

The ultimate holiday



WE ALL NEED a holiday from time to time. It's just good to get away, relax and recharge the batteries.

In my job it can be difficult to switch off completely. A war in Georgia or Gaza doesn't respect August (the holy holiday month of Europe) or Christmas. Fortunately, I've been blessed with the capacity to switch gears quite quickly.

Over the years I've tried to figure out the ingredients of a perfect holiday. My tastes have changed, but one thing has remained constant: I want to travel, even though I spend a third of the year on the road (or in the air) for work.

When I was young, we used to go skiing in the Alps during the winters and spend a few weeks on a tiny boat in the Finnish archipelago during the summers. We even drove across Europe a couple of times. My most memorable childhood vacation was a trip to North America where I spent the summer with three different families at the tender age of 13.

When I got a bit older it was all about visiting interesting places around the world. Good friends, inexpensive food and wine guaranteed a successful trip. These days the good friendships remain, but the quality of the food and wine has been upgraded.

I find that I need four breaks a year. The first one comes at Christmas. After a long dark autumn I simply need the sun.

This year we had the ultimate sports holiday at Club La Santa on Lanzarote: a shortish flight, virtually no time difference and guaranteed good weather.

The second break comes six weeks later

and in Finland is pretty much determined by the kids' winter vacation. The Alps are still my preferred destination. A dose of mountain air and sunshine combined with telemarking ensures that a beer tastes good in the evening.

The Easter break in Finland is short

There's nothing like cross-country skiing in the spring snow of Finnish Lapland.

and sweet. And there's only one place to spend it: Finnish Lapland. There's nothing like cross-country skiing in the spring snow of the northern mountains.

In Finland most people take their summer holidays in June and July. If you haven't visited Finland at midsummer, you should. It's difficult to forget your first white night, when the sun barely sets.

I tend to take a couple of weeks off around July-August. In the past few years our family has taken a special liking to Italy, but anything around the Mediterranean will do. Planning the holiday and dreaming of the destination is part of the fun.

So, what is the ultimate holiday? Simple, really. Travel somewhere nice, spend time with your family and friends, do a lot of sports, eat and drink well. Oh yes, and don't forget to relax and have fun.

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