

Fooling Yourself: Diary of a Staycation

By Charles McGarvey



Traveling is so 2019. But vacations will never go out of style. And if there's ever been a time in history that has made us all want to take a vacation more than 2020, I don't want to know about it.

Now more than ever, we need to get away from it all and give ourselves a chance to reset and take a break. This pandemic has us rethinking a lot and that means vacations too.

But what to do when you can't just pick a beach and go? Well, it's time you rethink the value of a good 'ol *staycation*. That's right, the latest trend in (non)travel can be the vacation of your dreams with just a few easy steps.

The hallmarks of any good vacation can be distilled to a few key components: sleeping late, pigging out, relaxing, indulging, and not checking email. And as long as you get that vacation feeling, that I'm-actually-excited-to-go-back-to-work-because-I-feel-so-rested-and-renewed vacation feeling, where you do those things really doesn't matter. After all, isn't a vacation just a state of mind?

Step one is to identify your vacation triggers. On past trips, what vehicles have helped you to reach your happy place? And don't say airplanes because this is a *staycation* — you're not going anywhere. I'm talking figurative vehicles. A good book, a fruity drink, comfy clothes, familiar tunes, a jaunty outfit that you wouldn't normally wear — everyone has their things.

But how to make a staycation not feel like quarantine?

When you're staycating in the same place where you quarantined, it's important to trick yourself. You're not holed up in fear with the door barricaded, glued to the news, obsessively taking toilet paper inventory — you're relaxing at home, casually allowing yourself the luxuries of a holiday, avoiding the news, and feeling confident in your paper products supply. And you're not checking email. See the difference?

I recently took a seven-day staycation like a true professional. I think my diary will help you discover the mind tricks necessary to lead you to that sweet spot between real and imaginary. If you're like me, by the end of your staycation you'll be more than ready to go back to work.

Day 1

What's one of the things we love most about Denver? Roof decks! If you are fortunate enough to have a roof over your head and you live in Denver, chances are you've figured out a way to hang out on top of it. And if you can see the mountains, even just a peek, chances are you've found a way to get all of your friends up there at some point too. Well, my apartment complex does indeed have a roof deck, but on day one of my staycation I find it packed with people. I've been sequestered for many months now, so the thought of all that potential human interaction gives me the jitters. And for a vacation, jitters just won't do. Then I remember that my apartment complex also has a parking garage. And that parking garage has a top level, aka, my own private roof deck. Sure, I'll have to share the space with a few parked cars, some random piles of broken glass, and

a scattering of pigeons, but I'm nothing if not adaptable. My destination has been decided. *Fantastique!*

So, if vacations are a state of mind, I'll need more than the top level of a parking garage to take me to that altered state. It just so happens I own a Hawaiian-style shirt with bright canary yellow hibiscus flowers overlapping with birds of paradise in rocket ship red. Loud is an insufficient adjective for this shirt. Deafening is more like it. The perfect piece of attire to put me in the vacation mood.

For me, magazines are essential travel items. One of my favorite activities is perusing the magazine wall at Hudson News before boarding my flight. I invariably drop serious cash to ensure I have a variety of pages to flip through. *GQ* for things I want, *Condé Nast Traveler* for places I want to go, and *Vanity Fair* for gossip and general aspiration. Magazines never fail to invoke the excitement and anticipation of travel. I subscribe to each of these publications, so I'm all set. No, they won't be coupled with that experience of collecting them from the rack for twenty times the price, but paramount to a successful staycation is lying to yourself. Collecting them from the mailbox is just as fun. *Yay!*

Piña coladas have a magical ability to transport me to a tropical attitude. When the pandemic first hit the fan, I stocked up. Canned goods, frozen foods, boxes and boxes of cake mix, and booze. Lots of booze. And not just your wines, beers, and clear spirits, but also ancillary liquors like amaretto, Cointreau, and Kahlua. I figured, if I'm going to be locked up for an indefinite period of time weathering a once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic, I want the option of a White Russian. Soon thereafter I remembered that I don't like to drink alone, so many months later it's all still there, decorating my cabinet. But this is a staycation — time to celebrate! I fire up the blender with pineapple juice, rum, Coco Lopez cream of coconut, and plenty of ice.

I slather on some sunscreen, don a bathing suit, the aforementioned Hawaiian-style shirt, a pair of flip flops, sunglasses, and a somewhat dusty Panama hat I found in the back of my closet. I grab my stack of magazines and my frosty adult beverage and to the parking garage I go! The excitement and anticipation of travel is very much with me as I climb the concrete stairs to my perfect staycation location.

A few hours in the sun later and I'm feeling very relaxed. I've made my way through all of the magazines and dogeared a bunch of pages of things, places, and people I plan to explore further someday. I already feel bathed in optimism. The pigeons turned out to be quite a bit more curious than I had expected, but we all got along. The piña coladas and the unobstructed Denver sun have made me sleepy, so I go back down to my apartment for a nap. What a perfect day! And I didn't check my email once. #Winning.

Day 2

I sleep late and lounge a bit before jumping back into my staycation. Then I remember, lounging and sleeping late are fundamental to a successful staycation. Look at me, I've only been awake an hour and I'm already accomplishing! Yesterday

was so enjoyable that I decide to go back up to my private roof deck. This time I pair my swim trunks with a t-shirt covered in pink flamingos and some extra-large, white plastic sunglasses a girlfriend of mine left behind. I feel very whimsical as I settle back into my relaxation on the roof with the pigeons. The sounds of splashing and laughing from the swimming pool just beside the parking garage really help to complete the fantasy. Now, I know what you're thinking. "Wait, if he has a swimming pool, why isn't he down there instead of on top of the parking garage?" Apartment management has removed all of the lounge chairs in an effort to, well, discourage lounging. They figured, who wants to hang out on a hard beach of bricks? Turns out, everybody. And without wearing masks.

Just a quick side note

People talk about their right to not wear a mask. Ok, I get it. Only problem is that your right to not wear your mask is infringing on my right to stay alive. This reminds me of something Fran Lebowitz once wrote: "Your right to wear a mint-green polyester leisure suit ends where it meets my eyes." But I digress.

So with the sounds of reckless abandon floating up from the pool below and my second piña colada conquered, I nod off happily. I wake up some time later feeling a little pink from the sun. I guess the tide is coming in. I head home.

Day 3

I wake up with a significant sunburn. I decide to spend the day inside indulging. I read, I watch some TV, I snack, I text with friends. This is going to be a wonderful day. I also decide to finally get around to a few things I've been putting off. I hang a couple of pictures, order some home goods online, and rearrange my sock drawer. I'm sure some of you are thinking that sock drawer rearranging doesn't sound much like a vacation activity but, for me, organizing is an indulgence, so there. I'm so pleased with my sock drawer that I tackle that top shelf in my closet with all the sweaters. Very rewarding. I order way too much Thai food. I say to myself, "this is great! I'll have lunch and dinner for tomorrow." Done and done.

Day 4

After a few hours of texting with friends and eating breakfast while still in bed (*très décadent!*), I head out for a leisurely walk around the neighborhood. I realize my sunburn is hurting pretty badly, so after only a couple of blocks out, I decide to abort the mission. No worries, this is vacation — no, better — staycation. I can do whatever I want. *Except check email.*

Continuing with the pigging out portion of my staycation, I decide to bake lemon squares. I've never made lemon squares before, but I had never made banana bread, sourdough bread, zucchini bread, or hand sanitizer before this year either, so I'm not intimidated. After mixing everything together, I realize that I don't have the correct sized pan. My only pan is larger than the recipe calls for. Give up? Yeah, right. I place some metal tongs on the oven rack to prop up one side of the pan so that all the lemony goo slides to one side and...*voilà!* The final product comes out as more of a lemon cobbler than a square, but the

deliciousness is fully formed. I eat the whole thing.

I'm so pleased with myself following my lemon cobbler creation that I decide to go for the sock drawer again, this time in a daring new way which features folded pairs side-by-side instead of the staked rolled pairs that I've traditionally done. Like colors are still grouped together, of course. Quarantine has changed me, but I'm not yet an animal.

Somehow, I'm still hungry. I treat myself to a pizza.

Day 5

My sunburn kept me up much of the night. I decide that the sweaters I rearranged on day three belong in a drawer, so I remove t-shirts from a large bottom drawer of my dresser and replace them with the sweaters. I neatly stack the t-shirts on the former sweater shelf. I'm a genius. I spend much of the afternoon texting with friends and watching the news. I'm becoming aggravated, so I switch to that overly wrought Ryan Murphy Netflix series I've been meaning to watch. It's great, but I feel a little guilty for watching so much television. I vow to only watch one episode. When it finishes, the next episode starts automatically, so I figure I can do one more.

Six hours later I order a pizza before beginning episode eight.

Day 6

The t-shirts are falling off that top shelf in the closet every time I pull one out. I put jeans and shorts on hangers in order to clear another shelf. It's satisfying to be inventive. I guess. I'm sick of looking at all that Thai food every time I open the refrigerator (which is at least eighty times a day), so I throw it all out. I order another pizza but this time with extra everything and a side of ranch. I stay in my pajamas and eat it while sitting on the floor in front of the TV. I'm pretty tired as I was up until 2 a.m. finishing that Netflix show. I thought it was overall pretty disappointing, yet somehow felt like my life would be torture if I didn't make it to the end.

Likewise, the new sock arrangement isn't working out. If they're folded, they get separated. I only wear argyle socks, so pairs need to stay together. I'm such an idiot. I'm feeling pretty frustrated as I roll each pair up and toss them back into the drawer. I look around and think, "now what?"

Day 7

It's finally almost over. My sunburn is peeling and I feel curiously unrested. Now not even Leslie Jordan's Instagram is lifting my spirits. I begin to fear that I've actually just been texting with a sympathetic algorithm this whole time. I step on the scale in my bathroom and instead of showing me numbers it just flashes, "FAT, FAT, FAT." There's now a pile of t-shirts on the floor of my closet. Quarantine is the worst. I mean, staycation. Whatever.

I open my email. There are 563 unread messages in my inbox. I've got to get out of here. 🍷