


SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

THE 'STAYCATION' IS HERE TO STAY



Re  **set**

**lessons from
lockdown**

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When international travel was put on hold, people found the pleasure, adventure and rejuvenation of holidays far closer to home



Holidays are sacred for many, and have long been so. The clue is in the word's origin, from the observance of 'holy days', where citizens in the Middle Ages embarked on pilgrimages to religious sites, and those that didn't travel were given instead days of much-needed rest.

Fast forward five centuries and – for those who can afford to have holidays – not much had changed – until the global pandemic took hold and holidaying rapidly reinvented itself. When COVID-19 began to spread, the dramatic growth of global tourism, which had gone unimpeded **since the end of the Second World War,**¹ suddenly halted. Borders closed, governments introduced lockdowns and the global tourism industry came to a standstill with airlines grounded.

Restrictions didn't dampen the human desire to travel – but it did prompt reflection. The demands of modern life, where long working hours and employee burnout are common, cemented the sanctity of holidays as a time for relaxation, repair and rejuvenation. People plot and plan for weeks, imagining the possibilities of exotic places, and willing to pay for the privilege. In 2018, tourism was worth around £1.3 trillion – **about 2% of global GDP**² – and **tourist numbers reached 1.44 billion.**³ Some countries have become reliant on tourism, either as a major industry – like many Mediterranean destinations – or as pretty much the only industry – like some tropical island nations.



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caravan sales grew by 47% in 2021



But overnight a foreign holiday became an impossibility – and people were instead invited to find adventure and respite much closer to home. Many people simply stayed at home, taking day trips to beauty spots or sleeping out if they had a garden. All across Europe people flocked to their local pleasure spots to find some relaxation amid the uncertainty. According to **industry research, looking at 16 global holiday hotspots**,⁴ an average of 76% of all holiday bookings in 2021 were for so-called ‘staycations’ (which can mean holidaying either at or near to your home, or in your own region or country) an 18% increase on the previous year. In Hong Kong, people splashed on the city’s many upmarket hotels as a way of taking a holiday, as the city’s lockdown kept visitors away. In the UK, bookings and enquiries for campsites **surged by 300%**⁵ and **caravan sales grew by 47% in 2021 alone**.⁶

Once the staycation became the only option, governments were quick to cash in on the new reality to boost flagging economies. In the Canadian state of Ontario, residents are able to claim a **‘Staycation Tax Credit’**⁷ which gives them a 20% personal income tax credit on accommodation through to the end of 2022. Ireland introduced a similar scheme in 2021 with their **‘Stay and Spend Tax Credit’**,⁸ which allowed Irish citizens to claim tax back on accommodation, food and non-alcoholic drink.

“In a world of increasing crises, the focus on domestic tourism should not remain a short-term emergency solution in reaction of COVID-19, but become an integral part of all tourism strategies. Its sustainability balance is usually much better than that of international travel: In general, domestic travelers consume more local products and travel shorter distances.”

Antje Monshausen, Tourism Watch

It seems that staycations are here to stay. Recent data shows that **almost half of holiday makers in the UK**⁹ are choosing a staycation in 2022, with the beauty spots of Cornwall and the Lake District set to push France and Spain off the top spot for UK holidaymakers. A similar trend can be found in Sweden, where record numbers of Swedes have rushed to get their hands on summer lodges in anticipation for continued staycations, **driving prices up by 12% on the previous year**.¹⁰



Holidays usually offer a chance to pause, but those that chose to holiday closer to home found themselves reflecting on the fundamentals of travel and tourism. Staycations have challenged the dominant cultural notion of what a holiday is, why it is needed and who it benefits. A **study from Norway**¹⁴ revealed that one in three respondents found staycations caused them to reflect on whether they should travel as much as they had before. The **same number of people**¹⁵ reported that a staycation had given them a clearer conscience on environmental issues. In Germany, holidaying on a houseboat is in vogue with **bookings up 60%**.¹⁶

A staycation also gives the planet a break. Global **tourism accounts for 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions**,¹¹ although this figure neglects the additional non-carbon dioxide impacts of aviation. The source of emissions from frequent leisure flights are also deeply inequitable, often generated by the wealthiest sections of humanity. Beyond air pollution, global tourism can **put enormous strain on water-scarce regions due to concentration of travellers**,¹² **generates eye-watering amounts of waste**,¹³ much of which ends up in landfill, and can suck wealth out of vulnerable local economies as well as any extractive industry. While staycations are not always kind to the environment, they are generally less energy and resource intensive than foreign holidays in far-flung places.



“There are many things that are good for our wellbeing that can be found closer to home: taking quality time out to connect with our loved ones, spending time outside in nature and taking the time to be mindful of the everyday beauty around us. All of these things can be good for the wellbeing of people and the planet.”

Florence Scialom, Network of Wellbeing

These sentiments have shown the cracks in the global travel industry – and through these cracks a new form of holidaying has become visible. This is a **more mindful, less impactful**¹⁷ way of getting away, finding far closer to home the solace and rejuvenation that makes holidays such an integral part of modern life. The pandemic has caused people to return to more basic, essential and non-negotiable needs. Taking time out, either alone or with loved ones, is such a need: but we’ve discovered that getting away need not cost the earth.

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