

Resolve to Plan Your Dream Vacation This Year

Start making your trip a reality, no matter what your budget, with these inspiring travel-planning tips.

by NEA Member Benefits

With a new year comes the opportunity to reflect on where you've been and where you're going. But this year, rather than resolving to do the same old, tired things (lose weight or quit insert-bad-habit-here), why not map out a fun resolution instead...literally! Travel resolutions are a great way to kick off the new year, plus they're more fun to keep, as they're inspiring, adventurous and often enable us to fulfill lifelong dreams of discovering a new place or having a new experience, says Emily K. Wolman, travel writer and editor of *Lonely Planet's Travel Resolutions: 52 New Ways to Experience Planet Earth*.

And travel resolutions don't have to cost a fortune. You can opt for practical goals, like finally organizing your vacation photos or more philosophical ones like celebrating a milestone by taking a big trip or unplugging to really be in the moment, adds Kate Appleton, Senior Digital Editor at *Travel + Leisure*. Of course, you can also make a commitment to take a journey to a far-flung destination, or even to a new spot in your own backyard—"you don't have to travel far; simply look at your hometown or region with the fresh perspective of a visitor, and you'll often realize there are interesting, new things to experience," says Appleton.

No matter what you decide, remember "travel enriches our experience of the world and promotes greater understanding between cultures; teachers can project these experiences back in the classroom to [benefit] the students, as well," says Wolman.

Get inspired!

Like any resolution, it's important to think about what you're really trying to accomplish. Appleton suggests asking yourself the following questions: Do you want to unwind, spend quality time with someone, explore a new place, or push your boundaries? If you're having trouble finding inspiration, look towards social media, says Appleton, who recommends browsing dreamy travel photos on Pinterest or following notable people as they tweet and Instagram on the go. Read travel magazines and guidebooks and talk to family and friends about their favorite travel experiences to get ideas. "Keep yourself open and you might find inspiration in a great meal at a Thai restaurant or a novel that takes you back to the Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire," says Appleton. It helps to keep realistic factors in mind, too. Think about your budget, time constraints and adventure level, adds Wolman.

While certain trips loom large (think Disney, New York City, Paris, Peru's Machu Picchu and the Grand Canyon), there's no shortage of great travel experiences out there, reminds Appleton, who has the food scene in Charleston, the rugged beauty of the San Juan Islands, the architecture of Kyoto and the beach towns of Uruguay on her resolution list. More trip ideas from Appleton and Wolman:

- **Unwind at an all-inclusive resort**—the kind with no kids and the homework done for you, as all your activities and meals are included.

- If you can't afford a trip this year, **resolve to learn a new language** so that when you are ready to travel, you can converse with locals, take classes or otherwise be part of daily life in your new destination.
- **Delve deeper into a favorite subject**—see a play at Shakespeare's Globe Theater in London, tour apartheid sites in Cape Town, take a cooking class in the home of a local chef or enroll in a week-long program in Virginia where you can stay on the grounds of Mount Vernon.
- **Become the student**—head to Thailand and learn to care for, command and ride elephants at Chiang Mai's Patara Elephant Farm (it's one of the best, with a focus on conservation and offering visitors a very hands-on experience, says Wolman.)
- **Fully immerse yourself**—those with extended summer vacation time can resolve to take advantage and slow down their travel pace, really getting to know a place over a few weeks and exploring small, less-visited destinations.
- **Get moving**—sign up to run a marathon in a city you've never visited before and kill two birds with one stone.
- **Digital detox**—promise not to check your email, text messages or other modes of communication and really 'get away.'

Make your resolution a reality

While more broad resolutions ("Go to the beach this year") might make for an easier reality, "you need momentum and focus to make things happen in life, and if you have a very clear resolution ("this is the year I swim with dolphins in Mexico"), you're probably more likely to save, plan and get there," adds Appleton. "So take the time to anticipate your upcoming trip—[mark it on your calendar], talk about it, look for books or movies set in the location and research what you'll do. That process can be deeply satisfying in itself while also improving your experience on the ground."

Keep in mind, it's equally important to leave some room to make your own discoveries, rather than rushing through each day with a checklist of sites. Wolman agrees: "Let urges, whims and serendipity lead you into further adventure." Most important of all: "Use those vacation days—even if it's for a long weekend in your home state, taking time off is invaluable. You deserve it!"

Have you planned your next adventure? Get more travel tips at neamb.com/travel.