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Holidays AT HOME

Angela Youngman shows us how to find joy in staycations this summer



IS IT REALLY possible to create a holiday feeling at home, without going anywhere at all? After months in lockdown and never knowing what's going to happen next, planning summer holidays is difficult. What's certain is that jetting off to sun-drenched resorts or even exploring somewhere new in the UK is going to be harder this year. Staycations at home are the new reality, but that doesn't mean you can't have fun.

Wellness expert Antonia Harman says, "Holidaying and breaking from the old routine alleviates stress. A simple change of scenery, even if it is in your local area, can do wonders for your mental health. Playing and having fun, even if just for a day trip, will refresh and renew you."

Preparation is crucial to ensure that your staycation is just as relaxing and fun as a more conventional holiday.

Some friends of mine had originally booked a holiday in Corfu in late spring, which proved impossible under the circumstances. Undeterred, they opted for a Greek staycation at home, obtaining lots of Greek food and drink, organising some trips to quiet local beaches, going for walks and finding activities with a Greek theme while camping out under the stars in their garden.

Break from the norm

"Cover up your workstation, take down work notes and put away all work-related stuff. Take out the mundane and replace with novelty. Be imaginative. Choose a different beginning and end to your day," recommend Claire Dale and Patricia Payton, authors of self-

'Take out the mundane and replace with novelty. Choose a different beginning and end to your day'



development book, *Physical Intelligence*.

Burn some candles or incense to evoke the smell of the sea or woodlands.

Resist the opportunity to check emails and social media. Turn off the alerts on your phones and don't answer messages. Above all, don't try and follow your normal routine.

If you have a tent, why not set it up in the garden? Sleeping outdoors, watching the night sky, creates a different experience. Camping specialists Olpro suggest putting up some fairylights to make it look cosy, adding a few colourful cushions or getting the kids to create some bunting or special decorations for the tent. Add a bird feeder to the garden and watch the birds come to eat.

Just go inside the house for essentials like bathing and going to the toilet, or preparing a meal. If you have little ones running around it may be safer to cook inside. Behave as far as possible like you would on a campsite, having barbecues and enjoying the outdoors. Don't be tempted to go and watch TV or a film on your tablet – take the opportunity to sit and talk, enjoy some quality time and perhaps play some games. There are several versions of Monopoly available with specific holiday themes, including a Lake District edition.

Eat as if on holiday

Keep your meals simple, you don't want to be spending a lot of time in the kitchen or going shopping. Avoid supermarkets while on holiday – buy what you need in advance and make sure there are special treats included. You might not be able to get down to the West Country this year – but you could order a Taste of Devon food hamper or luxury cream tea, which can be delivered to your door.

Fancy a Greek theme? Check out local Greek restaurants who may be offering a take out service, or do some online shopping in advance. Christina Lyropoulou from Agora Greek Delicacies says, "when you can't go to Greece, we'll bring Greece to you

with our Feel Good hampers." Order at agoragreekdelicacies.co.uk.

You can even make up your own versions of the hamper, combining authentic Greek brands like Kyknos, Jotis and Kataifi with frozen Kaseropita or Cretan Gyropita. Apparently it really feels like a trip to a Greek supermarket when your package arrives with all these delicacies ready for your holiday break! Add some Greek background music and watch some virtual tours of Greece on screen for extra atmosphere.

Alternatively, you could try a themed Cookaway box (thecookaway.com) containing everything needed to cook dishes from around the world, including Spanish and Japanese. Even spices and oils are included. The recipes are easy to follow and portions are very generous.

Explore the world

Take a trip around the world, exploring a different culture or country each day using the virtual experiences on offer. Visit museums such as the Louvre and see paintings like the Mona Lisa brought to life, or click your way to discovering intricate details of the Vatican museums such as the stunning Raphael rooms or the Sistine Chapel.

Discover playful dolphins in the sea at Les Feréhoux, the magical spot where land meets the sea at Corbière and the



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hidden beaches at Beauport Jersey. Get inspired by spectacular sand art in the Tottori Sand Museum in Japan, or take a virtual YouTube tour along Waikiki Beach at Oahu, Hawaii, which makes you feel as though you are really walking on the sand.

Explore your locality

There are surprises to be found if you look closely at your local area. Take a stroll around streets you do not normally use and see what you can find. In Norwich, for example, walking down a quiet street in the city centre reveals a wall inscribed with Sir Thomas More's entire novel *Utopia* in lime whitewash.

Treasure Trails (treasuretrails.co.uk) have some great themed walks,

which are fun for all ages. Over 1,000 self-guided treasure trails are available involving towns across the UK, from Perranporth to Braemar. The trails are themed as murder mystery, treasure hunt or spy mission and are downloadable. Each trail involves a series of clues to solve a mystery while taking in a walk of about two miles. Some clues are obvious such as numbers on a house, while others might be hidden on a manhole cover, or require some kind of calculation.

Fun at home

Escape Hunt (escapehunt.com) have some really entertaining downloadable escape games guaranteed to puzzle and challenge. Try solving a Murder at the

Mansion, discover the missing 'Treasure of the Aztecs, or step into a world of magic to find out why wizard teachers have disappeared. You might need code-breaking skills, to solve riddles or decipher ancient maps. Suitable for two or more people, it encourages discussion and teamwork plus a lot of laughter!

Or take time for yourself and enjoy some mindful activities. Search out some relaxation classes, or try an online retreat experience, such as the DIY Home Retreat offered by Adventure Yogi (adventureyogi.com) complete with customisable at-home retreat packs and yoga classes. Remember, things won't be like this forever, so make the most of the here and now and enjoy a different kind of summer holiday. ☺