

## How to have a vacation when you can't leave town

**By Tricia Brown**

The demanding responsibilities of a pastor or church volunteer makes ministry burnout a very real danger and vacations a very real necessity. But for many churches, the traditional vacation season of summer is one of the busiest times in ministry. How can you “get away” when getting away seems impossible?



A summer staycation might be the inspiration you need. A staycation is a vacation spent right where you are. Instead of traveling to find a place of rest, relaxation or fun, it's finding a way to do those things from your own home or community.

### **Make it a priority**

Summer retreats are great, but if you can't take a full-fledged vacation, you may wonder if a staycation is really worth the time and effort. After all, summer happenings like vacation Bible school, family outreach, youth camps and college ministries require much time and planning. And the financial dips and volunteer shortages that come with vacationing congregations can make rest seem a luxury you simply cannot afford.

Author Susan Carier Liebel reminds professionals that rest is necessary for optimum productivity. “Without taking a respite, our work becomes ineffective,” she writes. “The truth is we get virtually nothing done, walk through our days unfocused, and certainly don’t hit the goals we’ve set for ourselves.”

Research supports the fact that vacations are essential to stress relief, productivity and good health. Even a short getaway or a vacation at home can help you physically and mentally recharge. So, here are a few suggestions for how you can get away without going far.

### **Prepare a plan**

Be intentional. Set aside time to relax. In order for a staycation to be effective, you must:

1. Change your routine
2. Turn off your electronics.
3. Do something you enjoy.
4. Relax and put work aside, even for a short time.

Maybe you cannot afford to set aside a whole week, but you may be able to do one day. What about a couple of hours every other Saturday? It’s important. Make space on the calendar, and make a plan.

### **Brainstorm things to do**

Often, the last place you explore is your own neighborhood. You may be surprised at what is available within a stone’s throw of where you spend most of your days.

- Find your local library. Ask about free or reduced-cost activities offered during the summer.
- Check out top tourist attractions or visit your local tourist center to find the “hidden gems” in your community.
- Discover national parks or disc golf courses nearby.
- Ask friends and families for suggestions.

### **Arrange activities for an afternoon**

The closer the destination, the more time you have to enjoy it. If you are not traveling, you can pack more fun into an afternoon than you might imagine. Here are a few simple ideas:

- Go to a public book signing or reading hosted by your library or a local book store. While you are there, check out the variety of writing and craft workshops often offered.
- Stop by a local park for a quick walk around the track or a picnic lunch.
- Visit a local farmer’s market or flea market and enjoy a different kind of shopping experience.
- Try a fine dining experience or an iconic eatery. Or take a walk downtown and eat from a new food truck.

- Slate a spa date. Schedule time to get your hair done, get a manicure or pedicure, or get a massage. Take time to spoil yourself.
- Take a trip to the ballpark. Catch a Major League Baseball game or visit one of the many minor league parks in America. **Craft a creative escape**

Perhaps you think that staying put during the summer is boring, but you can have fun at home. You will find lots of great staycation ideas. With a little effort, you can create an exciting — even exotic — experience in the comfort of familiar surroundings.

- Go camping. You can camp in your backyard, at a campsite or your living room. Pitch a tent, get out your sleeping bag, eat a hotdog, and make s'mores (even if you have to use the microwave)!
- Go geocaching or treasure hunting to connect to your community.
- Bring a little culture to you. Pick a country. Then order in or visit a restaurant of that particular ethnic variety. Look for representative music samples or videos related to your destination of choice. Find posters or check out books on the location, or visit a travel agency and gather brochures that can help you dream of a future trip.
- Connect with nature. Explore local natural wonders. Find a beach or go to a local water park or community pool to create your own water experience.
- Create fun experiences for your children and family to enjoy together without spending much time or money.
- Have a reading marathon. Make a list of books for Christian leaders, great Christian reads or any books that interest you. Then make it a goal to finish reading through your list before summer ends.
- Schedule a sleepover. Treat yourself and your spouse or your family to a night in a hotel. Find one that has a complimentary breakfast, a swimming pool and other amenities. If you cannot afford a hotel, ask around. Sometimes friends have houseboats, vacation homes or cabins they may be willing to loan you for a night or two.

Remember, if you need a break, it's likely that your staff does as well. Consider planning a retreat for your entire ministry staff or merging a vacation with ministry opportunities. The important thing is to carve out a little time for rest and relaxation, even when you don't have time for an out-of-town vacation.

*— Tricia Brown has been a freelance writer and editor for more than twenty years, ghost-writing and editing for individuals as well as for health, education and religious organizations. She enjoys reading, writing and public speaking commitments in which she teaches and encourages other women*