

Canada, Health & Wellness · Judi Cohen

# Beyond the Spa: A Journey to Healing and Transformation in Northern Ontario

*Published December 3rd, 2024*

Photos by Judi Cohen.



When I first received an invitation to experience a Wellness Weekend at Dimensions Retreats in Ontario's Algonquin Highlands, I wasn't sure what to expect. I'd been sick for two months and felt disconnected



## Not Your Typical Spa Escape

When people think of relaxation, they often envision a spa: plush robes, cucumber water, manicures, facials, pedicures and massages. A wellness retreat like the one I experienced at Dimensions Algonquin Highlands, however, goes beyond outward pampering to focus on the mind, body, and soul. It's about finding balance, resetting priorities, and setting intentions for personal growth.

Dimensions Algonquin Highlands offered somatic practices to help us heal and reconnect from the inside out. It wasn't about indulgence (although it was quite luxurious) as much as it was about transformation—a focus that became clear as soon as we arrived at the luxurious and serene, forested property. Our 2-night all-inclusive Yoga and Pilates Wellness Retreat included a blend of holistic therapies such as guided forest bathing, floatation tank therapy, biosound therapy, balanced with nourishing meals. My daughter and I embraced it all.



## Finding Stillness in the Forest

While I have hiked in forests around the world, this was my first time doing it in silence. During an hour-long Forest Bathing Session, guided by an experienced practitioner, our small group of guests was encouraged to walk mindfully among the towering trees, soaking in the sounds, scents, and stillness of the natural world. At first, I struggled to slow my racing thoughts, but eventually, I felt myself let go. My daughter later said the walk made her feel grounded for the first time in months.



On the first night, I participated in my first Sound Bath, a meditative experience where I was “bathed” in sound waves. We gathered at a dome in the forest, and after settling comfortably on mats with bean bags covering our eyes, the resonant tones from a variety of singing bowls, gongs, chimes, and even singing enveloped us. The vibrations seemed to settle over me like a warm blanket, quieting my mind and calming my nervous system, as my brain just let go. It was a powerful reminder of the body’s ability to reset when given the chance to just slow down. The dome is considered a sacred place, no photos or recordings were permitted.



deprivation in a float tank. Suspended in saltwater, she said she felt weightless as all external stimuli disappeared. She described it as surprisingly freeing—almost an hour to truly tune into her inner thoughts without distraction.



My highlight was a one-hour Biosound therapy session. While lying down comfortably on a bed with bean bags covering my eyes, I felt vibrations from the bed and the sounds being played through the headphones. It felt like I was in a deep, restful state, yet still aware of what was happening. I was told that this modality uses vibrations to interrupt patterns of stress, trauma and pain. I honestly could feel my mind and body relaxing like I never experienced previously. I was advised to move slowly when I stood up and to relax in an adjacent lounge with comfortable sofas and refreshments to give my mind and body a chance to readjust. I plan to do more Biosound therapy sessions in the future.

We were all invited to try a Cold Plunge in the Lake, preceded by deep breathing exercises. Instructor Vanessa Iannucci prepared us well for the cold plunge, leading us in deep breathing exercises and explaining the benefits of cold-water plunging. Despite my initial hesitation, I entered the frigid water of Maple Lake up to my thighs for 2 minutes. It was a shocking, yet invigorating experience, that left me feeling energized and alive.



## The Nourishment of Food and Connection

The meals at Dimensions were not just food; they were nourishment. Each dish was gluten-free, dairy-free, and sugar-free—yet bursting with flavour. Chef Jordan Wagman shared how a clean diet had transformed his life after struggling with a skin condition, inspiring the philosophy behind his cuisine. I was so impressed that I bought his cookbook, which has since become a staple in my kitchen. One of the ingredients for his transformational food journey was cannabis, but that was not a part of the Wellness Retreat we attended.



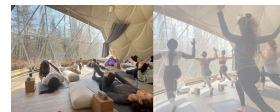
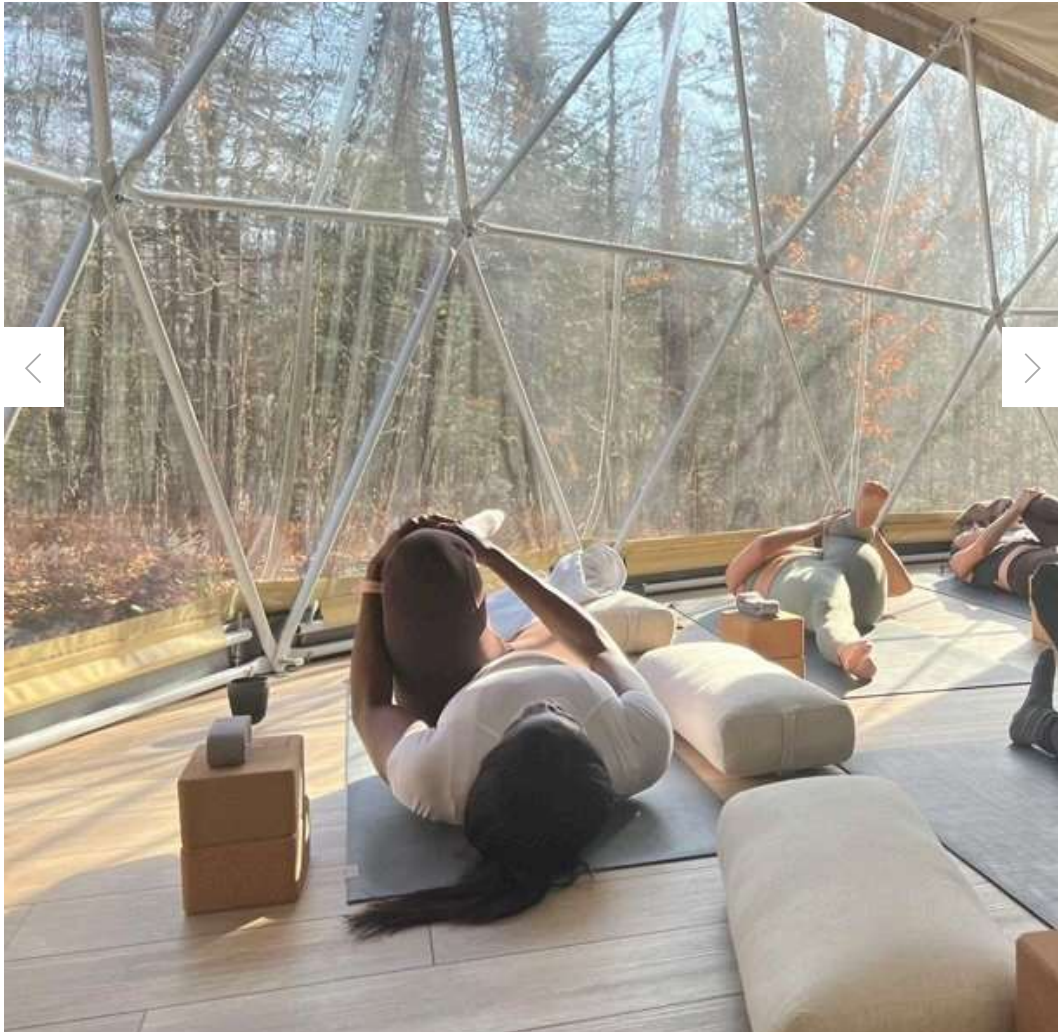


While the food fed our bodies, the group meals fed our spirits. There were 16 of us, each with a story to tell. Seated at long family-style tables we shared what had brought us to the retreat and what we hoped to take away. It created an unexpected sense of community, even among strangers.



## Moments of Personal Reflection

The retreat wasn't just about group activities. My daughter and I each had our own moments of quiet reflection. Between yoga, Pilates, and our therapies, we found time to talk about our lives in a way we hadn't been able to in months.



At one point, I confessed how nervous I had been about coming. I was the oldest participant by far, and the idea of stepping into such an unfamiliar space had been intimidating. Yet my fears melted away as soon as we arrived. The staff's kindness and the welcoming atmosphere reminded me that wellness has no age limit.





## Transformation, Not Just Relaxation

Unlike a spa, where you leave feeling pampered but quickly return to the demands of life, this wellness retreat offered us tools for lasting change. At Dimensions, the focus wasn't on what was happening outside but on what we were creating inside: balance, clarity, and purpose. I returned home with a renewed sense of self and practical strategies to manage stress. My daughter, too, felt more centered and hopeful about the challenges she was facing. It was a weekend close to home in Ontario that felt like a world away—and one that left us both transformed in ways our previous spa experiences had not.



## Final Thoughts

If you're seeking more than relaxation—if you're craving a reset for your mind, body, and soul—consider a wellness getaway at [Dimensions Algonquin Highlands](#). It might not offer the familiar indulgences of a spa, but it will leave you with something far more valuable: a sense of renewal that lasts long after you leave. In addition to the wellness retreat that I experienced, Dimensions offers three other retreats that focus on healthy ways to manage trauma and stress: the four-day Ascend retreat includes a plant medicine ceremony, the 10-day veterans-only Elevate retreat, and an Actuate retreat for corporate groups.



## Judi Cohen

Judi was a former senior executive in the Transportation and Engineering business for over 35 years, and is now living her best life as a Travel Writer and Content Creator. Judi fell in love with cruising and adventure travel over 45 years ago on her honeymoon, and remains passionate about small ship cruising and expedition travel in polar regions and off-beat luxury destinations.

Visit her [website](#) and join her on [Instagram](#).



HOME



CONNECT

SUBSCRIBE

## TESTIMONIALS