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Maximize the Joy of Travel

FAMILY FEATURES

Many facets of travel – the anticipation, the experience and even the return trip – can enhance your mood. It can create an element of the unexpected and give you the opportunity to gain new, memorable experiences.

To explore the connection between happiness and travel, and what makes a destination joyous, Bank of America, Condé Nast Traveler and happiness expert Shawn Achor created “The Joy Index.” Achor delved into the psychology of experiences that awe people and the physiology of adventure to explain the relationship between joy and travel, and identified the 10 most joyous places in the world. He also shared the following tips on how to make travel attainable and maximize the joy of your vacations:



Shawn Achor

Predictors of Happiness

The Joy Index combined Achor’s studies on travel and happiness with existing research from organizations, including the United Nations and Gallup, to identify six “happiness factors” based on the psychology of joy and travel: environment, wellbeing, culture, connection, adventure and wonder. These six factors, which encompass everything from weather to geography and local food to the friendliness of the culture, can have an impact on the joy experienced when visiting a destination.

While these factors may indicate how joyful a destination can be, the happiness you experience during travel and in everyday life must be cultivated rather than found.

“The three greatest predictors of happiness are gratitude, social connection and meaning,” Achor said. “If you have an amazing life but are not grateful for it, you do not have access to happiness. These three things scientifically improve happiness, but not just for a moment – they change the lens through which you view the world.”

Travel’s Effect on Happiness

Travel allows you to discover something completely new and unique, which is why it can bring so much joy. According to Achor, the human brain craves novelty.

“The new experiences we have when we travel help us gain perspective and remind us that the world is bigger than our everyday problems,” Achor

makes us joyful is the connection we experience. Traveling allows us to disconnect from our everyday lives and reconnect with the friends and family we are traveling with, as well as locals we meet along the way.”

One way travelers are honing in on experiencing this social connection is through embracing the sharing economy. According to data aggregated from Bank of America’s more than 40 million credit and debit accounts, the number of accounts making a home-sharing purchase increased 57 percent in 2016 compared to 2015.

Maximizing Joy on Vacation

Remembering to be grateful is crucial for staying in the moment and finding joy in your trips.

“When it comes to planning vacations, we get too focused on the stress of the details,” Achor said. “Try to think about how lucky we are to travel and experience the world. When things don’t go your way, such as an inconvenient rainy day, see it as an opportunity to make your experience even more memorable.”

Putting yourself out there and engaging with the local culture can also be crucial for maximizing the joy of traveling.

“Once you’re on your trip, one way to increase your happiness is to go back to that social connection. Get out of your comfort zone and talk to strangers,” Achor said. “Learning about different stories of people with different cultures than our own helps us realize and understand some of the cool similarities we share and interesting differences based on our backgrounds.”

Making Travel Attainable

Achor stressed that happiness can be cultivated wherever you are, but if you want to get the most out of a vacation, planning is crucial.

“My research has shown that planning more than a month ahead can lead to happier, healthier and more productive vacations,” Achor said.

Even though traveling can help increase happiness, many opt out of going on trips because of the cost. This, too, is where planning can help.

One way travelers can start saving up for their next vacation is by using a travel rewards credit card like the Bank of America Travel Rewards credit card, which lets you earn points on all purchases that can be redeemed toward travel-related purchases. Your morning coffee and other everyday purchases can help get you closer and closer to affording a joyful vacation.

To learn more about The Joy Index, including the most joyful travel destinations in the world for 2017, visit cntraveler.com/joyindex.

The Most Joyful Destinations of 2017

Happy places make for happy stays. According to “The Joy Index,” these are the top five happiest travel destinations for 2017.

- 1. Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada**
A perennial front-runner in world happiness rankings, diversity and the grandeur of its natural landscapes, including the remote cliffs and fjords of Newfoundland and Labrador, are what set Canada apart to visitors.
- 2. Shanghai, China**
The city of 24 million is a mashup of formal and informal, modern and historic with visible signs of China’s history of tectonic change.
- 3. Aarhus, Denmark**
The European Union’s 2017 Capital of Culture, Aarhus is an architectural marvel and culinary hotbed with a cluster of talented, young chefs.
- 4. Madagascar**
Often described as the eighth continent, Madagascar is an unspoiled melting pot of cultures featuring deserts, baobabs, rainforests and 3,000 miles of turquoise coastlines.
- 5. Big Island, Hawaii**
Big Island’s sheer capacity for wild, natural wonder is the result of geological events that are still underway; Hawaii grows every year as lava from the Kilauea volcano cools in the sea.



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