Summer is suddenly upon us. Can school vacations be far behind? Time to catch up with your studies, dispose off pending tasks, or perhaps visit relatives and friends or just go out and enjoy the world and enjoy time with family. But do holidays and travel help you in any way or make you happier? Is there a scientific basis to it?

Well, two long-term studies have suggested that taking holidays may actually lower your risk of cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and even premature coronary death (Eaker et al., 1992; Gump & Matthews, 2000). Then there is the ‘Framingham Heart Study’, a study of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and Boston University in USA, which started in 1948 examining healthy adults every year and is now on its third generation. This study also identified infrequent holidays as an important risk factor for heart diseases. Japanese researchers led by K. Tarumi (1998), who studied participants aged 20–60 years, also found that people who go on vacation regularly generally have a healthier lifestyle.

In fact, Dr. Thomas Gilovich of the Cornell University has found that spending money on experiences brings lasting happiness than spending money on material objects. People “adapt” to physical objects, he says, which bring decreasing amounts of happiness as time goes. On the other hand, holiday and travel experiences are looked back upon with joy. In his paper published in Experimental Social Psychology, Gilovich says that while the happiness from material purchases diminishes over time, experiences become an ingrained part of our identity.

Some scientists suggest that travel even lifts you out of your despondent mood. A group of scientists led by Terry Hartig of the Uppsala University in Sweden studied monthly anti-depressant prescriptions in Sweden between 1993 and 2005 and found that the more people took vacations at the same time, the more prescriptions dropped exponentially. Hartig calls it “collective restoration.”

Of course, a vacation will not do away with all your problems in life and at work. But there is enough scientific evidence to show that a holiday can have a soothing effect on your health and wellbeing and it could also positively affect your work performance, giving you a new perspective to the task and job at hand.

Have a happy holiday!

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