

# Case CLOSED

A holiday can give you so much more than a great tan; it's also the perfect time to invest in yourself, says **Maureen Rice**

LIVING WELL

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**P**eak holiday season is here, and, like everyone else, I am looking forward to my two-week break – a recent report in *The Times* showed that Brits started booking their holidays early this year, and in record numbers. This could well reflect our response to a turbulent year, as many of us rely on those precious weeks to deliver rest and relief from the stresses of modern life. There's just one problem with holidays: they end, and all too quickly their benefits fade as fast as our suntans. But that doesn't have to be the case. There is a way to enjoy our two weeks in the sun, unencumbered by our usual responsibilities – and also to use this as a chance to reset our health and wellbeing, and rediscover what makes us tick.



A reset is a gentle, holistic process – not a bootcamp, or a time for rigid self-discipline. ‘It’s about taking the opportunity to set intentions, clarify what you need, break some old habits or thought patterns and begin the process of caring for yourself,’ says Cathy Houghton, a health coach and personal trainer specialising in women’s midlife wellbeing ([blossomhealthcoaching.co.uk](http://blossomhealthcoaching.co.uk)).

And there is no better time to do this than on holiday, away from the clamour of washing, cleaning, working and other duties. ‘A holiday gives us that most precious gift – time to focus on ourselves. Turning it into a way to reset your wellbeing for the longer term just requires some conscious thinking and choices,’ says Dr Julie Hannan, a chartered psychologist and psychotherapist and author of *The Midlife Crisis Handbook* (Morency, £10.88).

#### MINDFUL SELF-CARE

Julie recommends that we plan in some ‘mindful self-care’ while we’re away. ‘Eat and drink well, practise some movement every day, whether it’s laps of the pool, a walk or a game. Slow down. Rest, relax and savour this time.’ These are wellbeing basics we all know but often find hard to put into practice, which is why the ‘fresh start’ feel of a holiday is a great way to begin.

Then introduce some simple self-care rituals that can become staples of your daily life when you’re back at home. Anna Murphy is fashion director at *The Times* and the author of a wonderful and positive book, *Destination Fabulous* (Octopus, £20), which is about embracing and optimising all aspects of midlife. Looking after our faces and bodies is not, she insists, an optional extra. ‘Think about how closely connected the way we look is to the way we feel,’ she says. ‘If you wake up and look tired or grey and stressed, it reflects how we feel, but it also contributes to it – our mood will match our faces.’ Our faces, she says, ‘tell profound stories about who we are and where we are in our lives. Taking care of them can really improve our wellbeing.’

She recommends some simple rituals that each take about five minutes. ‘After two weeks you will begin to see a difference, and carried on at home, you’ll get long-lasting results that will make you look and feel good for years to come.’

Her first tip is to begin a regular gua sha facial massage. Before you go away, buy a face oil, like Super Facialist’s Rose Hydrate Miracle Makeover Facial Oil (£16 for 30ml, [sainsburys.co.uk](http://sainsburys.co.uk)), and a gua sha tool; Anna recommends the Jade Beauty Restorer from Hayo’u (£45, [hayoumethod.com](http://hayoumethod.com)), or try the Gua Sha Handheld Body Massager Tool from Danielle Creations (£10, [argos.co.uk](http://argos.co.uk)). ‘Any oil is fine, but my favourite face oils are by Alexandra Soveral,’ she says. ‘Massage the oil into your face with your fingers, then follow the instructions on the box for a quick and simple gua sha

## Holiday inspiration

Spend time on the sun-lounger acquiring new ideas and support. Here are some of our favourites for living well and happily at midlife and beyond.

**PODCAST:** ‘Feel Better, Live More’ with Dr Rangan Chatterjee. Easy health hacks and great expert advice.

**ONLINE:** [goldster.co.uk](http://goldster.co.uk). Online classes and guidance on all aspects of ageing well from a brilliant team of medics and health experts.

**INSTAGRAM:** @lorrainepascale. Support, information and education about self-love, psychology and self-care. @themidlifecrisisdoctor. Expert advice on ageing well.

**BOOKS:** *How to Meet Your Self: The Workbook for Self-Discovery* by Dr Nicole LePera (Orion, £20). A fascinating, interactive workbook. *Destination Fabulous* by Anna Murphy (Octopus, £20). Turns the old rules about ageing upside down and inside out.



massage (or simply Google: “Beginner’s gua sha” for tutorials online). Facial massage brings blood to the surface, feeds the skin, and helps plump and lift the face. You’ll get an instant “glow”, and over time it really will help slow down sagging and wrinkling.’ Anna also recommends trying some simple facial exercises or facial yoga to tone muscles; find free tutorials online or visit ‘Face Yoga Expert’ on YouTube. ‘I follow a book called *Facercise* by Carole Maggio,’ she says. ‘Just five to 10 minutes a day really does make a difference.’

As this self-care kicks in, our minds become calmer and clearer, and allow us to do the internal work that will turn a reset into lasting change. In midlife and beyond, we might feel like we have lost sight of what we really want from life, and who we really are, so Julie recommends setting aside some time for a mini internal audit. ‘Think consciously about your values,’ she says, ‘the set of guiding principles we live our life by, even if we’re only half aware of them.’ Our values create our goals and should be related to who we are now – not who we were years ago. For example, she says, ‘the values of an adolescent might be power, money and success, but the values of a midlifer might be freedom, fun, autonomy and contribution.’

There’s a big difference, which can explain why we might sometimes feel disconnected from our lives. Julie recommends asking: ‘Who do I want to be, now?’ then creating a list of the values that speak to you – like integrity, excitement, curiosity, creativity, learning and security. Choose six as your ‘core values’, a set of principles to guide your actions from here on in.

As we transition back to home and our real lives, it can sometimes be hard to keep the spirit of a holiday alive, so Cathy recommends the simple tool of journaling. Every day, write down three good things that you’re grateful for. As the days pass, she says, you will see your gratitude journal as a map, guiding you towards the people and things that make you feel good, or that you aspire to. It’s a way to stay connected to yourself, and to the things that nourish you in mind, body and spirit, and helps bring all the benefits from your holiday reset back home and into a happier, healthier future. ■