

## September 2021 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames Health Benefits of Our Memories of Travel

“Memories of summer days, sunny holidays, adventures and distant lands all harbour an incredible force that we can use to our advantage.” Lutz Jäncke

Recalling memories of our travel adventures can play an important part in helping us weather this current pandemic and promote a sense of well-being. Everyday life is largely, though not exclusively, controlled by subconscious processes, meaning we're no longer perceptive of the world around us unless we specifically address important aspects.

Why do travel memories become so engrained in our minds? When we travel, we rid ourselves from everyday routines and focus our cognitive resources on all the “peripheral” things. We are captivated by objects or natural events we don't see or experience in our everyday lives. These moments are unique and important. We have “stored” them somewhere in our brains. Whether it be certain smells, typical noises from a location, or the taste of exotic food, we weave these diverse travel experiences into stories which become deeply engrained in our memory. “And the most remarkable thing about these memory episodes is that we're able to retain them particularly well – a skill our brain has become a specialist in through the course of evolution.”

The neurological basis for this is as follows: imagine the information is stored in our memory system like a kind of network. If part of this network is remembered (activated), other parts of the network become activated too. “First, it's the 'memory nodes' that are directly adjacent to the memory you want to remember, then it's the more distant ones. The further the respective nodes are from the consciously remembered 'memory nodes', the less they are activated. In this way, you can move from one memory to those lying deeper and deeper – and relive those wonderful memories” from your travels. Researchers have found that the main centers of the brain's reward circuit are located along the medial forebrain bundle of the brain. Explicit memory is located in the hippocampus, the neo-cortex, and the amygdala.

What do we remember from travel? It can vary greatly and depends on many individual needs. One study found that many travelers remember experiences involving nature. “While famous structures are also up there in terms of the hierarchy of holiday memories, they don't constitute the favourite memories.” Travelers are good at remembering special social contacts made during travels.

Why is it that we seldom remember the negative experiences? Research suggests that since we are on holiday travel, “our 'fear mode' has virtually been switched off. People generally do not feel at risk. Memory is primarily taken up with pleasant and positive information. Maybe it is because the sheer volume of positive travel adventures leaves little room for unpleasant memories.

How can you access important memories within your brain? The best way to do it is by initially focusing on key stimuli from various travels. In addition to pictures, souvenirs and videos, key stimuli can also include conversations with friends and acquaintances about events from your travels. “You don't necessarily have to share the exact same experiences. Roughly similar experiences will suffice to bring back those supposedly buried memories.” So, sit back, and let your mind visualize and “experience” some of your past travels. Note feelings of pleasure and delight as you recall a travel adventure.

Source: <https://www.nowtolove.co.nz/health/mind/why-travel-memories-are-an-important-part-of-our-personality-41070>