



## Take a creative staycation

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*Carving out time to work on creative projects doesn't require an artist's residency. A staycation is cheaper, simpler and focuses attention where you need it.*



The staycation - a vacation spent at home – is becoming an increasingly popular option for burnout creatives. Instead of packing their bags and dealing with travel stress, creative staycationers would rather stay home and take advantage of the time off to work on side projects. Or else they might simply want to enjoy the comfort of their homes to read or learn a new skill.

To optimize the time at hand though, you have to get into a staycation with the right mindset. Here's how four creatives made a productive yet enjoyable time out of their staycation.

### **Laura Ellen Scott – Time to work on a novel**

Writer and fiction writing professor Laura Ellen Scott took her first ever staycation in May 2015 in order to work on her book. While in the past she had already taken time off to write, she didn't have clear boundaries between work and play. She'd find herself taking her laptop everywhere. "Writing on the beach is like sex on the beach, best imagined than practiced."

The label "staycation" helped her to rethink the subdivision of time. Throughout her staycation, writing and recreation were co-priorities.

In term of mindset, she planned as if she had an elderly relative coming to visit. "That means making sure the house is tidy, coming up with a modest set of conversation-stimulating activities, and going to expensive restaurants. I'll write when my imaginary elderly relative takes her naps."

The staycation boosted her productivity. "I was writing a murder mystery that was a clutter of disparate scenes, and on the final day I found my theme—misconceptions of mental illness. The focus required time to concentrate, plus a deadline to achieve, which was the whole point of the staycation. From then on the writing went very quickly."

Laura also blogged about the experience and her progress during the staycation. In this way she realized that the best writing days were the ones where she could answer the question "What did I do today?" with a compound sentence. "For example: I wrote a scene, and I hiked/went to a new restaurant."

The result of the staycation has been the murder mystery called *The Mean Bone in Her Body*, which will be released near the end of 2016 by Pandamoon Publishing.

### **Richard Streitmatter-Tran – In the studio for the holidays**

Saigon-based artist Richard Streitmatter-Tran will take a staycation for the Tet holidays to re-energize. "I've become much more introverted over the recent years and going into crowds or doing small talk drains my energy. My studio is like a battery charger. I have much to watch, read and do this year."

For him this will be also a time to hone his craft: "I will work on figurative sculpture, drawing and painting. I may also sketch out some larger works I'd like to start in 2016."

He thinks the national holiday Tet is the best time to experience the city in a different light, as the normally congested streets are without vehicles. "There is a silence that only exists during this special period, so it is almost like going somewhere else. It also gives me a chance to stay inside the studio to refocus on the new year ahead. In the past I often travelled, to Singapore, Bangkok or Phnom Penh. But I'd rather avoid the airports and business and simply submerge myself in the silence of the city."

A constant traveller, Richard finds the staycation a very different experience from an art residency. "In a staycation I still have a familiar rhythm in some ways. I have the resources I usually rely on at hand. But the residence allows you to focus on making work in the studio 8-12 hours per day and depending on where you are, away from the networked world."

During a residency he feels he can put in a lot of time into one thing only, whereas at his studio he multitasks by default. "I think the experiences learned in residencies ultimately end up back in the studio."

Richard believes that if done right, a staycation might be as valuable as a trip somewhere outside. "Approaching it as a new experience or way of working, you might find that your everyday environment has something you overlooked. It's like driving fast, the periphery becomes blurred, slowing down to check out your home space might be just what you needed. Oh, and you probably save some money."

## **Tara Lynne Groth – Unplugging from work**

For freelance writer Tara Lynne Groth, staycation equals space and time to unplug. The decision of taking a staycation came after the realisation that at no point in her career she had spent quality time home. “As a freelancer and as a writer, work is never done. Something can always be revised. I wanted to relax at home surrounded by our animals and nature and not have to pack a suitcase arrange pet care, sit in airports, and the usual travel stresses.”

She knows that when your calendar is always full, it's difficult to avoid planning something, even when you're supposed to steer away from work. But to be commitment-free was vital for the success of her staycation. “Every other day of the year I am writing something and accountable to clients and editors. It was nice to have a break from that. I am toying with the idea of a 'staycation retreat' - in which case creative writing would definitely be a priority!”

She advises freelance writers who are willing to try a staycation to let their regular clients know ahead of time. “I told clients in late July or early August about my mid-September staycation. I was worried about prospective client inquiries receiving a 'Vacation Message' while I was away. If their first impression is I'm on vacation, they might think I don't take my job seriously. I made sure to include a note that it was my only non-working vacation of the year. Also, I recommend having a 'fun budget' for entertainment and funding your personal interests around town!”

The experience made her more energized when she returned to work. Now she is thinking about taking a staycation annually.

## **Tracy Durnell – Catching up on creative projects**

Graphic designer Tracy Durnell is a staycation veteran, having tried it for three times. On each staycation she feels she accomplished something important: “In 2012, I crossed off several tasks on my blog, Cascadia Inspired; in 2010, I worked on a book I was writing as well as my portfolio website.”

In retrospect, Tracy acknowledges a creative staycation is most effective to either launch or complete one large project. “Each time, I worked on a few different projects. Probably picking only one project to focus on would have been more effective.”

She stresses the importance of preparing in advance for the staycation time. To her, you must clearly outline your expectations in order to not get sidetracked or bogged down in thinking about what to do next. “Plan ahead exactly what you want to accomplish, and use the week to finish a specific deliverable if at all possible. The creative staycation should be a week of execution rather than planning.”

While cabin fever wasn't really an issue for her, she recommends getting outside for a walk to break up the day. In this respect, she highlights the importance of balancing work - even creative work - and physical and mental health.

“It's easy to get over-excited and go crazy on a creative project for a week, but it's also important to give yourself a break, especially if you don't get much time off from your day job. Rest and play - like taking an evening class or experimenting with a new technique - can really help your mental health. After all, this is still your vacation.”

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Naima Morelli is an arts writer and curator who specialized in Italian contemporary art and art from the Asia-Pacific area.

