

6 Reasons Why Traveling is Good for You

Courtesy of Emily Holland, Certified Health Coach

Submitted by the Editor to honor the adventurous spirit of AGCM Moon Mullen, USN (Ret)

1. Promotes Heart Health

One of the amazing benefits of traveling is that it promotes physical activity, whether it is rushing through the airport, walking the streets of a foreign land, or climbing a mountain. Physical movement lowers blood pressure and the risk of heart disease and stroke.

According to information gathered from the Framingham Heart Study, a landmark study that began in 1948 and spanned over the course of 20 years, women who vacationed only every six years or less were nearly eight times more likely to develop heart disease or have a heart attack compared to women who traveled at least twice a year.

2. Keeps the Mind Sharp

Travel also can promote brain health and keep the mind sharp. When your brain is introduced to new experiences and environments (which happens during travel, essentially) it becomes challenged and builds resilience at the cellular level so degenerative disease is potentially delayed. This increase in cognitive stimulation due to exposure to novelty has been shown to improve both memory and concentration, particularly in individuals with dementia. Similarly, when you travel, you interact with novel stimuli in the form of new people, cultures, situations, and experiences, which can contribute to the delayed onset of degenerative disease.

Note: While you may like to frequent the same vacation spot every year, visit new destinations that will allow your brain a chance to reap the benefits that result from different activities and locations.

3. Enhances Creativity

Turns out writers have good reason to travel to a different country in search of inspiration and motivation for their next novel. The brain's neural pathways are influenced by environment and experience (the brain's adaptability is also known as neuroplasticity), which leads researchers to believe that travel can spark synapses in the brain and enhance creativity.

A 2012 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found a strong link between creativity and travelers' immersions into cultures different from their own. According to the study, the better you are at engaging and adapting to new cultures, the more creative and professionally successful you will be. In order to actually enhance creativity, the author stresses the importance of immersing yourself in new cultures, rather than simply changing your physical location.

4. Relieves Stress and Boosts Mental Health

Stress reduction is one of the most important advantages of traveling, according to the Global Coalition on Aging. According to a 2012 Expedia survey, 89 percent of vacationers found they could let go of stress and just relax after only a day or two into their trip. Pulling yourself out of your daily routines and into new surroundings helps to reset both your mind and body, resulting in significant stress relief.

Moreover, leisure activities, such as travelling, can lower levels of depression and improve psychological functioning, according to a 2009 University of Kansas study. You can experience a boost in happiness even while planning a trip (up to eight weeks before setting off to your destination). Having something to look forward to, even if it's a two-day trip, can feel rewarding. Vacationers also likely experience less stress and more satisfaction with their overall mood and outlook after returning from a trip compared to non-travelers.

5. Shifts Perspective

Travel broadens your perspectives, not only of the world but also of yourself. When traveling you may often find yourself in situations that you wouldn't be in otherwise. You are faced with the reality of living outside your comfort zone, which, as uncomfortable as it is, gives you the opportunity to transform how you see things. Psychologists point out that people often have epiphanies while traveling, as they are able to view their problems from a more detached view.

Watching firsthand how other people live, almost like viewing the world through someone else's eyes, helps to broaden your view and leaves you with an opportunity for personal growth. Watching how other cultures live can force you to challenge your own assumptions and free your mind to experience alternative ways of being.

6. Increases Connection to Others and Self

Travel offers opportunities to meet new people that you otherwise wouldn't have the chance to connect with or share memorable moments with. There may be moments where you experience cultural differences that force you to learn about the local culture. When you are outside of your comfort zone in a different country, you may have to look to others for guidance, which can create a sense of connectedness. Whether you obtain this connection by engaging with the locals, other travelers, or even those you are travelling with, making social connections, or deepening the ones you already have, can improve your mental and physical health.

Moreover, the social aspects of travel can enhance your sense of self and offer reasons for you to improve or change your day-to-day habits. Research has shown that when you get out of your social comfort zone and immerse yourself into cultures different from your own, you strengthen your personal identity, including your values and beliefs, and increase your confidence.