

## The Prison Room that Helps Inmates Relax

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Illustrations by Muti for TIME

### “Blue Room”

*Developed by Snake River Correctional Institution in Oregon*

For 23 hours a day, the 200 inmates in solitary confinement at Oregon’s largest prison see nothing but a tiny, white-walled cell—an experience some research suggests can heighten mental illness and make prisoners prone to suicide attempts and violence. Last year, officials began letting some of them spend their free hour in a first-of-its-kind “blue room,” an exercise space where a projector plays video of open deserts, streaming waterfalls and other outdoor scenes. That imagery, says creator Nalini Nadkarni, who studies how nature affects behavior, is designed to calm prisoners, “much in the way we walk through a park” to relax. Inmates have responded so well that guards now use blue-room time as a way to pre-empt bad behavior.