


LIFE

# Crush Your Time Off!

**Quick question: Would you rather get a vacation or a raise?**

In a recent survey, more than one-third of employees said they'd prefer days full of mai tais and palm trees over a pay bump. So it seems totally bonkers that more than half of Americans bailed on their allowable time off last year, leaving behind 658 million unused vacation days, according to Project: Time Off, an initiative of the U.S. Travel Association. Unacceptable! Stacks of studies show that taking vacations, whether you go way off the grid or camp out on your couch, can improve your health, mood, creativity, and productivity. So whip out your calendar, block off some me-time, and get ready to feel amazing.

BY LISA FREEDMAN

A woman with dark hair, wearing pink sunglasses and a white tank top, is floating on a large, colorful inflatable ring in a swimming pool. The ring features a tropical design with palm trees, a beach chair, and a drink. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The water is bright blue and rippling. She has several colorful bracelets on her left wrist and pink nail polish on her fingers.

HER MORNING  
COMMUTE:  
FROM ONE END  
OF THE POOL TO  
THE OTHER



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## MAKE YOUR VACATION DREAMS A REALITY

### First, Feel Entitled

Nearly 50 percent of millennials think that sacrificing their breaks will impress their bosses. News flash: Being a martyr is rarely a good look. Never assume your boss is anti-vacation (she may even be impressed with your ability to plan an awesome trip). “They might not be talking about it, but we find that managers are overwhelmingly supportive of vacation time for their teams,” says Katie Denis, senior program director at Project: Time Off. Supervisors want a positive work environment and to avoid staff burnout and know vacays help with both. Another tactic: Remember your days off are part of your compensation. You’ve earned them, so don’t give back your benefits.

### Coordinate With Your S.O.

Constantly putting work before the person who hears all about it (all the time) means fewer opportunities to build positive memories together, warns Meg Batterson, a psychotherapist and relationship counselor. There’s never a “perfect” time to get away, and synchronizing two schedules is harder than dealing with one, but it *is* doable. Make a point to sit down and look at your calendars—especially at pivotal moments, like when one of you gets a new job or at the start of the summer—and block off some dates, even if they’re months away.

### Consider a Long Weekend

Stuck with just one week off? As with veggies, every little bite—or in this case, day—is good for you. “Look for opportunities to leverage existing holiday weekends to get a few extra days away,” suggests Denis. Even a short break benefits your mental health, says Jessica de Bloom, PhD, a research fellow at the University of Tampere in Finland who studies vacation. No matter how long your trip is, the mid-

### YOUR VACAY BY THE NUMBERS



The percentage of millennials who say they shame coworkers who take time off, compared to 24 percent of people in older generations. *No mas!* Support your colleagues and they’ll likely do the same for you—not to mention, help cover your workload while you’re out.

# LIFE

dle of it tends to be the most relaxing (so make the most of that Saturday!).

## Save All the Money

Plenty of contractors, tutors, waitresses, and other hourly employees don't get paid vacation. If that's you, try budgeting more or picking up extra hours or shifts to make up for the time (read: money) that you'll miss while on your trip, says money-saving expert Andrea Woroch. Consider starting a separate vacation savings account with your current bank or using an app like Digit or Money Box Pro. "Goal-oriented savings accounts allow you to visualize your progress when working toward a specific target," says Woroch. "That keeps you motivated. And on some apps, you can track your progress and even share your goals on social media, so your network can help keep you accountable."

## EXIT GRACEFULLY

### Feel Out Office Etiquette

Before booking anything, consider talking to coworkers who've been on the job longer than you have, suggests Cynthia Marco-Scanlon, PhD, interim director at John Carroll University's Center for Career Services. They may have learned valuable lessons about the best times to take off or how your boss will react to your request. Ask them how many days they usually use in a row and how far in advance they vocalize their plans.

### Set Reminders

You might think you should downplay your big trip (no one loves a braggart, right?). But actually, preparing your manager and coworkers—early and often—is a better bet. "Remind people of your upcoming vacation, put it on their calendars, and don't forget to set up your out-of-office replies," says Denis. Do a walk-through of your day with anyone who might be filling in for you. Don't forget to let clients (or any other people you work with outside the com-

## YOUR VACAY BY THE NUMBERS

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30

The percentage of workers who worry no one will be able to do their jobs when they're out. Chillax: A well-functioning office shouldn't disintegrate in your absence. Before you go, figure out who will take point for you on any projects or shifts. Then meet with each person to walk through a game plan.

LIFE

STRESS  
REDUCTION  
CAN BE HABIT-  
FORMING.

# Infinity!

The number of days off some tech companies, like PayPal, are now offering salaried employees. (No need to drool. Informal surveys suggest that employees with unlimited vacation take no more time off than they would otherwise.)

pany) know you'll be out, and give them a point person to check in with.

## Lay Down Some Rules

"A lot of evidence shows that checking e-mails and calling into work is a bad idea—and may erase the well-being benefits of time off," warns de Bloom. So do everything you can to go offline. If you must check in with work, set up guidelines in advance. Example: Plan to check your e-mail every night at 5 p.m. or call in every other morning. Unless there's an emergency, don't start responding to messages.

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# LIFE

## MAXIMIZE YOUR BREAK

### Explore a New Place

To really energize your mind, travel somewhere you haven't been before. Broadening your proverbial horizons and learning new things are key for amping creativity and gaining fresh perspectives, says Robert Epstein, PhD, a senior research psychologist at the American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology. The resulting mental boost could help you crush it at work when you return.

### Do What You Want!

Feel like lazing around on the beach all day...or taking jam-packed tours of local sights? There's no wrong activity when it comes to milking the mind-body benefits of vacation. Experts say what matters is that your itinerary consists of things you *want* to do.

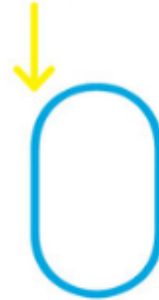
### Live in the Moment

Ditch the selfie stick and try (like, *really* try) to think less about documenting every single moment, especially during meals. "Research shows that the mere presence of a phone on the table while people are talking can make them feel less connected to one another," says Emma Seppälä, PhD, science director of Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education and author of *The Happiness Track*.

### Welcome Brainstorms

"Vacations make us think differently," says Epstein. That means you may well cook up new ideas or have a breakthrough on a tricky problem while traveling. He suggests packing a notebook and jotting down thoughts as they come to you. Epstein calls this process capturing, and it's a great way to foster creativity before you get back into the zone at work.

## YOUR VACAY BY THE NUMBERS



Number of paid days off U.S. companies are required to give you by law. If your benefits are less than great, try negotiating for more time off. Explain that a vacation will help you to be a higher performer.



# LIFE

## PROLONG THE GLOW

### Plan Your Reentry

“I don’t like to schedule too many appointments after a vacation,” says Marco-Scanlon. Instead, she uses day one to read up on what she’s missed. Follow her lead by blocking off at least the morning of your first day back to catch up on e-mails and calls. If you don’t have the luxury of planning your own schedule, consider getting to work a little earlier than usual for a few days post-trip.

### Stay Off the Grid

Resist the urge to hunt down every Insta photo and tweet-storm that happened while you were gone. “Chances are, nothing drastic occurred in your absence,” says Seppälä. “Use this as an opportunity to jump-start a new relationship with your social-media feeds...meaning, only checking them one or two times a day, so you can reclaim your life.” Repeat after us: *I can do this.*

### Switch Up Your Workspace

Remember those new perspectives? Hang tight to them now that you’re parked at your desk. “Static environments are bad for creativity,” says Epstein, so hang photos or souvenirs (think: postcards, seashells) nearby and swap them out regularly. The more frequent and dramatic your changes in environment, the bigger the mental boost may be.

### Keep the Fun Going...

...Before, during, and after work. Integrate as many vacation-like activities into your everyday life as possible, says de Bloom. “Go for a morning swim, eat outside at lunch, or take an evening walk in nature,” she suggests. Or, really, squeeze in *anything* that’s entertaining or relaxing (meditation podcasts and chats with colleagues count). Studies show that the benefits of vacation can fade as soon as a week after returning to your daily grind. Keeping the vibe alive can extend your bliss—until your next trip. ■

## YOUR VACAY BY THE NUMBERS



The percentage of Americans who say they've done vacation research at work, according to a survey from Travelzoo. The sheer act of planning a vacation can boost happiness, so get on it (*maaaybe* during lunch).

