



## Immersive vacations prescribed by judge

TRAVEL IS A NECESSARY BREAK FROM THE STRESSES OF PRACTICING LAW

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

— *Mark Twain*

Mark Twain was on to something. In his final years, my father used to tell me that he had no regrets about the things he did, but only about the things he was not able to do. Just shy of his 91st birthday when he passed, my father had traveled extensively with my mother. Together they had visited several states, discovered parts of Canada, explored numerous Western and Eastern European countries, and toured much of Asia. Fortunately, I seem to have inherited my parents’ travel gene. Even more fortunate, is the fact that my husband also carries this heredity.

So many obligations and commitments, both professional and personal, daily vie for our time. It is easy to become ensnared in a continuous loop of deadlines, trials, and billable hours; forgetting that life is happening all around us, and the world, filled with wonders and adventures, stands ready to welcome your participation. While I have been fortunate to enjoy a career in the law, both as a litigating attorney, and for the past 14 years, as a commissioner and judge, I cherish the time I have spent away from the law exploring the world. I feel I have gained immeasurably from my travels and adventures in over 40 countries. From the planning and anticipation of each trip, to the experience of activities planned and unplanned, to the indescribable joy of taking in sights previously unseen, each voyage has given me a chance to step away from my daily routine and focus my energies on non-work-related endeavors. Consider travel to be an extended “spa day” for the mind.

### **A feeling of wonder: The Northern Lights**

It is hard to describe the feeling of wonder I experienced watching the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) in Tromso, Norway last year. At age 12, I had read about the Northern Lights in a small book on Astronomy. The photographs on those pages had stuck with me since then. Even at that age, I knew I wanted to see the lights dancing over the north pole. As we stood in the snow looking up to the sky, some distance from the lights of the city, I was covered head to toe and layered to withstand the 20-degree Fahrenheit temperatures. Waiting for the cloud cover to part, I reminded myself that I was freezing and shivering for a reason. I was going to see something I had been waiting to see for almost 50 years. Suddenly, someone in our group yelled out, pointing a gloved hand to the sky behind us. The first streak of green light appeared across the sky, followed by a luminous curtain of green moving from left to right. Next came a yellow streak pursued by a pink curtain of light. Gasps and applause filled the air. We remained there for several minutes, enthralled by the spectacle. I had forgotten how cold I was.

Going about our day-to-day routines at work and at home, we are comfortable with our surroundings. Aside from the occasional (or in LA, frequent) traffic jam or car accident, we know what to expect on the way into the office, driving to the courthouse, or returning home. We are part of the fabric of a community, with which we are completely familiar. There is a comfortable predictability to repetition. But, what if each day you awoke to a unique adventure, completely distinct from the previous day’s activities? What if you weren’t sure what the day might hold, or what you might see? Each day

would represent an opportunity to experience something new, something unpredictable, something to take you out of your comfort zone. I suggest that this is one of the best reasons to travel. It is the quickest way to break your routine and refocus your mind away from work and the commitments waiting at home.

### **The Galapagos: Clearing the mind**

Cruising the Galapagos Islands in April, on a 16-passenger catamaran, we awoke each day, excited for the adventures that awaited us. Our on-board nature guide, Gustavo, would preview the next day’s itinerary each night before dinner, so we had an idea of the morning and afternoon excursions that awaited us. Eight of the 16 passengers were friends and family we had enticed to join us. Other than initial introductions that referenced what sort of professional endeavors we engaged in back home, work was never discussed for those seven days. Our first thought each morning was whether we were going to have a dry or wet landing (requiring sneakers or water shoes) and whether we should wear our swimsuits under our shorts or hiking pants.

It is impossible to think about work, or fret about the results of the last trial, when you are snorkeling with sea lions and Angel fish in crystal clear waters. You cannot contemplate a discovery plan as you walk on Lobos Island mere inches from blue footed boobies engaged in a courting dance. As you take a few steps over lava rocks and encounter multiple male frigate birds, with their bright red throat pouches fully inflated, your thoughts are focused on the uniqueness of the scene that surrounds you. Each male frigate sits on a carefully constructed nest they hope will attract a female partner. Sometimes a bit of guttural

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singing is thrown into the mix. Meanwhile, sea iguanas soak in the sun on the surrounding rocks. It is hot, but a cool breeze arises, as rain showers descend in the distance. Aboard our zodiac inflatable boat heading back to our ship after an hour on the island, all heads turned as a rainbow appeared across the sky. We were surrounded by natural beauty that existed only in that place, at that time. Nothing else in the world mattered at that moment. It was all good.

As amazing as each day of discovery was on the boat, the nights had their own magic. After happy hour and dinner, which provided the 16 of us an opportunity to recount the day's adventures and share our impressions, we were treated to an unparalleled canopy of stars in the night sky. Far from all light, and traveling along the equator, there was nothing to obstruct our view of the millions of lights that enveloped our sky. Talk about taking the time to stop and smell the roses – or in this case, count the stars! Lying on lounge chairs on the top deck in the dark gazing up at the sky, became a nightly ritual. Our only concerns dealt with identification of constellations and vying to be the first to spot a shooting star. Physically and mentally, we were all present in the moment, without a care in the world.

One night our peaceful star gazing was interrupted by splashing and thumping on the side of our boat. While we had been staring at the sky, a collection of more than forty six-foot sharks had assembled around the boat. A school of flying fish was in the area, and the sharks and two very large sea lions were giving chase. We were treated to the spectacle of large flying fish, with luminescent bright blue “wings” leaping from the water and flying 15 to 20 feet, chased by the sea lions and sharks. We all shouted encouragement to the fish and expressed disappointment when the sea lions put an end to the chase, beating the sharks to the catch every time. To listen to us all cheering, we sounded like kids at a Little League game. That exciting unplanned adventure will never be forgotten.

I categorize the trip to the Galapagos as an immersive adventure.

I would suggest that it is particularly effective in removing work deadlines from your mind. Surrounded by indescribable beauty, fully engaged with nature, and separated both physically and mentally from pressing work concerns, the stress of meeting daily obligations at work or home dissipates. At least for a few days, your mind goes on holiday, and an overall sense of well-being sets in.

I have developed a fondness for this type of vacation – an adventure that completely engages the body and re-focuses the mind. Our first experience with this concept occurred several years ago when we spent seven days in Patagonia at the Explora Patagonia, in Torres del Paine National Park. I learned on that trip that a 13-kilometer hike to a glacier ensured a good night's sleep. Horseback riding in the Andes and hiking with guanacos (part of the alpaca and llama family) was thrilling. I remember holding my breath in amazement, when an Andean condor landed on a rock a few feet from us. How fortunate I felt to be in such a magical place. How far away the rest of the world seemed.

In our professional lives, our energies are often completely exhausted by the end of the day. Aside from working on cases and dealing with clients or litigants, there are Bar functions, involvement in community organizations, and the never-ending quest to stay abreast of the latest appellate and Supreme Court decisions. Frequently, there is little time for exercise, or a moment of relaxation before bedtime. Watching the eleven o'clock news, or reading an online news service at night, does not count as a relaxing activity. If anything, watching or reading a recap of the day's political developments or world events, may stimulate the over-production of acidity in the digestive tract. You may find yourself reaching for an antacid as a night cap.

### When a vacation is overdue

If you find that you are at a loss to remember your children's names or recall their favorite activity; if your last few conversations with your significant other have consisted of little more than “good

morning,” and “good night”; if your close friends have stopped inviting you to events because they know you'll be too busy to join them, you are way overdue for a vacation. By “vacation,” I mean a real vacation; one where you leave the familiar behind and lose yourself in a series of fun outings. If you haven't used the “F” word (F-U-N) in a while to describe a recent activity, it is time to escape. Consider taking a vacation with the family where you discover and play together, without mention of work or school. Vacations are a great way to reconnect with friends and family whose company you enjoy, but just don't see enough. We have cousins that live in other states, who love to travel. Exploring the world together has proven to be a wonderful way to catch up on each other's lives, enhance the strength of our bond, and enrich the “fun quotient” of our trips.

### Escape to an African safari

Consider an African safari for a thrilling escape. We have been fortunate to visit South Africa twice; the first time we visited Botswana and Zambia with my husband's cousin and her husband, and two years later with our adult son to the Serengeti and Tanzania. Even though between flights, airport lay overs, and jeep and boat transports, it took us 40 hours of travel to return home from Botswana, I would gladly have turned back around and done it all over again. The Indian novelist Anita Desai noted, “Wherever you go becomes a part of you somehow.” Africa is a place that attaches to your soul.

The sight of elephants, zebras, and wildebeest herds crossing your path, without regard to your presence, is absolutely exhilarating. To see baby elephants, lion cubs, and hippopotamuses nursing and nuzzling with their mothers, free of restraints in beautiful surroundings, is an unforgettable sight. Watching young male impalas, springbok, and kudu spar over undefined patches of grass, harkens back to childhood memories of young boys in a playground.

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The first sighting of a lion, or pride of lions, or cheetahs on the hunt, will make time stand still.

Along with countless memorable sights on safari, there were instances that took our breath away, and others where we simply held our breath. To stand less than 20 feet from three adult rhinoceros in the bush in Zambia, is, to put it mildly, indescribably exciting. This is especially true because rhinos can see clearly for about 15 feet; their vision becoming less acute at that point. The fact that there was nothing but some small brush and thin tree branches separating us from the rhinos added to the excitement and fear of the moment. We had been walking in the bush with our guide and two armed military rangers for more than two hours, when trackers radioed that the rhinos had been spotted. The weapons would be used to fire warning shots into the air to startle the rhinos, should they charge at us. We had been admonished not to run if they charged, because they would outrun us.

As we stood there photographing the sleeping rhinos, I became aware that our guide and the two armed rangers were in fact standing behind us. Coincidence, I asked myself? During the 10 to 15 minutes we remained there observing the sizeable beasts, two of them twice stood up, looked in our direction, and sniffing the air, took several steps toward us. Clearly, they knew we were there, somewhere. Having been instructed not to move if this should happen, we held our breath and remained completely motionless, doing our best to blend in with the scenery. After the second time two of the rhinos moved towards us, our guide decided it was best to quietly remove ourselves from the area – walking backwards with the rhinos in sight. I will never forget that experience!

The American author, James Michener, reflecting on travel said, “If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion, and avoid the people, you might better stay home.” In my opinion, part of the experience of traveling to foreign countries is the opportunity to become immersed in a different culture.

I have become more tolerant and more accepting of people of diverse backgrounds because I’ve visited their homelands, eaten their foods and interacted with them on an informal basis, in a setting where I was the foreigner. Preparing for a trip to Saudi Arabia several years ago, my husband informed me that all the women in our group would be required to wear an Abaya in public. An Abaya is a black long sleeve cloak worn by Muslim women. Being told what to wear did not sit well with me, and I began to reconsider my decision to join my husband and his MBA students on the trip to Jeddah. I acquiesced in wearing the Abaya when my husband kindly reminded me that I was required to wear a black cloak at work every day. As it turned out, our host in Saudi Arabia generously gifted each of the women in our group with custom made Abayas; each distinctly and beautifully decorated with gold embroidery. I was so glad I had not declined the opportunity to visit Jeddah, as the trip was extremely educational and allowed me to experience life in a world completely different from the one in which I live.

### A smile and “hello”

I wholeheartedly encourage you to travel to foreign lands and experience the unease of attempting to communicate with people whose language you do not speak. If you do, please remember that raising your voice and repeating your English words more loudly, does not translate them to the local language. However, a smile and a simple “hello” in the language, accompanied by appropriate hand gestures, will generally result in the rendering of assistance. Knowing how to say “thank you” in the local language will reap tremendous rewards. We have been made to feel welcome, and received help from people all over the world, whose kindness often went above and beyond the expected. We’ve sampled local cuisine and enjoyed unique dishes not found in the states. Some of the food was delicious and memorable, some we would not have a second time. However, each culinary adventure has

enhanced our travels and added to our memories.

There are so many sights in the world, both man made and in nature, that simply must be seen in person to be appreciated. May I suggest that the next time you’re drafting a brief, or preparing for trial, and you have a mental block, or simply need to think about something else for a few minutes, consider making a list of places you’ve always wanted to visit and things you’ve always wanted to see and do. Treat yourself to time away from work. “Once a year, go somewhere you have never been before.” — *Dalai Lama*.

Decide to go to Paris and see the lights twinkle on the Eiffel Tower. Go to Alaska to watch American eagles in flight and get close to the Mendenhall Glacier. Travel to Tokyo at the end of March and marvel at the beauty of hundreds of thousands of cherry blossom trees in bloom. Zipline through the Cloudforest in Boquete, Panama in the spring. Climb the uneven steps of the Great Wall of China and be amazed at its size. Stand in solemnity at the American Cemetery in Normandy and look out over the Omaha Beach landing sites. Travel to Siem Reap in Cambodia, and wake up at 4:00 a.m., to see the sun rise over Angkor Wat. Learn to Tango in Buenos Aires. Marvel at the artistry of Michelangelo’s masterpiece in the Sistine Chapel. Take a ride on the Swing at the End of the World in Banos, Ecuador. I have experienced these places and returned from each adventure hungry for the next. We have never come home from a trip and thought to ourselves that we wished we had not gone. To the contrary, the more places we visit and the more adventures we experience, the longer our list grows for future travel.

Sir Michael Palin, British actor, travel writer, and travel documentarian remarked, “Once the travel bug bites there is no known antidote, and I know that I shall be happily infected until the end of my life.” I couldn’t agree more. Traveling the world is a balancing element in my life. I am fortunate to have a career I love, and the health, time, and means to discover the world. I fully

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understand my father's words. Should my light be extinguished tomorrow, I will have no regrets about the things I did, or the places I saw; but only the things I was unable to do, and the adventures I was unable to complete. I hope the latter will

be a very short list. What are you waiting for? Make your list now and start traveling!

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