



How to make the most of your vacation this summer

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The average American gets about 16 days of paid vacation every year — but only 25 percent say they take all of it, [according to a 2014 survey by Glassdoor](#).

For entrepreneurs, taking PTO is even more fraught. “There never seems to be an ideal time to go on vacation, so you need to just book a trip and commit,” says Dan Menchini, president and CEO of U.Santini Inc., a Brooklyn-based moving and storage company. “It forces you to get organized before you leave so your team can manage in your absence and it forces you to take a break and come back to work reinvigorated and energized.”

Amir Cohen, founder and CEO of Green Blender, a Brooklyn startup that delivers pre-measured organic smoothie ingredients across the Northeast, tries to sneak away for a few days each quarter to refresh and get inspired. “I always come back with big and bold ideas,” he says.

Every holiday has to end, but new research suggests that you can maximize and extend vacation happiness with simple tweaks before, during and after your trip. Consider this your ticket to your best summer ever.

Before

Time it right. Planning your trip months in advance will up your anticipation — in a great way. “I definitely get more pleasure from planning and looking forward to a vacation than I do from the actual vacation,” says Amanda Freeman, owner and founder of SLT, a boutique fitness studio with locations in Manhattan and New Jersey.

Science backs her up: When it comes to experiential purchases like vacations, waiting is a positive state, according to Amit Kumar, Ph.D, a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business whose research focuses on consumer behavior, well-being and decision-making. “It’s a good idea to start planning that vacation ahead of time,” he says. “We tend to look forward to what’s to come with great excitement and delight.”

During

Try something new. Dying to take a surf class? Want to see the view from the top of a skyscraper? Wondering what that tropical fruit tastes like? Dive in. Unique experiences boost happiness levels for a variety of reasons, says Kumar. And the benefits are amplified when you bring someone along for the ride. Trying new things with other people on a trip is beneficial for a variety of reasons. First, it will help shape your identity. (“The more we talk about the time we climbed Mt. Rainer, the more fully we become ‘a mountain climber,’ ” he writes in a study published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* in June.) Second, the act itself prompts social interaction. Plus, the whole thing will probably be great cocktail-party fodder when you return.

Go out with a bang. Save at least one splashy experience (a hotel room upgrade, an over-the-top dinner, a hot-air-balloon ride) for the last day of your trip. That’s because when people look back on vacations, they tend to only remember “peak” moments — and the later portion of a certain event. “It might not much matter how

long the trip actually lasts, so long as one is effectively managing their peaks and ends,” says Kumar. “People should work some fantastic peak moments into their vacations and go out with a bang.”

After

Talk it up. You’re more likely to regale friends with tales of vacation adventure than a recent shopping spree. “More than the possessions we buy, our experiences live on in our memories and in the stories we tell,” says Kumar. His research suggests that people get more satisfaction from talking about experiences than material goods.

The catch? Don’t compare your latest trip with the one Mike in Accounting took, suggests work by Dr. Elizabeth Dunn, a happiness researcher at the University of British Columbia. Social comparison is an important facet of happiness, and once you start keeping tabs on who took the most baller beach getaway or epic ski trip, you might come to the cold realization that someone else’s holiday was ten times better than yours.

Don’t go there

Ease back into real life. Cohen schedules a fun activity, such as meeting friends for drinks or watching a movie when he returns from a trip, to keep the vacation vibe going. “It’s a great way to set the tone that it’s OK to take a break at home, too,” he says. And Freeman knows that her memories are as close as her smartphone. “I always take an inspirational photo that reminds me of the beauty of my trip and make it my home screen,” she says. “Every time I look at my phone, I am reminded of the relaxation of the trip.”

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