

Happiness is ... looking forward to your vacation

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It takes more than a vacation to make people happy. Indeed, vacationers tend to be happier than non-vacationers in the lead up to their break, but once they are back, there is very little difference between the two groups' levels of happiness. These findings¹ by Jeroen Nawijn from Erasmus University in Rotterdam and NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences and his team are published online in Springer's journal *Applied Research in Quality of Life*.

Research to date suggests that vacations are associated with a number of [positive feelings](#). Jeroen Nawijn's study sets out to answer four questions. Firstly, are vacationers happier than non-vacationers? Secondly, does a trip boost happiness? Thirdly, if a trip does boost happiness, how long does this effect last? And lastly, what are the roles of length of time away and [vacation stress](#)?

The author assessed how vacations impact happiness among 1,530 Dutch adults, 974 of whom took a vacation during the study period. In particular, Nawijn looked at differences in happiness levels between vacationers and those not going on vacation, as well as whether a trip away boosts post-trip happiness.

Jeroen Nawijn found that those planning a vacation were happier than those not going away, and suggests that this may be due to their [anticipation](#) of the break. Following a trip, there was no difference between vacationers' and non-vacationers' happiness, unless the time off was very relaxing, in which case the slightly increased happiness was

particularly noticeable in the first two weeks back. The effect wore off completely after eight weeks.

The author explains that it is not surprising that trips do not have a prolonged effect on happiness, since most vacationers return to work or other daily tasks and therefore fall straight back into their normal routine fairly quickly.

Jeroen Nawijn concludes by looking at possible implications from three points of view. From an individual point of view, he suggests that people are likely to derive more happiness from two or more short breaks spread throughout the year, rather than having just a single longer vacation once a year. From a policy perspective, in order for families to be able to stagger their trips throughout the year, the school system would need to become more flexible. And lastly, from a managerial point of view, the author would advise tourism managers to provide vacation products which are as stress-free as possible.

More information: Nawijn J, Marchand MA, Veenhoven R, Vingerhoets AJ (2010). Vacationers happier, but most not happier after a holiday. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*.

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