

# To live the slow life

One of my colleagues traveled abroad. Upon his return, he claimed that he was gone for a long time. In contrast, his coworkers thought his trip was so short that they hardly noticed that he was gone. Why did time seem to pass slowly for my colleague and quickly for his officemates? It wasn't that they were glad to see him go. Instead, it came down to how we all make decisions.

During normal times, we all spend a lot of time on autopilot. We follow routines that do not force us to think very much. We drive to work the same way every day. Once there, we face similar tasks. A professor might give a lecture that he already gave last semester. A plumber might replace a faucet, using almost the same steps he always uses. The professor, the plumber, and the rest of us have so much routine in our lives that we usually do not have to actively figure out how to deal with new situations.

When we travel, we have to shut our autopilots off because so much is new for us. When I lived in Italy for a month, I had to figure out how to do the most mundane tasks. I could not just throw out my garbage in a bin outside my door. Instead, I had to find where the city's trash bins were. If I wanted

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time.

Because of all the active decision making that we do while traveling, our time seems to pass slowly. We are aware of each moment because we are actively using our brains during these moments. We are paying attention. At home, while on autopilot, we are not paying close attention to much of what we do, so time passes quickly. We do not notice much.

All of this active decision making during travel has another effect. It tires us out since we are doing so much active thinking. My colleague came back from his trip exhausted. I was exhausted after spending a month in Italy. But these trips were worth the extra mental effort. In my case, because I was paying close attention to what I was doing for so much of the day, I have more memories of my travel experiences than I do from a month at home when I follow my routine. Also,

to take a day trip, I had to plan how to get there and what to do once there.

This took a lot more mental effort than the day trips I take while living at home, where I might go to a state park for the tenth

because I was thinking about every little decision, I realized that some of my routine caused me to do things that I would rather not do. For instance, before I went to Italy, I drove almost everywhere I went. After coming back from Italy, I became much more likely to walk to many of my destinations.

We can all get out of our routines by challenging ourselves with new experiences. Travel is only one way to find these new experiences. When I learned to play piano, I was so far out of my comfort zone that time slowed down. I was paying full attention and was wiped out after about 25 minutes of playing. But this effort had a large payoff. I learned to play many songs and developed an ear for music.

As we get older, it is easy to have routines take over our lives. This is why time passes so quickly as we age. We just aren't paying attention as much as we used to. To combat this, challenge yourself to try new things. You can travel, learn to play an instrument, or pick up a new hobby. Once you do, time will slow down and you will be creating memories or valuable experiences. But to get these benefits, we need to shut off our autopilots.

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