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6 Secrets to Sponge Up More Happiness From Your Summer Vacation and Travels

By Judy Feldman, iTraveler Times | June 18, 2012 1:28 PM EDT



6 Secrets to Sponging more Happiness from your Vacations and Travels(Photo: WikiCommons)

6 Secrets to Sponge Up More Happiness

Studies give us lots of insights. Below are several tips gleaned from scientists, researchers and psychological experts around the globe that can help you derive the most internal pleasure from your travels and vacations around the world.

And from your time at home too. Is it all in your head?

Says Dr. Simon Rego, Director of Psychology Training at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and cognitive psychologist, "It is

our thoughts about things, rather than the things per se, that impact our moods. The higher one's expectations (which are really just a kind of thought) the greater the chance of being disappointed. This does not mean that you should go into a vacation with low expectations (thinking you'll be pleasantly surprised if things work out better). Rather, the best way to approach situations like these is to go in with the most realistic expectations possible."

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That said, here are some excellent tips.

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1) Planning increases pleasure.

No, no, not as you might think -- not just in order to be more organized, and not just to save money. Although you might save money and get more organized. In addition to that, however, planning helps increase your pleasure because, and several studies have shown that vacationers are happier BEFORE a trip than during the trip. Anticipation is key.

"Such is the state of life that none are happy but by the anticipation of change. The change itself is nothing; when we have made it the next wish is to change again," wrote Samuel Johnson.

And studies back this up. One study performed in 2010, by Jeroen Nawijn, a tourism research lecturer at Breda University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, examined the behavior of 1,530 Dutch adults and found that the 974 individuals who took a vacation achieved the greatest amount of happiness leading up to the trip. Also, studies led by the psychologists Leigh Thompson of Northwestern University and Terence Mitchell of the University of Washington compared travelers' anticipation of, actual experiences on, and memories of vacations. "The results, published in 1997 in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, found that regardless of the type of trip, vacationers were happier in the period leading up to their time off than during the vacation itself." To find out more, see [here](#):

So -- If you plan your vacations well in advance, and exercise your imagination while you do this, you will increase your enjoyment factor. And when you return from a trip? Just start planning your next trip as soon as possible. For more background on how to plan the perfect vacation see this evergreen NYTimes article [here](#).

2) Go Easy with that Planning. Remember, it is supposed to be fun!

This advice is particularly targeted to anyone not going solo, because studies put vacation planning high up on the list of things that trigger couples - and friends - to go head to head in arguments. In fact, the vacation planning fight is #3 on the top ten list of what couples fight intensely about. For more on that hot topic, see [here](#). And when you do plan..."Come up with a plan so that you both get to do some of what you both want to do. It's much better if you both agree that if say one of you hates sight-seeing, you'll do it for two days in exchange for two days of sitting by the pool or shopping, which the other loves. Happiness has a lot to do with compromise when traveling together," suggests April Masini, a relationships expert from Naples Florida.

3) Keep 'em Short, (sweet, of course) and Frequent!

As discerned from the study mentioned above, Mr. Nawijn noted that questions remain about whether the time of year, type of trip and other factors may influence post-vacation happiness.

The study didn't find any relationship between the length of the vacation and overall happiness. Since most of the happiness boost comes from planning and anticipating a vacation, the study suggests that **people may get more out of several small trips a year than one big vacation**. Mr. Nawijn said..... "What you can do is try to increase that by taking more trips per year. If you have a two week holiday you can split it up and have two one week holidays." For more on this subject, see [here](#).

4) Money. Money. Money. 3 Wise Tips

So many people want to tell us what to do with our money. And everyone wants to get their hands on it too, right? Especially when you are travelling. Granted, it is fun to buy things when you are travelling. Gifts. Souvenirs. Treats. As the sayings go: 'More is not better. Most is not best. Quality not quantity. Money can't buy love.' But this too is true: "If you use it wisely, money can definitely help you achieve your goals - and increase your traveling happiness. See these 3 Wise Money Tips, below from [April Masini](#), with a particular emphasis on how to use money (and not to use it) to make a vacation a happy one.

* Aim for Goldilocks Spending:

"If you spend beyond what you can afford, you're going to feel uncomfortable and angry at



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yourself -- and you'll most likely express your anger at everyone around you. You'd have been better off not going on vacation in the first place. "

If you get a bargain vacation package and it's a bomb (dirty hotel room, bad service, ugly beaches, food poisoning from the room service....) you'll be furious that you spent as little as you did. 'You get what you pay for', will come to mind, so underspending isn't really a great option either if you're underspending on a bad vacation.

If you spend way within your budget and have an amazing time, you're going to feel like the vacation was amazing, you were amazing, your travel partners are amazing and life is grand. Do your homework on the vacation -- and your bank balance.

* Know what you're spending. Lots of times people snap up vacation packages, and by the time the charge is on the credit card statement, they've finally come to realize that the price they paid didn't include extras -- like food, taxes, a rental car or plane fare. Oopsy! Read the small print and ask questions about vacation packages. Better yet -- ask your questions in writing so there's no misunderstanding. You'll be very happy if your expectations are met; not so happy if they're not.

*Know your own tendencies. If you get to your [vacation destination](#) and then blow through your entire vacation budget by ordering room service and expensive cocktails because you didn't really factor in the reality that you don't like to leave the hotel room once you're "there", you'll be miserable realizing you've blown your budget. If you want to sit in the room and drink cocktails by the pool, consider an all inclusive package. If you're never going to be in the room because you're out exploring from the crack of dawn until the moon is high in the sky, consider a bare bones hotel situation and a hefty budget for add on experiences and a rental car! Self-knowledge is the key to happiness and success -- on vacation and otherwise! " For more from April -- see [here](#):

4) Timing. As in music, variations in rhythm will increase the interest, enjoyment and the mojo.

Add changes to your routine, and who would have thunk it? Deadlines! Experts quoted in an article in the Boston Globe, [here](#), prove that timing is indeed, often... everything.

Ayalet Gneezy and Suzanne Shu, marketing experts at The University of California in San Diego and The University of California in Los Angeles, found that people given a longer time to redeem a gift certificate are less inclined to do so. They also note that people living in cities with major landmarks are less likely to visit these attractions, unless they have out-of-town guests.

What is implied is that the enjoyment we get out of vacations comes from the limited window of opportunity that is involved. Boundaries, limits, and deadlines trigger us to take advantage and appreciate what we can. And we do.

The Boston Globe article also quotes psychologist Leif Nelson of the University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, who, working with Tom Meyvis of the New York University Stern School of Business, found that people, whether having a pleasant experience like a massage or an unpleasant one like prolonged separation from a loved one, felt the pain or pleasure more intensely if the experience was started and then stopped and then restarted. "If you put a disruption in the hedonic experience, it intensifies it", says Nelson. The same principle, he said, applies to a vacation. "You can imagine spending a week-end at some wonderful beach house. While it's great for the first couple of hours, by the second day it's pleasant and then no longer exciting. If for some reason, you're forced to leave the beach house, when you return, you have all that new pleasure all over again."

Some would suggest that sounds anti-intuitive, or at least a difficult thing to do -- to interrupt an activity while the going is good. But Gal Zauberman of Wharton University, points out that if we do strategically break up our trips, we might get more enjoyment. "if you partition after each peak experience, then you remember that piece as better than if you partition after each lousy thing, he suggests. (which leads us to Tip #5).

5) Sweet Endings are Key

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'All that ends well, is remembered well.' (Not sure who said that, but this one too reeks truth.)

As reported by Gary Belsky and Tom Gilovich, in *Minds Over Money* (see [here](#)) this is often and simply the way it works. "Things you experience on your last day of vacation will be enhanced simply because you know they're happening at the end. In a recent paper published by *Psychological Science*, psychology researchers Ed O'Brien and Phoebe Ellsworth had University of Michigan students taste five types of chocolates - milk, dark, crème, caramel and almond - varying the order in which they were eaten. Some students ate the last one knowing it was the last; others were not given that info and were left to assume it was just another in the series. When later asked to pick which one was their favorite, two-thirds chose the last one when they knew it was the finale when they ate it; only a fifth did so when they hadn't known it was the last. So be sure to choose something like chocolate on the last day or two of your vacation - something good that will seem even better because it comes at the end."

Make the last days of your time travelling very special, to make the good vibrations last. Literally. This will enhance your ability to cherish the vacation, like the taste of chocolate or fine wine lingering...

And last but not least ...although it might be the best...

6) Volunteer service works wonders -- for you!

Do good for others and treat yourself at the same time and you're sure to be the one that reaps the benefits.

"Habitat for Humanity, Doctors Without Borders, Operation Smile, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, The Red Cross -- and many other organizations offer opportunities to serve others in different parts of the country and the world," notes April Mansini.

Just do it, and you'll be that much more happy. Think of the joy of giving -- and the adventure.

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