

Great Escapes

As figures show an overwhelming desire to switch off from the fast-paced modern attention economy, an increasing number of people are seeking more than just a “regular” break, but instead, a true escape during their time off. And the travel industry is taking note

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Endless emails. Packed schedules that leave some people so busy they need to choose between being able to do their own laundry, cook their own dinner, or get to the gym – but rarely all three. The ping-ping of endless notifications from our numerous devices, apps, and communication platforms. Ads popping up everywhere we go, from

our computers and televisions to the electronic billboards on our drives, and pretty much anywhere there’s a screen – even in the elevators of apartment buildings. In a fast-paced modern world where it can often feel like we are bombarded by information left, right, and centre – and statistics repeatedly showing that burnout is on the rise across the world – it’s little wonder that when there is the

opportunity to take a little time off, an increasing amount of people are seeking not just the ability to enjoy a bit of a holiday, but one that also offers them the chance to escape from the cacophony of their everyday life.

When it comes to escapist breaks, for many, the old idea of a few cocktails by the pool just isn’t going to cut it – instead, many people are seeking newer and more radical

ways to switch off from the “grind” completely, be that travel to an as-yet-undiscovered location that can offer them a brand-new perspective, wellness-infused options that will send them home feeling truly restored (and maybe even improved), or travel experiences so immersive that they are powerful enough to help shake off the doldrums of everyday life.

In a 2023 report from ABTA – a trade association for UK travel agents, tour operators, and the wider travel industry – escapism travel was listed as one of the biggest travel trends for the year 2023, and in 2024, the desire for a “getaway to get away” shows no signs of stopping. In further research from ABTA on consumer sentiments, 93 per cent of those surveyed felt that a holiday could improve their well-being and mental health, of which 65 per cent felt that the reason for that was a holiday’s ability to give them an escape from the stress and pressure of everyday life. In a poll by YouGov that looked at 13,000+ consumers in eight key markets across the globe, 61 per cent of those in France, 59 per cent those in the UK, and 56 per cent of those in Australia cited that their

greatest motivation for travel was the need to escape from their routine and everyday or home life. And the desire to go “off-grid” isn’t limited to the UK or even Europe – the YouGov survey showed that at least 43 per cent of consumers in markets such as India and Indonesia felt the same. Meanwhile, in 2023, data from Booking.com showing that at least 55 per cent of travellers across the globe were reported to be seeking vacations where they could be offline, unreachable, or otherwise incommunicado to take a break from their everyday reality.

Whether the appeal is in a hiking trip, a yoga retreat, or a more radical form of “switch-off” holiday, it appears that selective unplugging is a key underlying factor in the appeal of escapism travel. Defined as being only partially connected or altogether disconnected from information and communication technologies during travel, a 2022 study on Tourism Management published on Elsevier found that technology was regarded as a, if not *the*, key medium for people to be able to switch between the status of being able to travel for a restoring escape, versus daily life.



ABOVE: Reports show that 52 per cent of workers feel burned out or exhausted

BOTTOM LEFT: Immersive yoga retreats are a popular form of escapism travel

OPPOSITE PAGE: Hiking vacations in as-yet-unexplored destinations are growing in appeal

Escapism travel: an antidote to burnout?

It’s little wonder, given how much the lines between home and working life have been blurred thanks to the advent of technology – an issue that has been exacerbated by the long-term changes towards our collective approach to work since the COVID-19 pandemic. A report from Indeed found that 52 per cent of all workers are feeling burned out – a 9 per cent increase from the pre-pandemic era that is being, in large part, attributed to the rise in remote working. Indeed’s study found that 61 per cent of remote workers find it more difficult to unplug from work during their personal time or non-working hours – and this growing lack of boundaries appears to be leading to rising levels of burnout among workers across the globe.

According to a study by Asana, a web and mobile work management platform based in the US, burnout – defined as a state of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress, overwhelm, and an inability to meet constant or unending demands – makes workers 36 per cent more likely to have lower morale, 30 per cent more likely to feel less engaged, 27 per cent more likely to make mistakes, 25 per cent more likely to miscommunicate, and 25 per cent more likely to leave a company. In 2022, a survey of 15,000 workers across 15,000 countries conducted by McKinsey Health →

4.6
TRILLION US\$

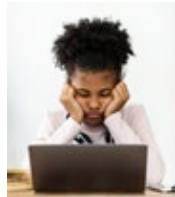
The value that the global adventure tourism market is predicted to reach by 2032

61%

The number of remote workers who find it more difficult to unplug from work during their personal time or non-working hours



ANDRIY, STOKKETE, SUNTI/ADOBE STOCK



QUICK TIPS FOR A "DAILY ESCAPE"

Can't get away, but still need a break from the everyday grind? Commit to regularly putting your phone away for a specific timeframe that you put into your calendar and treat like a serious appointment. Then use this time for some intentional embodied presence: that is to say, doing an activity through which you can feel self-aware, and fully in tune with yourself both physically and emotionally – wherein your workload is placed into a temporary mental box of sorts.

found that a quarter of the employees surveyed had experienced symptoms of burnout. Research from Deloitte and Workplace Intelligence, across four different countries, found that 43 per cent of workers regularly feel exhausted, 42 per cent feel constantly stressed, 35 per cent feel overwhelmed, and 23 per cent feel depressed. The Asana study found that among 10,000 workers across seven countries, 70 per cent had experienced burnout in the last year – findings that were similar to further research from Deloitte, which reported that 77 per cent of workers have experienced or are currently experiencing burnout at their current job. Among these figures, women were more likely to have reported burnout than men. And yet 40 per cent of people feel that burnout is an unfortunate albeit inevitable part of achieving success. So what's the cure?

While a single vacation may not provide a permanent fix, it seems that taking regular breaks – the kind that allow people to truly switch off from their responsibilities – is one solution. Yet despite a desire to disconnect, many people find it difficult to do so alone. A 2023 report by Priority Pass – the world's largest independent airport lounge access programme – that surveyed 8,500 people across 11 countries found that one in three people across the world experience "the fear of switching off". Among them, UAE residents were stated to find it exceptionally difficult to draw a line between work and vacation, with 49 per cent struggling to switch off the demands of daily life while they are on holiday, 57 per cent unable to stop checking their work-related emails, and 58 per cent finding themselves unable to put their phones away at all.

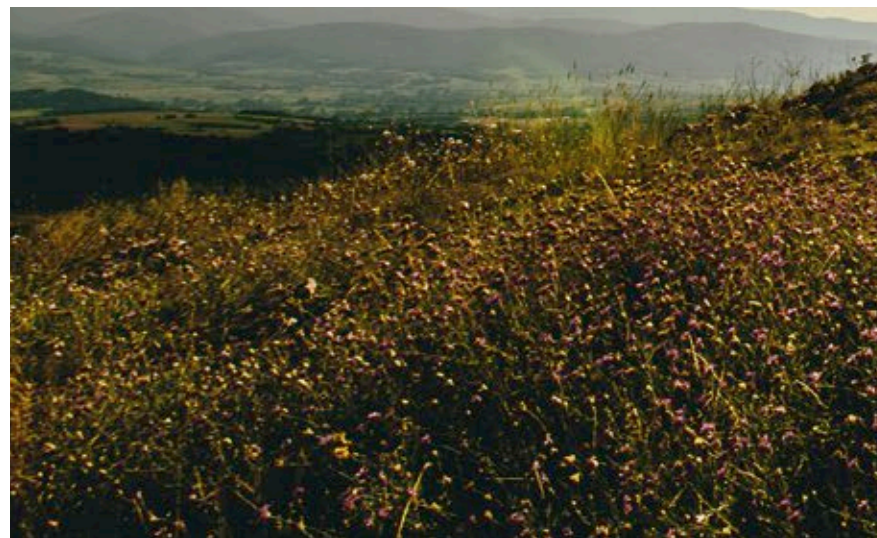
As many continue to succumb to the temptation of staying plugged in no matter where they go, increasing numbers are turning to their travel operators, hotels, or tour companies to help free them of this pressure, through curated escapism-focused packages that can help take the decision off their hands.

Getaways to get away

Numerous tourism operators and travel companies have published reports showing that from 2023, an increasing number of customers have been opting for all-inclusive vacations – and Statista reports that the Package Holidays market worldwide is expected to grow by 3.03 per cent from 2024 to 2028, to be valued at US\$340.30 billion by 2028. All-inclusive holidays can offer customers the chance to enjoy a break without having to worry about taking out their wallets and calculating or paying for individual moments, or thinking about anything but the enjoyment that is present or ahead of them.

With numerous studies having shown that the practice of meditation

and mindfulness can help people switch off, well-being focused escapes continue their steady growth in appeal, with the global wellness retreat market predicted to grow at a CAGR of 7.4 per cent until it reaches a staggering US\$363.9 billion by 2032. From long-standing hotel resort brands to online operators such as BookRetreats offering new packages through which clients can unplug, de-stress, recharge, and restore themselves to vitality, people are increasingly travelling for retreats centered around meditation, yoga, fitness, personal development, adventure, hiking, or some combination of all of them and more. These trips can last from just a few days to a week, two weeks, or more,



PROSTOCK-STUDIO, PARILOV, BGSTOCK72/ADOBE STOCK

all with the intention to offer people the chance to rejuvenate their mind, body, and soul in beautiful surrounds, with their needs catered to through delicious food and great service, and the chance to head home not only feeling relaxed, but having grown.

The YouGov study found that two in five global consumers wish to seek out new travel destinations. Alongside this burgeoning desire to discover the undiscovered, adventure travel is on the rise. According to Allied Market Research, the global adventure tourism market is predicted to reach a value of US\$4.6 trillion by 2032 with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.7 per cent. Adventure doesn't necessarily have to mean pulling out the hiking gear and hitting the mountains, either: it could be anything that gives the traveller a true sense of adventure, from scenic long train journeys that transport them to another

time and place, to hot air ballooning, river rafting, and ski vacations complete with a cozy luxury chalet.

The latter is important: by offering the same level of comfort and safety available in any other travel experience, the scope of modern adventure travellers is widening. Luxury travel company Black Tomato is one company that has seized the opportunity around this niche through a service called Get Lost. Inviting customers to go "on a daring journey across a thrilling and remote wilderness", it promises that "You'll find your way home – but you'll also find yourself." Its Get Lost packages, which start from £10,000 and can go up to £150,000, involve customers filling out an enquiry form that matches them to a Get Lost expert to "determine how lost you want to be", with the only input the traveller has being choosing the type

of environment they want to get lost in, if they wish. The website asks clients to "commit to taking a trip to Get Lost, without knowing where you're going or what you'll need," assuring them that "Black Tomato will take care of the rest. All you'll know is to show up at the airport and find out what's next." The packages offers customers the chance to feel genuinely lost – and all of the rich experiences that can come with that – but with all of the support, gear, comfort, trust, and safety of knowing that they are in good hands, with a luxurious ending and sense of achievement awaiting them at the end.

By offering more comfort, the scope of the modern adventure traveller is widening



FROM TOP LEFT: Scheduling time away from screens can help place less pressure on holidays; White-water rafting is an immersive switch-off experience; Hiking can be restorative



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Hot air balloon trips can give customers a new perspective; Silent retreats hold growing appeal; Astro-tourism is a new form of escapism travel

The power of nature and quietude

The ability to immerse oneself in something truly experiential is at the heart of the appeal of escapism travel. While as-yet-unexplored travel destinations do give many the sense of disconnection they are seeking – in many cases this is literal, with the location of some camping trips and hiking trails making it impossible for them to get online – for stressed and exhausted travellers seeking quality rest, “hibernation holidays”, or those offering some form of quietude, may hold more allure than off-the-beaten-path destinations. Silent retreats, for instance – once a vestige of the spiritual or wellness community often linked to yoga communities in East and South Asia – have now begun popping up across the world, from the US to Europe and the Middle East.

On the more extreme end of the spectrum, US company Dark Retreats Oregon – founded in 2003 – now offers their signature five-day “Dark Retreat” year-round as a “great space for self-care”

and “uninterrupted self-exploration”. During previous years, they only had them during the wintertime, and they were primarily seen as novelty experiences for inspiring “ uninhibited creativity”. Now, they attract repeat visitors. Their retreats invite guests to spend their stay in partial or total darkness, free of artificial light sources, with the option to carry out the duration of their trip in silence as well. The benefits cited include “profound rest and nervous system reset”, “silent and digital detox”, and “expanding energetic capacity” alongside the chance to enhance one’s knowledge of self and personal introspection, as well as spiritual growth. Guests are sent a list of instructions for “darkness prepping” before arrival, upon which they can select a “landing opportunity” that allows them to familiarise themselves with the space as they acclimatise before plunging themselves into darkness. Once the retreat is over, guests can be led to an on-resort location of their choice, guided by staff while they wear a

blindfold, where they will “break light”.

For those seeking similar benefits without having to delve in quite as deeply, astrotourism – travel that allows people to spend time gazing at the stars, or in pursuit of specific astrological phenomena – is another option. In 2021, the Qatar National Tourism Board capitalised on this desire for serenity and reconnecting with nature through a partnership with Gulf Adventures, that invited astronomy enthusiasts to join them through curated star-gazing experiences at historic and cultural sites. In Saudi Arabia, where there are plenty of locations with no light pollution that allow travellers to see the stars with the naked eye, the King Salman bin Abdulaziz Royal Reserve Development Authority held its inaugural astrotourism event in winter 2022 at Al Tubayq, a natural reserve in the north-west of the kingdom, near the border with Jordan, with more such experiences to come. AlUla, with its low light



SINGOSIX, TONJUNG, ASTROSYSTEM/ADOBE STOCK

pollution and serene desert landscape, is also often cited as a prime location for astrotourism in the kingdom.

Across a number of studies explored and published in the National Library of Medicine, spending time in nature, or “nature-based” interventions, were found to have a profound impact on improving

mental and physical health. These psycho-somatic benefits can also be found in other forms of escapist travel that reconnect people with nature. Fans of the ocean or the underwater world can find a similar sense of escape through live-a-board boat trips that offer packages centered around diving, surfing, and more,

for instance. Meanwhile, those who love greenery can indulge in a spot of forest bathing – a wellness practice that originated in Japan in 1982, and involves spending time in lush green surrounds, often barefoot for “grounding” – through dedicated, specialised retreats, or via individual visits to one of many natural or botanical parks around the world. Not sure where to find one? The website quietparks.org is dedicated to listing these spaces for intrepid, solitude-seeking nature-lovers.

Whatever your chosen “cure” for the noise of normal life, the appeal of escapism travel as the antithesis to the hustle and bustle is one that is only set to grow. The ability to truly escape from our daily lives through immersive and experiential travel appears to increasingly be the ultimate luxury in this day and age – and it’s one that can offer a whole new world of potential for travel, tourism, and hospitality companies who are ready to jump on the trend. **BT**