

Vacation destinations help travelers unplug, literally

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Arielle and Jeff Dufour tried something a little out of the ordinary on a recent getaway. They checked in at Miraval Berkshires so they could disconnect from their devices to reconnect with themselves and each other. Miraval is a device-free property where guests are asked to tuck their phones into a tiny bed or to keep their phones on airplane mode or silent.

"It was a good time to get away before we have our second child. Kind of block out all of the stress and digital anxieties of real life," said Arielle Dufour.

"Why do you think it's important that you take a break from that digital connection?" asked "CBS This Morning Saturday" co-host Dana Jacobson.

"I think it's important for our relationship and us specifically because even when we're together at night after our son's gone to bed, we're looking at our phone, or she's answering a work email, or I'm doing the same," said Jeff Dufour. "So we may be together but we're not always talking, or communicating, or actually, you know, together."

"We've been like, every night together. But I feel like we had more conversation last night than typical," added Arielle.

The couple stayed at Miraval Berkshires—an \$1,000 all-inclusive resort that promises to awaken your senses if you can put your phone to sleep. Jen Leahy is the Animal Connections Specialist at the Berkshires property. The equine program, where guests care for rescue horses, offers the chance to "spark creativity, clarify communication and release fears."

"My job is to provide opportunities for our guests to have firsthand experiences with the more-than-human world here at Miraval Berkshires," said Leahy. She helped Jeff Dufour come face-to-face with an owl named Jules. It was an uncomfortable accomplishment given his fear of birds.

"Animals are incredible teachers. They live in the now. And they ask us to join them there," said Leahy. "And if we want to explore that, learn from them, be a part of that, we need to be there in our full selves."

When asked if there is more of a need to unplug now compared to prior to the pandemic, Leahy said, "Absolutely."

She says the level of human disconnection and isolation many of us have experienced over the past year has had a huge impact.

"Animals offer us this opportunity for connection not just with them, but by being with them it's a doorway into ourselves," said Leahy.

Miraval's three properties help guests who have the means find more balance in their lives through mindful activities.

"Some people may have a robust wellbeing practice. They may practice yoga. They may do meditation. And others are coming to dip their toe in," said Simon Marxer, the Group Director of Spa and Wellbeing at Miraval Berkshires.

"Wellbeing...is a sense of living life fully, being authentic to yourself and feeling all of the joys and challenges that we all confront in our day and yet feeling comfortable and feeling able to cope with them," he said. "No one is going to stop stress, it's how we manage it and I think that's ideally what we are trying to help people do—is to teach them to pay attention to and discover the beauty around them and within them."

While the Miraval experience comes with a high price tag, Marxer says the company is finding ways to make wellbeing more accessible for all, especially with demand for it intensifying.

"We'll be introducing a digital mindfulness video series to help support the pursuit of mindfulness when you're not able to come to Miraval or, perhaps, before your stay or after," he said.

For many Americans, coping during the pandemic has been difficult. With the majority of employed adults in the U.S. working remotely, some get the feeling they're living at work instead of working from home.

"Suddenly work is in every part of your life. You sleep in your work. You have to be a lot more intentional about saying I want to step away from work," Dylan Thuras said. He is the Co-Founder of Atlas Obscura, a company that curates unique experiences and catalogs hidden wonders like a "pocket park" in New York City.

"People are traveling again for sure but it's largely domestic. People don't want to go back to what they were doing necessarily," Thuras said. "I don't think anyone's super excited about going back to being in a giant crowd of 50,000 people in Venice during high season. That's not what people want. They're looking for something that's a little bit more natural, a little more farther off the beaten path, and stuff that is maybe closer to home."

"You can spend a fortune to escape but you don't have to to get what you want out of a vacation," said Jacobson.

"That's right," said Thuras. "One of the ideas of Atlas Obscura is it's not about distance travel or getting on a plane or stamps in a passport. It's really about being willing to kind of trust that you can find something incredible almost anywhere you are."

Anywhere, including the middle of nowhere—that's what Jon Staff's company Getaway is betting on.

"Staying at Getaway is all about having more free time and more balance in your life. So there's no wi-fi, there's no TV. We really try to get you to do nothing," said Staff.

Getaway operates small cabins in remote areas all over the country. Guests can escape the noise of everyday life for about \$120 per night.

"Everybody should have access to nature and it's important for all of us to carve time out of our daily life to sit, to think, to reflect, to be with our loved ones and we hope that can be Getaway for so many folks," he said.

It's a sentiment the Dufours agreed with during their stay at Miraval Berkshires. "I think it's just a reminder that, like, this time together away from reality is-- it's okay, and we deserve it, and we need it to get back to being the best parents and people we can be," Arielle Dufour said.