



The Winter Unplug

by Jen Villa

Living on Cape Cod is wonderful. As a year-round resident and small business owner, I love the Cape. I love all the activities the warm months bring; I love the business the summer months bring, despite the traffic that comes along with it.

I also love the Cape in the off-season: a secluded beach to yourself, the epic winter sunsets, and more time to connect with other locals. But, like any sane person, I like to get away for a little "Winter Blues" getaway. As a business owner who spends most of the year working seven days a week, a little vacation is a MUST.

This year I decided to take a few weeks off during the short but feisty month of February. The first half of the trip would be sun, surf and adventure in the Dominican Republic, and the latter would be spent in Southern California visiting friends and towns from my pre-Cape Cod days.

The trip was scheduled to "recharge my batteries," although I wasn't sure exactly what that meant. I only knew I had to get away from the shop and break my daily routine to get fresh ideas, and so I could come back energetic and enthusiastic.



Boat Ride from Las Galeras to Playa Rincon

I arrived at my island digs in the Dominican Republic very late the first night. I had decided to make no plans or arrangements to use my phone while there and brought no laptop. I woke up the first morning and was officially "unplugged."

I have to admit, during the first couple days of my trip I experienced what I'm cleverly naming "communication withdrawal." I'm sure this has been discussed and written about, and perhaps officially coined something, but this was my first taste of it.

I had to relearn how to be quiet with myself and not distracted. It was a fascinating experiment.

After the initial symptoms passed, which literally included minor anxiety attacks and some serious internal banter that could drive a girl crazy, I embraced it. It felt so good to regulate my day with casual patterns of sleep, wake, eat, beach, read, eat, snooze, read, eat, sleep, REPEAT. I had to learn had to entertain myself.

During my "unplugged" experiment, I was somewhat shocked at how addicted I had become to being "plugged in." I actually consider myself somewhat technologically old school. I listen to vinyl, I don't use an iPod, I only use a computer at work, my world is not synched in... but apparently I'm still hooked.

I can only imagine what skills our younger generations are lacking in terms of making use of their time without the aid of technology.

So, there I was, in the Caribbean doing nothing. And it was great.

I read four books in nine days. I eased into it with an easy, quick thriller by a Cape Cod novelist, then worked into **The Orchard: A Memoir** by Adele Crockett Robertson, which discussed the harsh times of a Massachusetts family farm in the 30's. Next up was **Tuesdays with Morrie** and I finished off with **The Alchemist**.

Three of the four books took place in Massachusetts and I took some pleasure in reading their descriptive weather

references while snuggled in white sand under a beating hot sun. It felt so good to get lost in their stories without the distractions I have gotten so used to. I know many people make time to read in their daily lives, but I find it extremely difficult. Now that I'm back, I plan to make reading more of a priority.

After the relaxing days on the beach, I headed to the West Coast for the second part of my vacation. Here I visited with friends and revisited favorite shops and restaurants from the times I had lived there.

It was a self-indulgent vacation, loading myself with a year's worth of all my favorite California things, including Baja-style fish tacos and sunsets over the Pacific Ocean. Here I rested less, but fed my social soul and felt satisfied. Waking up on the eighteenth day in a bed that was not my own, I felt I was ready for home. Luckily, that's where I was headed.

I arrived back on the shores of Cape Cod after a very long day of travel and crawled into what was finally, my own bed! I slept great and woke up excited but slightly confused about where I actually was. I headed back to work (!) and looked around... and felt like I'd never left.

What? How could that be? I had just slept in foreign beds for nearly three weeks and here I was not feeling refreshed and recharged? How disappointing!

But, rest assured, after almost a week of re-acclimation, it sunk in. Now, as I sit here writing this article after a full week anniversary back at the office, I feel great! I'm excited and enthusiastic about all the work to be done in the next couple of months.

I'm swirling with new ideas and inspiration from my travels and my time off. I'm filled with fresh concepts that had a chance to form while I was unplugged and taking the time to be quiet with myself. It's almost like my brain needed a break from being in the thick of things in order for it to fully function.



Unplugging at Playa Rincon, Dominican Republic

So, it turns out that it's true; we need a break. We need to take time to recharge our batteries to function at our fullest potential.

I really learned a lot about myself during this vacation and realized that my, and perhaps society's, attachment to the internet and instant communication is rapidly growing and increasing. I encourage everyone to take a break from it. Whether it's just for a weekend or it's one day a week. I know I am going to try and give myself more space, so I can be more organically creative.

Oh, and one of the best parts about being on vacation? It's being happy to be home.





Jen Villa owns The Little Beach Gallery on South Street in Hyannis. A photographer and collage artist, she currently lives on the street she grew up on, in West Hyannisport on "The Aves."

She also one of the organizers of Green Drinks Cape Cod.

She insists on taking a moment with the ocean every day...feeding her creative inspiration and enthusiasm.

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