



WHAT WAS ONCE A PRIVILEGE
TO BE FOUGHT FOR SEEMS NOW
TO HAVE BECOME A COMMODITY.



HOW TO A BE TOURIST

TIPS FOR A TRULY
REWARDING VACATION

THE PERFECT HOLISTAY

So you want to be a better tourist? Then there's no more logical place to start practicing than home. A vacation seems synonymous with far-away destinations, but tourism is in essence about an attitude – a sense of curiosity, a hunger to explore. Which you can do anywhere. So getting better at vacationing starts with a break at home. Or, as some English speakers might put it, a staycation or a holistay (though used here without any negative overtone of going cheapskate). →





RENT A GERMAN

They're incredibly efficient, have great *bratwurst* and make the best cars. Those admirable attributes of Germans gave Johannes Blank – a German himself, 'as it happens' – the idea for an amusing website, www.rentagerman.de. It lets people hire Germans for meals, an afternoon's shopping or other "personal and social purposes." It was a conceptual stunt, but there turned out to be a real demand. People wanted Germans for odd jobs, parties, and planning vacations.

It's not only true for Germany, of course: inviting a native round can be a wonderful way of preparing for a trip to any destination. Anticipation is half the fun. On top of that, the quality of your trip is directly affected by the preparations. If you want to be a better tourist, take this stage seriously.

Personal stories and insights from someone born and bred in your holiday destination are way better than a travel guide on paper. Live narrators are efficient – listening is quicker than reading – and you can involve the whole group who are traveling. So that's more than enough reason to have a native round as a warm-up. Ask them to cook an authentic national meal, bring photos from

their childhood or find a selection of YouTube clips that are typical of their country. Take time together and make things easy for your native by buying things in and driving them home afterwards.

The key advantage of a live guide is that they are interactive. You can lead the conversation round to what interests and fascinates you, so a successful evening also means asking the right questions. Sure, you want to know what the best museums and hotels are, but a guide book tells you that. The native lets you dig a bit deeper. What are the big issues and latest developments in the country? What are the typical good and bad sides of the locals? A clear analysis or background sketch will make more things (and different things) stand out on your trip.

If you don't know any Cubans, Swiss, or Vietnamese, your friends or work colleagues will. Facebook has a long reach: you'll find the native you're looking for there or elsewhere online – why not put a personal ad on an odd jobs website? Especially if you make it sound attractive: offer a home-made apple pie, a ticket for a popular local ball game, or some other suitable reward. The right, enthusiastic native will soon contact you.

NOW THE MOST ESSENTIAL ITEMS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRIP ARE PLANNING SKILLS.

That is after all when our travels are the best antidote to our over-organized lives full of deadlines. In reality, though, vacations keep getting more complicated, demanding ever more advanced logistics and technology. The most essential items for a successful trip are no longer suntan lotion or travel guides – it’s different now: you need planning skills. More than ever, proper organization is make or break. Or, as the time management guru Alan Lakein would put it, “Failing to plan is planning to fail.”

But what does good planning mean? When traveling, we are mostly planning how to fit sights into the available travel schedule: first Notre Dame, then the Eiffel Tower, then the Palais de Tokyo. However, if you pause

to think about what really makes a vacation, you rarely come up with specific tourist must-sees. Ultimately we look for more general qualities in our travels, such as adventure, inspiration, or relaxation. Those are the goals that really need planning.

Have you ever unexpectedly found a picturesque square or a hidden restaurant? The *The Three Princes of Serendip*, a Persian fairy tale, calls this ‘serendipity’: a discovery that you weren’t looking for. Strangely enough, the story sees serendipity as a skill, saying that clever and well-prepared people are more capable of discovering things by chance. That’s where the fable touches upon the essence of planning for the qualities you want from a trip. Aspects

such as inspiration and discovery can’t be forced: they demand mental preparation and alertness above all. If you want a vacation full of (say) discoveries, be aware that getting lost can often be valuable (with hindsight), and embrace any unusual and unplanned events.

“Everyone has a plan till they get punched in the mouth,” said the boxer Mike Tyson. Planning suggests that everything can be organized in advance, but that’s only partly true for vacations. Be prepared for how you’ll react if things go differently than

expected. You can plan for that too. What do you do if the queues are too long, the weather won’t play ball or you’re suddenly exhausted? Take a book, or have alternative sights nearby up your sleeve. And above all, develop a mindset that makes you resistant and flexible, because the gods of misfortune never take a vacation.

ADVENTURE, INSPIRATION, OR RELAXATION, THOSE ARE THE GOALS THAT REALLY NEED PLANNING.

TO AIRBNB OR NOT TO AIRBNB?

The global rise of Airbnb and similar websites has been a wake-up call for the hotel industry. The platform, which lets people rent out their home like a hotel owner, has built up a large following in a short time. On any given night, one million people are staying in Airbnb homes. →





SUPERMARKET SAFARI

"A person buying ordinary products in a supermarket is in touch with his deepest emotions," observed the economist Kenneth Galbraith once astutely. At home we often see supermarkets as a necessary evil, but it's different when we're away. Supermarkets abroad are a cultural destination *par excellence*. Stroll past the shelves like a museum visitor and you'll get an enjoyable impression of a country's (culinary) culture.

Market halls, butchers, wineries, and farmers' markets: food retail outlets come in many guises. But on vacation it's the bigger everyday supermarkets – a Carrefour in France, a Trader Joe's in California – that are the most interesting to visit. First and foremost, it's about the local favorites. Spanish supermarkets are an ode to canned sardines, tuna, and mackerel. Japanese supermarkets are known for their candy, from traditional Japanese caramels and lychee gummy bears to KitKats in every conceivable flavor. The packaging and brand names are often amusing, from the splendid cool minimalism of Finnish salted licorice to toilet paper called *Happy End* in German supermarkets. It makes supermarkets the ideal places to find amusing or regional gifts (see tip 12).

If you want to know what the local residents' daily staples are, or the regional dishes, look for the deli (most supermarkets have one now), where you can find locally produced goods. And why not pick out some nice local cheese, sausage, or a salad for a picnic in the park? Or stock up for the evening meal. After a whole day sightseeing and snacking, making your own version of a local specialty can be a welcome and active challenge.

"The grocery store is the great equalizer where mankind comes to grips with the facts of life like toilet tissue," said a store owner philosophically once. Grocery shopping has become such a shared part of human experience that the supermarket has come to symbolize everyday life. Whether it's newlyweds, or a mom with her toddler, or an old grandad, you see authentic people in the supermarket, in their everyday splendor buying everyday products. People-watching is another reason why a supermarket safari is a must. For you, the observant tourist, other people's everyday routine will hold entertaining and exceptional revelations.

SMELLING MEMORIES

Mimicking the aroma of sunscreen and sea air, a dab of this oil on your pulse points serves as a quick escape. Shut your eyes, take a sniff, and imagine that the office's fluorescent lights are actually the sun's rays.

— Beauty Editor Marianne Mychaskiw about the Urban Decay Go Naked Perfume Oil

Vacation destinations provide inspiration to many perfume makers. Fleur de Portofino, for instance, with a mix of Sicilian lemon, jasmine, and violet leaf presents itself as “a Mediterranean getaway”. Or Big Sur Coastline, with scents of salt air, camphor, and foggy chaparral, “will transport you to your last road trip down California’s coastal Highway 1”.

What makes vacation destinations smell so inspirational? Is it the unique local aromas hanging in the air, in the woods, by the sea, or at the market? Probably, but it’s just as important that these holiday scents get inseparably associated with the freedom and adventure that you’re experiencing during your trip. The olfactory sense is the only one directly linked to the brain – in fact to the same areas that our emotions come from, the amygdala and hippocampus. Smells therefore create our longest-lasting

memories and even evoke more powerful emotions than sounds, images or words.

So your nose is your strongest memory. People who know that fact allow for it: the stronger your vacation memories, the longer and more intense your later enjoyment of it at home will be. A holiday scent now often nestles subconsciously in our minds, particularly if we were exposed to a particular aroma a lot on the spot – take the lavender fields in France, for instance. But smells should actually have a special status in your trip, as a permanent item on your to-do list.

Powerful, aromatic memories of vacations are created by deliberately scouting local scents and breathing them in deeply on your travels. Alertness and inventiveness will take you a long way. Buy aromatic candies or snacks from a local supermarket and eat one every afternoon. Put a bag of local herbs in your car or your bag. Buy an unusual local flower at the market and leave it to dry in your hotel room. Choose less obvious aromas too: keep the serviette in Spain that you wiped your fingers on after a paella, or a T-shirt that went to the laundry in India. Take the most striking aromas back home and you will be amazed how your nose manages to conjure memories up again in a flash, years later. Oh, that smell – I remember it exactly!



GO RESIDENTIAL



Where is the best place to learn about the Netherlands: the Rijksmuseum or an Amsterdam suburb like IJburg? What tells you more about San Francisco, Alcatraz or Los Altos? And where can you find the real Rio de Janeiro: the statue of Christ the Redeemer, or the hill slopes with the favelas? If you want to get to know a city or country better, look for the everyday life. Whether that's rigidly designed new towns in the Netherlands, nostalgic suburbs in America or lively ghettos in Brazil, an afternoon spent there often tells you more than a whole bunch of tourist attractions.

Strolling through picturesque city districts is always nice, but real everyday life is often found elsewhere. It is more likely to be manifest outside the center, at the end of the metro line, in residential areas where people like you and me – most of the population – live out their lives. There are no cutesy stores and spectacular sights there.

A neighborhood safari is a welcome change in your trek past the tourist magnets. It's not about finding entertainment in highlights: it shows you what life is like for the vast majority. Residential areas offer simple and recognizable pleasures: what's more entertaining than watching the local kids playing,

seeing the clean washing on the line and looking on as someone builds a rabbit hutch? People's lives elsewhere can be reassuringly similar to your own, or inspirationally different – hey, look at how the milkman still delivers to the door here!

From a tourist perspective, the everyday side of residential districts abroad is often amusing and educational. But be aware that not everything is equally worth a visit. The most interesting neighborhoods are the ones with daring architecture, built with clearly stated ideas about 'how to live'. How can you find them? Go for it: phone a local architect's office and ask where you should go.

If this sounds a bit tedious, remember residential areas have their attractions too. Such as the absurd, master-planned Sun City in California, where only the elderly live. Or the VM houses in Copenhagen, with spectacular pointed balconies inspired by the film *Titanic*, where the residents can mimic Leonardo di Caprio: "I'm flying!" Almost every city has an iconic residential district, or at least an unusual one. Go find them, walk around and give your eyes a treat. There's every chance of this excursion sticking longer in the memory than the brief adrenalin hit of tourist attractions.

YOU MAY FIND THAT YOUR VACATION IS LIKE A PERSONAL COACH HELPING WITH YOUR WORRIES AND AMBITIONS.

You may even find that your vacation is like a personal coach helping with your worries and ambitions. What do you want from your work? What could make your relationship better? What do you dream of? Far away from the latest fads, you may find answers to the questions in your life, both large and small. Which doesn't mean that you can order them as simply as a drink on the patio... Gaining new insights about your

work, happiness or other big themes in your life while traveling takes practice and patience. That's vacationing for experts.

What can you do to make sure you come back home with more than just nice memories and snapshots? A modest three-part recommendation:

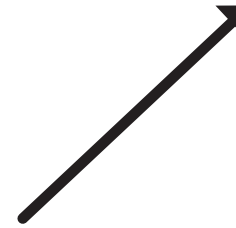
BEFORE

Pack your mental bags too. Think about what you want from your vacation. Write down a couple of key questions or challenges and stick it as a reminder on the inside of your suitcase or on your toiletries bag. They'll travel with you and nestle in the back of your mind.



DURING

An unusual chat with an old woman in the park, a creatively furnished hotel, the dedication of a baker – you'll find plenty to be amazed at on vacation. The subjects are up to you, but your experience is often linked to what's happening in your life at that moment. Write down your observations, associations, and experiences, big or small, before they fade.



AFTER

What may seem obvious while you are away can be valuable pieces of the jigsaw back home. You'd normally forget them once you're back in the maelstrom of the working week, but now you've written them down. Read your notes through carefully at the end of the vacation, or when you're back home. Look through them and make connections. The aim now is to embed what you have learned and genuinely do something with it. The best opportunities for change are when you get back from vacation. Or, to paraphrase the writer Richie Norton, "a little piece of everywhere you go, may become a big part of everything you do."

WHAT MAY SEEM OBVIOUS WHILE YOU ARE AWAY CAN BE VALUABLE PIECES OF THE JIGSAW BACK HOME.