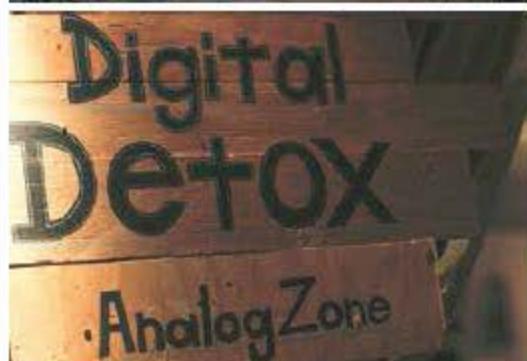
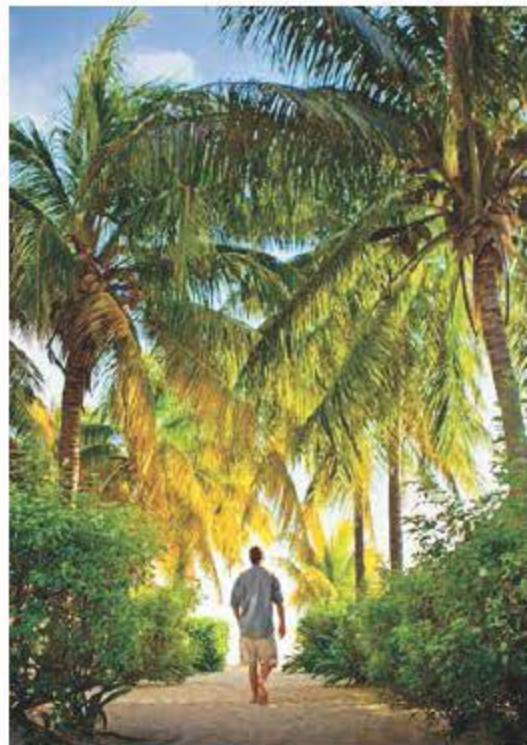


# UNPLUG, UNWIND AND RECHARGE

TEXT FREYAN PATEL

Modern technology is a marvel—you're connected all the time, everywhere you go. The only setback is... you're connected *all the time, everywhere you go*. If you feel like you need to disconnect for a while (and especially if you don't), an e-tox vacation might be just the thing for you.



Above: Camp Grounded has an "Analog Zone" where you can work on typewriters, play board games, learn arts and crafts, etc.  
Left and top: Marriott and Renaissance Caribbean & Mexico Resorts comprise nine properties where guests were offered special "braincation" tech-free zones "to disconnect, relax and enjoy peaceful reading, conversation or other tech-free pursuits."

ven as I type this I hear the all-too-familiar buzz of my phone in the other room. Despite a concrete wall and the noise of traffic downstairs, I'm so attuned to my phone's series of beeps, buzzes and alarms that I can still hear it—like ESP or a sixth sense with not much value, I know it's buzzing. Even more familiar, however, is the little tug I feel that's trying to get me off my chair to check my phone—"go ahead," it whispers, "you know you want to". It's a constant struggle to resist and an ever-present distraction. One that, I hate to admit, is not entirely unwelcome.

But recently, on a holiday in the Himalayas, I found myself itching to post a picture of the gorgeous place we were staying at. However, this place, so beautiful because of its remote, windswept location, was also too far from a cell phone tower for me to do so. The thought of not being able to send out a single message for ten days made my blood run cold. But once I returned to city life, the pure, uninterrupted joy of my little tech break made me realise just how much I needed it. In today's fast-paced world, we're all trying our damndest not to fall behind in the rat race; only, today, we're running it with our eyes glued to our smartphones, tablets and laptops. No wonder we keep stumbling. No wonder we need a break.

## ENTER THE DIGITAL DETOX

Luckily, hotels seem to be catching on to this, offering guests special digital detox packages, setting them up in rooms without wi-fi, some even making them surrender their gadgets at the front desk during check-in. Others, meanwhile, take a more subtle approach, simply choosing to remain out of coverage area—an increasingly popular trend, which is quite in opposition to the mad scramble to up connectivity at hotels and resorts over a decade ago. So if your loved ones constantly have to pry your beloved gadgets away from you for a little face time (and not of the Apple variety), maybe it's time you checked yourself into rehab—digital rehab that is...

Not surprisingly, the idea to offer guests a tech break has become huge in the United States, with a number of resorts offering special deals for those who want to leave their gadgets behind. At the Lake Placid Lodge, guests can avail of the "Check-in to Check-out" package (which includes complimentary boating, fishing, hiking, and yoga, as well as a selection of books, and a special cooking class), if they leave their gadgets at the front desk. The RiverPlace Hotel, in Portland, Oregon, offers a similar package for couples looking to spend a few days off the grid, with their "Romantic Revival" package, complete with sparkling wine and chocolates.



Clockwise from above: Oneworld Retreats' Kumera Spa offers various Ayurvedic massages for optimal deep relaxation and stress removal; Part of detoxing also involves basking in the early morning sunshine which is necessary for good health. At Oneworld Retreats, mornings often begin with yoga sessions facing the rising sun; The idea of Camp Grounded is to reconnect with people and nature. Use of any gadgets is prohibited and participants are encouraged to spend time conversing, stargazing, taking creative workshops, doing meditation and even indulging in pillow fights and laughing contests; The CasaMagna Marriott Cancun Resort is built around lush greenery and the turquoise waters of the Caribbean and the breathtaking Nichupte Lagoon.



From left to right: The digital detox packages Via Yoga offers at their Mexico and Costa Rica locations involve surfing, paddleboarding and world-class yoga; Montagne Alternative's mountainous location means trekking to nearby summits is part of the experience of staying there; A cooking class on the beach is one of ways in which you can occupy yourself while digitally detoxing at Marriott and Renaissance Caribbean & Mexico resorts.

Below: In Combeire, Montagne Alternative's guests can enjoy a bespoke meal overlooking the magnificent Entremont valley and the snow-capped mountains.

Granted, it might take more than a pretty view and a box of chocolates for some to unwind, which brings us to the next place... If you're so tightly wound you've forgotten what it's like to unclench your fist long enough to put your Blackberry down, it's time to let your inner child take over, even if just for the weekend. At Camp Grounded, a compulsorily tech-free camp for adults in California's wine country, activities include hiking, yoga, archery, dancing under the moonlight, games of Truth or Dare, bare-feet baking and, adorably, "sneaking out at night" (if you don't believe us, check out their website!).

#### GET AWAY TO GET TO KNOW

Over in Europe, too, people are aching to go cold turkey on their gadgets, which would explain why the Westin, Dublin, encourages its guests to discover the Irish capital the old-fashioned way. Perfect if you fancy a tech-free holiday, but don't want to go to the middle of nowhere. Their overnight digital detox package includes a massage, breakfast in bed and a tech-free survival

kit, including a walking map of Dublin, tips to discovering the city, a board game, and even a tree planting kit!

If a city is the last place you want to be in, check out the gorgeous Montagne Alternative, nestled in the pristine Swiss mountains. Five restored farm buildings have been converted into swanky rooms (complete with optional chef service), making this out-of-the-way destination the perfect place to relax. Great for a romantic getaway or a vacation with the family, Montagne Alternative offers up a range of cultural, sporty and wellness activities, including visits to historical sights, sleigh riding, mountain biking, yoga and massages.

If you're looking for something a little more tropical, then beach bums and technophiles rejoice, because the "Disconnect to Reconnect" package at the Four Seasons Resorts Costa Rica is kind of genius, though unfortunately, only for iPhone users. Guests can choose to hand in their iPhones for 24 hours to the hotel staff, who will return it with a free iPhone



Montagne Alternative; Sebastian Albrecht; Marriott and Renaissance Caribbean & Mexico Resorts; www.marriott.com; Digital Detox Retreats; courtesy of Via Yoga; www.viayoga.com



cover, specially designed for Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica. At the start of the 24 hours, guests are handed the "24 Things to Do Without Technology at Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica" guide to keep themselves happily occupied.

For something a little fairer to other smartphone users, but no less exotic, the Marriott and Renaissance Caribbean & Mexico Resorts have specially designated "braincation" or tech-free zones in their resorts, while the Via Yoga Retreats in Costa Rica and Mexico are the perfect way to disconnect from the outside world and reconnect with yourself. And if you're really serious about weaning yourself off technology, shell out the big bucks for a special tech-tox package on St Vincent and the Grenadines, replete with a life coach to help you out (hardcore tech junkies can even get daily counselling sessions) before you jet off to Young Island and Palm Island for a relaxing vacation on a technology-free beach.

#### BACK TO NATURE

Over on the other side of the world, at the luxurious Saffire Freycinet, Tasmania, the e-tox package includes, again, relinquishing all electronic devices, but comes with the bonus of specialised massage therapy for "hand working hands, sore backs, necks and tired twitter fingers". And if it's a complete detox you're after, check out Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary and Holistic Spa in Koh Samui, and

Oneworld Retreats in Bali, both of which offers structured detox programmes that rejuvenate mind, body and soul.

If none of this is up your alley, or if you have a loved one you want to force (read: trick) into an e-tox vacation, the places you need are those in technology dead zones, like the Cockatoo Hill Resort in Queensland. If you're a nature lover, Jongomero, a safari camp in southern Tanzania, is the perfect fit, and the perfect foil for anyone who's snuck in an illicit phone or tablet—the sight is cell phone reception-, wi-fi- and TV-free. And if that isn't off the grid enough, how about stranding yourself in the heart of Mongolia's Gobi Desert, at the Three Camel Lodge? Amidst sparse, sweeping landscapes, the lodge is well out of coverage area, but what it lacks in connectivity, it more than makes up for in beauty and the unmatched experience of being guided through this gorgeous desert.

Sure, modern technology is a marvel, but every now and then you have to give yourself a break from it—whether you have the self-control to lock up your gadgets when you're not working or need to have your phone surgically extracted from your hand, a little tech-free time can go a long way. It's just like they say, too much of a good thing is actually bad! ■

Above and below: Iyan Yaspriyana and Wyan Parta of Oneworld Retreats are certified yoga instructors who teach yoga at the yogashala on the property premises.

Top left: The Thai food platter at Amrita Cafe in Kamalaya, Koh Samui comprises betel leaves, pineapple, red onion, peanuts, sesame seeds, toasted coconut, chili, shrimp and ginger with tamarind dipping sauce.

Bottom left: At the Three Camel Lodge in Mongolia guests can experience life in the wild and get acquainted with local wildlife such as wild horses, camels and eagles.

Oneworld/Getaways, Gettyimages, iStockphoto, P. Peter/Corbis, iStockphoto, iStockphoto



## PLAN YOUR DIGITAL DETOX NOW!

**Camp Grounded:** Trade in your computer cubicle for an open-air cabin or tent, unplug, and let your inner child run free at this summer camp for adults. For details, check out [campgrounded.org](http://campgrounded.org); email: [camp@thedigitaldetox.org](mailto:camp@thedigitaldetox.org) or call: +1 415-340-2267

**RiverPlace Hotel, Portland:** The "Romantic Revival" package at RiverPlace provides the perfect mini getaway for couples, with a distraction-free night that includes special treats, a late, 2-pm checkout and a private butler to draw up the perfect bubble bath. Contact: [www.riverplacehotel.com](http://www.riverplacehotel.com); email: [reservations@riverplacehotel.com](mailto:reservations@riverplacehotel.com); or call: +1 888-869-3108

**Montagne Alternative, Switzerland:** Check your family into one of the refurbished barns in this little Swiss hamlet, and leave the world behind. You can choose to be in a room with no television or wi-fi which, considering the amazing location you're in, we'd definitely recommend. For details check out: [www.montagne-alternative.com](http://www.montagne-alternative.com); write to: [info@montagne-alternative.com](mailto:info@montagne-alternative.com) or call: + 41 27-783-2134

**Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica:** Give yourself a 24-hour break from your iPhone and get a free, custom-designed cover as the perfect holiday souvenir. Sounds like a win-win situation! Details on: [www.fourseasons.com/costarica](http://www.fourseasons.com/costarica); contact: +506-2696-0098

**Via Yoga Retreats, Costa Rica and Mexico:** If you feel relaxed just thinking of a tech-free holiday, doing yoga to the sound of the crashing waves, then you need to book a retreat at one of Via Yoga's destinations today! More details available at [www.viayoga.com](http://www.viayoga.com); email: [info@viayoga.com](mailto:info@viayoga.com) or call: +1-206-216-4049

**Jongomero, Tanzania:** The ultimate nature-lovers' escape, what better way to forget about crazy work emails and Facebook updates than getting lost among the animals of south Tanzania? Details on: [www.selous.com/jongomero-camp](http://www.selous.com/jongomero-camp);

email: [reservations@selous.com](mailto:reservations@selous.com); call: +255 (0) 22 212 8485

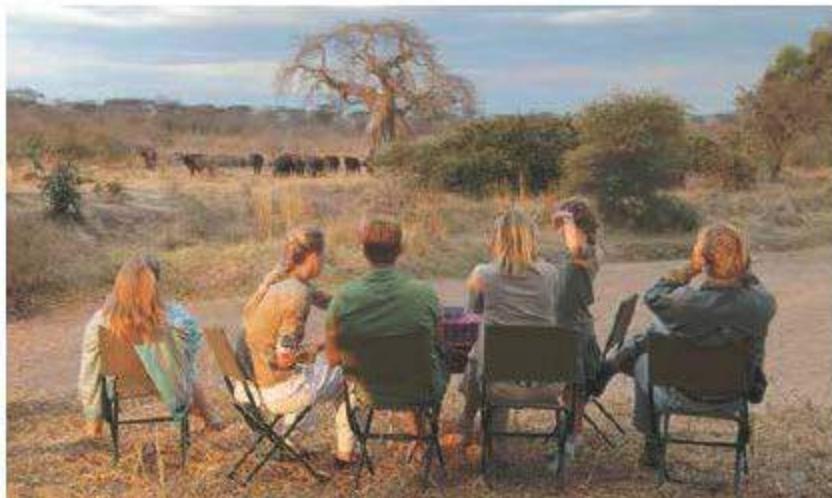
**Three Camel Lodge, Mongolia:** Three Camel Lodge may not have a special digital detox package, but located in the heart of the Gobi Desert, you'll be hard pressed to find network, no matter how desperately you try. For details, visit [www.threecamellodge.com](http://www.threecamellodge.com). Email: [info@ThreeCamelLodge.com](mailto:info@ThreeCamelLodge.com) or call (1-800) 998-6634, (1-609) 860-9000; Within Mongolia: (976) 11-313 396

**Kamalaya, Koh Samui:** At Kamalaya, you're in good hands, with a whole range of naturopathic treatments for any number of things, including carefully monitored detox programmes, and rejuvenating packages for common modern ailments including stress, fatigue and burnout. For details, visit: [www.kamalaya.com](http://www.kamalaya.com); email: [info@kamalaya.com](mailto:info@kamalaya.com) or call: +66 (0) 77 429800.

**Oneworld Retreats, Bali:** The retreats at Oneworld cover a varied range, from cleansing to journeys of self-discovery and retreats focusing on different schools of yoga. To participate, unplug and unwind, visit: [www.oneworldretreats.com](http://www.oneworldretreats.com); email: [info@oneworldretreats.com](mailto:info@oneworldretreats.com) or call: +62 (0)361-289752

**Saffire Freycinet, Tasmania:** Once you've handed in your gadgets, the e-tox package here includes meals, a special "Downtime massage", daily activities at the resort and yoga classes. Visit: [www.saffire-freycinet.com.au](http://www.saffire-freycinet.com.au); email: [stay@saffirefreycinet.com.au](mailto:stay@saffirefreycinet.com.au) or call: +61-36256-7888

**The Westin Dublin:** Housed within a historic 19th century facade, The Westin offers digital detox packages so that you can focus on unwinding completely. Visit [www.thewestindublin.com](http://www.thewestindublin.com) or email [reservations.dublin@westin.com](mailto:reservations.dublin@westin.com) or call+353 (0)1 645 1000.



The elephant population in Tanzania's Ruaha National Park numbers around 20,000. From your comfortable accommodation at Jongomero, you can observe these majestic beasts at a safe and secure distance.