

MINDFULNESS ON HOLIDAY

(Padraig O'Morain)

Whether you holiday with others or alone, mindfulness can make the experience better.

Pack these tips – some are from my book *Mindfulness on the Go* – in your travel bag:

ON THE PLANE

Bells, announcements, trollies, safety routines: How can you possibly be mindful on the plane, an environment which seems to be built to distract, bore and cramp? We'll look at some ideas in a moment but first,

Nervous about flying?

I am grateful to reader Nicola, who read an earlier version of this post, for this tip in the comments section: "I love travelling but don't enjoy flying, especially take off and landing. I now use mindfulness during these times, focusing on my breath and the feeling of my feet on the floor. It really helps me to stay more relaxed and I gain a sense of control whilst in the air."

I would also suggest that you breathe with your tummy and not your chest as tummy-breathing is more relaxing. Ordinary, gentle breathing is what you should aim for: gulping air and breathing too heavily can make you even more nervous. Give more awareness to your out-breath as this will also help you relax.

Ok, you're up and flying. To bring some mindful calm to the experience, try these:

Connect with your posture

Notice your feet against the floor, your back against the back of the seat. Notice what your hands are doing. Practice relaxing a little more than you are relaxed already. If you encounter an area of tension, rest your attention on it and watch it relax.

Practise a little mindfulness of breathing

Follow your out-breath all the way out and allow the in-breath to occur absolutely without effort. This is especially useful if you are trying to catch a snooze.

Listen to a mindfulness exercise on your smartphone

You'll find lots of good mindfulness apps for smartphones. Insight Timer is one. Listening to a ten minute mindfulness practice on the phone could help you get to your destination in good shape and in a mellow mood.

ON THE TRAIN

Trains still have a romantic image. But they can also be very unromantic places, crowded, noisy, and irritating. In these circumstances, a little mindfulness can get you to the end of the journey in a calmer mood than otherwise:

Look at the passing scene as if for the first time

For most of us, if the railway company papered over the windows so that we could not look out, it would make no difference. Have you noticed that on our first couple of journeys we may appreciate the passing countryside but soon take it for granted? Now and then, connect mindfully with the passing scene as an antidote to forgetfulness.

Connect with your anchor point

Notice where in your body you are most aware of your breathing. Where is that point? It could be at the tip of your nose, inside your nostrils, in your chest, tummy or elsewhere. You can look on this as an anchor point which you can use to connect you in with the experience of mindfulness at any time. How? From time to time, on that train journey, connect with your anchor point and notice your breathing at that point for a while. You'll find that on a crowded train this can actually give you a sense of spaciousness.

Feel the rhythm of the train

Modern trains don't chug along like the old romantic steam engines but they still run according to a rhythm. So tune out of all that is going on inside the railway carriage or on your phone and rest your attention for a little while on the rhythm of the train

IN THE ACCOMMODATION

Travel means hotels, apartments, tents, boats – places in other words. Try these mindfulness practices as part of your hotel experience:

Try one minute of mindfulness breathing

Now and then, take a minute to be mindful of your breathing. Sit on the side of the bed and focus your attention on the out-breath for about a minute (don't worry about getting the time right, guess). Return your awareness to the breath whenever your mind wanders.

Have a morning ritual

Whether or not you welcome the arrival of morning, a little mindfulness ritual will help get your day off to a good start. This can be as simple as forming the intention to be mindful as you're getting out of the bed.

Notice meals

Paying a little attention to the taste and aroma of your food can enhance the experience and in that way even gives you better value for money.

Take a walk

If you're staying in the same place for a while, seek out a pleasant place for a walk. Taking a familiar, mindful, pleasant walk can be very refreshing. It can also provide a good interval for awareness and presence before you get into busier holiday activities.