about their minds, bodies and souls. Today, there are songs, television shows, books and websites concerning the search for that deeply sought-after Holy Grail.

In its most simplistic form, a happy place transcends one's mind from an uneasy, stressful space to one of serenity and peace. But of course, it can go beyond that. A happy place can be a destination halfway around the world or a room in your home that acts to lower the blood pressure and return serenity to the soul.

**Paula Montoya**, an attorney with Jackson Montoya Law Firm and a resident of **Windermere**, describes many locations she considers happy places, but the common thread is nature.

"I am not an indoor person," she says. "I prefer to be outside. If I am at the office, I will look out of the window if I am getting stressed. The sunlight, being in tune with nature, really makes me happy."

### The Happiest Place on Earth

In fact, where Montoya lives is one of her happiest places, because of its natural beauty. Her finding peace with the wonders of Mother Nature could be attributed to being born in Rio de Janeiro, which she depicts as a chaotic place of 10 million people.

"I live in Windermere now, but before I did, I used to drive there when I was upset," she says. "I love the beautiful trees. I love that the speed limit is 30, because you have to slow down, and you may even see an eagle or a pelican fly by." Now, her backyard has become a happy place. "I play with my dog, and it helps me forget everything."

Montoya adds that traveling to nature-rich destinations also makes her very content.

"I try to pick a place with natural wonders like the Grand Canyon. The Cape of Good Hope in South Africa is the most peaceful place I have ever been to. You feel like you are on the edge of the world. You feel so insignificant."

### A Necessity

Dr. Romila Mushtaq, a neurologist who has transitioned from traditional medicine to become a mind-body physician in Windermere, says finding a happy place is critical for one's well-being, explaining that advances in neuroscience have allowed us to realize the important role the mind has in healing the body.

"There has been a societal shift in redefining happiness," she says, noting people are looking to quiet their minds and search for true happiness as opposed to finding happiness in material goods or wealth. "That's why yoga has become so popular. Populations are shifting back to the realization that happiness resides within."

Journalist Galen Pearl, whose stories have appeared in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *A Cup of Comfort* anthologies, wrote the book on finding your happy place — literally. In *10 Steps to Finding Your Happy Place (and Staying There)*, Pearl believes most people hold happiness hostage, continuously hoping something in the future will make them happy, like a new job. Yet, she stresses happiness is not something to be pursued, but simply the way we live.

Dr. Mushtaq agrees, stating while it is true that happiness is not found in a place of poverty — one lacking in food and shelter — there is no scientific evidence people are happier with more money or material wealth.

"The prescription for finding that happy place for each person is as personalized as our thumbprint," she says.

Montoya says if she can't be at any of her happy places and begins to feel the weight of the world resting on her shoulders, she closes her eyes and drifts away.

"I breathe in," she says, "and think happy thoughts." ■

## A Little Help

Sometimes, it takes an outside source to help you find or reach that happy place mentally, usually due to some sort of life-changing tragic event. One such method gaining popularity, which is drug free and non-hypnosis, is called Accelerated Resolution Therapy (ART).

Laney Rosenzweig, LMFT, of the Orlando-based Rosenzweig Center for Rapid Recovery, says eye-movement therapy helps eliminate negative images in the brain and replaces them with happy images or places, a process called Voluntary Image Replacement. Once the problematic images are gone, so are the symptoms.

"Clients leave a session feeling that a weight has been lifted and a wonderful change has been made," says Rosenzweig. ART was recently studied at the University of South Florida under a two-year U.S. Department of Defense grant, specifically addressing trauma in military personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Dr. Mushtaq has her own recommendations for finding happiness, all the while reminding us that the million-dollar question has yet to be answered:

- *Disconnect from the external and connect with nature.*
- *Find some sort of movement-based practice, such as yoga or tai chi.*
- *Find the cure for loneliness by joining a club or a church group, since many people find themselves without a sense of community.*
- *Get six to eight hours of sleep a day.*

