



Fun in the forest: Enjoying the outdoors in autumn

COVER STORY

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# Wish you were here?

Don't we all! But the joy of travel is that it keeps on giving – even when you're grounded. **Chris Leadbeater** reveals why

**T**here is a celebrated quote from the pen of John Steinbeck which declares that “a sad soul can kill you quicker, far quicker, than a germ”. The accuracy of this statement could be debated endlessly at present – but there is a pertinence to those words, written 60 years ago, here in the gloom of 2020. And not just because a germ (or, at least, an insidious virus) has compromised our world. The sentence is taken from *Travels With Charley*, Steinbeck’s account of his road trip around the USA in 1960. While the book details the author’s search for an America he felt he had lost touch with, it also shows him on a hunt for happiness as he nears the end of his life, describing his “urge to be someplace else” as an

itch that is always within him. His cure for his sad soul is to get on the road, and go.

This is a feeling plenty of us can subscribe to. There are many serious reasons to be despondent this year – but while the continued difficulty of travel will be more important to some than others, it is still a cause for sorrow. Especially at the moment. This weekend marks the start of autumn half-term week. Some of us still get away – but for lots of us, local lockdowns, border closures and general worry will keep us tethered to home, denied that final trusty shot of family-holiday brightness before winter exerts its grip completely.

This is a shame. Because travel does make us happy. In 2008, Jeroen Nawijn, a lecturer at Breda University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, conducted research into the positive effects of a holiday – interviewing hundreds of international tourists, in Holland for the spring, as to their feelings. Almost 96 per cent of them reported a happy mood. He was even able to identify a “Happiness Curve” that sees the first 10 per cent of a holiday dogged by more downbeat emotions (the stresses of the journey), before it soars to a core 70 per cent of the trip where travellers are at their most contented.

The research may be 12 years old, but the survey would surely produce the same statistics today. “Enjoying a holiday is universal,” concluded Nawijn, in a remark every bit as pertinent as Steinbeck’s.

But how do we achieve a dose of happiness from travel when travel is such a frustratingly tricky proposition? The answer to that question will always be a case of opinion.



Stella Photi, founder and managing director of Wellbeing Escapes

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“Our tag-line is ‘Holidays for Health and Happiness,’” says Stella Photi, the founder and managing director of self-care travel specialists Wellbeing Escapes ([wellbeingescapes.com](http://wellbeingescapes.com)). “We believe it’s all wrapped in the same thing. Health and happiness go together. You can go away, have a hedonistic time with alcohol and rich food – and feel great while you’re doing it. But then you go home, and you don’t feel as good on your return. We see a ‘well-being

escape’ as a holiday where you reset your life.”

This concept has come into focus since March. It has been impossible to sell holidays to the countries the company traditionally offers (Thailand, India, Sri Lanka etc) but there has been scope to deal in “travel” closer to home. Much closer. As lockdown began to bite, Photi launched a “Wellbeing At Home” option, designed to soothe the soul in trying circumstances. This is ongoing. “Every Saturday, we bring in an expert to do a free Zoom session for anyone on our database,” she explains. “We’ve done corrective exercise, yoga, nutritional talks. We have booked psychologists, life coaches, ayurvedic doctors. We are still offering the sessions because they are still needed – and we’ve had a great response.”

However, she is quick to emphasise that, even in these straitened times, a holiday should involve more than staring at a screen. “The idea of a holiday,” she continues, “is that you remove yourself from your day-to-day environment – so that you feel lighter, have a different experience, and are in a different place.” On this, there is full agreement from Dr Katie Sparks, a member of the British Psychological Society, who argues that failure to switch off is one of the common problems of modern life. “People will often go on a break, but take with them everything that they need to take a break from,” she says. “Phones, laptops, even work itself. And that sort of

‘travel’ doesn’t help at all, mentally – because all you’re doing is changing location while being in the same place in your head.”

Disconnecting is particularly important, she says, if you want to have a “holiday at home” in the coming weeks. “You need to switch off everything you would usually be looking at from Monday to Friday, otherwise it isn’t a holiday,” she adds. “With the shift to ‘being in the office at home’, too many of us are living to work right now, not working to live. You need to be disciplined – the world won’t end if you turn off your mobile for the day.”

Of course, simply pressing the off button is not enough if you want to attempt a holiday in your domestic setting. Leaving the house is also essential. Travel is good for us because it interrupts our routines, says psychologist Linda Blair – whose weekly Mind Healing column offers advice to readers of *The Telegraph*.

“When we go on holiday, we are breaking away from the habits we have in our normal lives,” she explains. “Little traits such as plopping in front of the TV as soon as you come in, or eating chocolate because you have finished work. A holiday is a chance to move away from your usual behaviour.”



Magically medieval: Warwick Castle is still open for business with pre-booked tickets

But where to go when the nation is partly shut down? Anywhere possible, contends Blair.

“One of the best trips I’ve ever taken was with my children when they were younger,” she says. “I decided we had to have a holiday. We’d been cooped up too long. I told the boys, ‘Get your cases, get yourselves ready, we’re going on a journey.’ Then I strapped them into their child seats and drove to the hotel I’d booked. Two miles away. They had a ball.”

Although not subject to the same day-to-day stresses as adults, children also benefit from the routine-change of travel, according to Dr Rachel Andrew of Lancashire psychology practice Time Psychology. “Because they are so interlinked with their family, one of the key benefits of travel for children is that, if their parents are relaxing into time off, and enjoying themselves, the children will pick up on it,” she says. “Especially smaller kids.”

And even if we cannot travel very far this strange autumn, the advantages of getting out and about – perhaps into the countryside, or to the seaside – are, she continues, manifold.

“The benefits of being in a natural environment, or by the coast, are pronounced,” adds Dr Andrew. “It can be as simple as a rural hike, a forest path, or an afternoon at a lake.”

Within this, she talks of “Green Space” and “Blue Space” – enthusing about the latter in particular. “We know that a coastal environment – Blue Space – provides big emotional-health benefits,” she comments. “In training I’ve done recently, we have spoken about the many upsides of being close to water, whether it’s the sea, a river, a lake. There are various different elements to it. Sensory elements. The sounds and smells of being around water. The colours involved. I think it feeds into childhood memories of trips to the seaside, and brings a sense of freedom. There is something about reflections in water as well; an almost literal case of letting people reflect on their lives. And ‘Green Space’ also has a power to inspire – whether it’s a mountain trail or a gentle stroll in your local park.”

A general desire to reconnect with nature has been increasingly apparent to Paul Lister in the last half-year. Since 2003, he has run Alladale Wilderness Reserve ([alladale.com](http://alladale.com)) – a 23,000-acre slice of the Scottish

Highlands, 40 miles north of Inverness – as a rewilding project, working to restore its ancient tree-covered ecology. He also offers lodge accommodation and has found that the crisis has delivered new visitors to his doorstep.



Stretch of imagination: Alladale Wilderness Reserve offers a spectacular well-being refuge in deep in the Scottish Highlands

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“We have definitely had guests come here this summer who would not ordinarily have chosen northern Scotland for their holiday,” he nods. “But they have been put into this situation where they’ve had to stay in the UK – and they’ve thought ‘let’s go to the most remote part of the country we can’. Well, Alladale has to be one of the most remote locations in the British Isles – and there has been increased demand for what we provide.”

Lister is – unsurprisingly – an advocate of spending time outdoors. “Getting out into nature is hugely important,” he argues. “Because only once we get there do we understand it; maybe want to help to preserve it. We can’t spend all our lives in concrete.”

The last seven months have also had a significant impact on the working life of Toby Maguire. An expert in massage therapy, meditation and (posture-improving Chinese discipline) qi gong, he categorises himself as a “mind therapist”. A normal year has him imparting his calming wisdom in

luxury resorts in Asia (he has worked for five-star brands such as Six Senses). July 2020 found him on the south coast of Devon, at Compass Quay ([compassquay.uk](http://compassquay.uk)) – a collection of luxury holiday “cottages” near Totnes.

Not that he’s complaining. “We have been running retreats here,” he says. “These are beautiful properties, and this is an ideal environment for people to get away from their stress; to learn to calm their minds.

“I am likely to be here until December. And in March and April, it will get busy again. I will probably return next summer for further sessions.”

He is unabashed in suggesting meditation as a way to cope with the crisis, or carve some space for a “holiday at home”. “The thing about meditation,” he says, “is that once you’ve learned to do it, you have it for life. It’s something you can rely on to give you that sense of peace, no matter where you are.” With Headspace ([headspace.com](http://headspace.com)) and Insight Timer ([insight timer.com](http://insighttimer.com)) apps available at a click, it is also an art that the uninitiated can attempt for themselves. “I encourage people to practise on their own,” adds Maguire. “It isn’t good business for me, but it is important that people don’t rely upon a therapist for years and years.”

If all else fails, you can retreat to bed. It is perhaps a sign of the odd direction 2020 has taken that Love Home Swap – a service that lets would-be travellers arrange short-term property swaps with like-minded homeowners for a change of scene and a fully furnished holiday – has joined with “dream incubation expert” Charlie Morley to create a “dream passport” (see [lovehomeswap.com/blog](http://lovehomeswap.com/blog)).

This, obviously, is a way to “travel” in dreams, guiding your sleeping subconscious to splendid destinations, via the power of suggestion.

“Dream incubation is a real process,” asserts Morley. “By combining visualisation and pre-sleep hypnotic suggestion, with just a few nights’ practice most people find they are able to influence the content of their dreams, and essentially choose what – and where – they dream about.

“Focusing on a much-loved past holiday will allow the brain to access existing memories and build on them,” he adds. “But thinking of a ‘fantasy destination’ you haven’t visited may hold more excitement. Either way, stress is not an issue. What could be a better anti-stress sleep aid than dropping off while placing yourself in a beautiful holiday location?”

### **Ten tips for a happy ‘holiday at home’**

**Camp in your back garden, visit the place on your doorstep that you have always wanted to and rustle up your favourite holiday food**



**1 Share out the experiences**