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BLANK SPACE, BABY

The majority of Americans say they're addicted to their phones, touching them roughly 2,600 times each day. What role should they, and technology in general, play in our vacations? By Brianna Kovan

In the summer of 2018, Jenny Odell planned a solo trip to the Sierra Nevada mountains. Upon arriving, the Oakland artist found her cabin unexpectedly lacking both Wi-Fi and phone reception, and she spent 20 minutes “freaking out,” she says. “I realized that no one could contact me.” Odell had urgent emails to respond to and calls to make, but, left without other options, she settled in for an analog couple of days.

Her trip sounds idyllic, but the unplugged earlier decades it recalls feel nearly anachronistic in today's world—hence the panic. The following spring, Odell released her debut book, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Melville House), in which she critiques the “mythology of productivity,” which suggests that not only is productivity inherently good, but that our value as humans comes from what we produce. If technology allows us to be endlessly available, she posits, are we ever truly off the clock?

According to NPR journalist Celeste Headlee, social media makes taking vacations neurologically impossible. “When you're checking your Facebook feed, as far as your brain is concerned, you're not taking a vacation at all,” says Headlee, author of *Do Nothing: How to Break Away From Overworking, Overdoing, and Underliving* (March 10, Harmony Books). “When you refresh Instagram, for example, you get this little shot of dopamine, which can be accompanied by a tiny clench of muscles. You're wearing yourself out, not just cognitively but physically.”

In response, both authors turn to nature. Headlee heads into the woods. Of late, she's become a regular user of Getaway, a five-year-old company founded by a pair of Harvard Business School alums, which

has built more than 300 compact cabins (136 to 200 square feet) on the outskirts of major American cities, each outfitted with a lockbox for phones and gadgets. “I've found it takes me three nights to fully shake off the stress of Twitter,” she says. “It's that fourth morning when I truly feel refreshed. I bring a huge bag of books and my dog. I take naps. I build a fire. I do embroidery.”

Odell opts for ecological activities, like bird-watching, that connect her to native plants and wildlife. “It's important to signal your unavailability, both to yourself and to other people,” she says of time off. “It's easy to overlook that—but then watch that time get colonized.”

Across the hotel industry, resorts are offering their own antidotes. At the Kamalame Cay Private Island Resort & Residences in the Bahamas, each of the property's 27 rental units purposely comes sans Wi-Fi and television—although rentable hot spots are available. (The serenity has attracted guests such as Penélope Cruz and Nicole Kidman.) And in northern Oman, the hospitality brand Anantara tapped an ultra-remote location for the country's first outpost. Opened in 2016, the Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort sits on the edge of the Saiq Plateau and lacks any neighboring towns, as local communities moved to more accessible land decades ago. One guest credited the quietness as the Middle Eastern resort's defining luxury.

But ultimately, is a Thoreauvian lifestyle the goal? Odell says no. “The need to periodically step away is more obvious than ever. We *absolutely* require distance and time to be able to see the mechanisms we thoughtlessly submit to,” she writes. “[But] some hybrid reaction is needed. We have to be able to do both: to contemplate and participate, to leave and always come back, where we are needed.”