

# WORKING FROM HOLIDAY

*If the novelty of Zoom calls from your kitchen table and a 30-second commute to the sofa has worn off, then it could be time for a change of scenery. Amel Mukhtar investigates the growing trend of working abroad. Illustration by Tishk Barzanji*

I haven't had the chance to spend four weeks in Italy since I was a student," says Emily FitzRoy, founder of bespoke travel agency Bellini Travel. When its office shut and schools closed last March, she realised she had the opportunity to work and educate her eight and 11-year-old daughters from wherever she pleased. The moment lockdown eased in July, FitzRoy took her family to Tuscany, then the Amalfi Coast, and extended her usual one-week holiday to a month's stay. "I worked every morning. It just made sense." It meant that along with dutifully filling their prescribed maths worksheets, her children were also learning Italian, pasta-making, even crafting their own bath salts. "It was heaven," says FitzRoy.

Now that many of us are no longer beholden to the office, "working from holiday" is a trend that FitzRoy has watched swell among her clients. If we don't need to leave our homes to work, then why not make our homes somewhere we can start the day with a morning swim, and end with an al fresco supper.

Take George, a finance worker, and his husband, who were on holiday in Rome. With another lockdown in Italy a looming possibility, they decided to stay and work from there. FitzRoy located a "generous-size" palazzo – even finding them a local PA and "micro team" to liaise with his London office assistants. Before each workday, a leading art historian took them around cobbled streets in a guided tour focused on a different artist each week.

A perk to the pause in business as usual is that many of the most highly coveted and in-demand hotspots and activities are suddenly within reach. There is currently "this huge amount of flexibility", FitzRoy explains. The apartment, usually fully booked, could be extended another few weeks at a whim. The art expert, whose busy schedule typically makes reservation impossible without up to a year's notice, was arranged last minute. This quietening also makes the typically tourist-heavy destinations the ideal place to socially distance. Ileana von Hirsch, founder of Five Star Greece, who connects clients with a wide range of paradisaical luxury villas and yachts across the Greek islands (with Wi-Fi always a given), saw a rare surge of interest in the archipelago outside of popular summer months. "The beaches are empty; the bays are empty," she says. "If you've got a villa, it's very much like having your own country house."

Outside of Europe, remote spots in Kenya, Madagascar and Tanzania are proving popular, too, with the additional draw of a time difference that puts you on the front foot. With Kenya three hours ahead, you can experience a full morning of activities – such as a sunrise safari – and still squeeze work in before your colleagues are up, explains African-focused luxury travel company Abercrombie & Kent. "You can impress your office back in England by having your work done early," agrees Von Hirsch. Morale, as she explains, also tends to be higher when your lunch break is a sunny Mediterranean Sea swim, or a flower-filled Cretan hike. "They find they're far more productive."

Bookings for stays longer than 10 days have jumped to 300 per cent of the normal rate at resorts such as Joali in the Maldives, with many requesting work set-ups alongside their spa treatments. These new demands range from secure internet access to nutritionists and personal trainers to maintain wellness over the extended time away. Countries are picking up on the interest and seizing it, looking to make up for the fall in normal tourism. Barbados, Croatia, Dubai and Bermuda are among the hot destinations offering visas for digital nomads, with the Canary Islands launching a campaign, and Greece offering tax breaks to draw remote workers.

Hotels are following suit. Taking advantage of Croatia's scheme, the Hotel Dubrovnik Palace and Hotel Excelsior offer bespoke workspace options, a laundry service, and dining discounts to those staying over three weeks. Beau-Rivage in Switzerland offers a package with business lunches, fitness centre access, free parking, and a lake view included. Or the Grand Hotel Tremezzo in Lake Como has called holidayers to "Work at the Grand" – promoting its early morning infinity-poolside classes and the high-speed Wi-Fi that you can connect to even from its park and private beach.

The opportunity to improve work-life balance by working from abroad is a silver lining in an otherwise turbulent and taxing time – a chance for office workers to release some of the stress of the situation in a temporary home away from home, as Von Hirsch says, "in a place with a much nicer climate and better food". Particularly for those who, up until now, have felt too constrained by heavy workloads or limited holiday time, FitzRoy says, "This whole new world has opened up." ■

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### GRAN CANARIA

Conveniently in the same time zone as Britain, Gran Canaria is full of co-working spaces and hotels. Hike up a volcanic crater at Caldera de Bandama or through the pinelands of Tamadaba, then return to the Baobab Beach Resort's seven pools, waterfall grotto and excellent Wi-Fi.

### CROATIA

With its new digital nomad visa, Croatia is an ideal WFH destination. You can tour its archipelago by boat and explore the local area at each port. Packed with history and only an hour ahead, there's time to wander the Roman amphitheatres, palaces and walled towns pre- or post-work.

### BARBADOS

Why not head to the Caribbean? Stay for up to a year in beautiful Barbados with the Welcome Stamp visa, and discover Rihanna's homeland haunts. La Maison Michelle, a black-owned resort, offers an on-site chef to whip up Bajan fare served poolside at the stunning seven-suite villa.

