

# SOUND MIND, SOUND BODY COLUMN: Mind, body will thank you for travels

WALLA WALLA UNION-BULLETIN

Friday, October 15, 2010

In today's culture, people believe that being in excellent physical shape is the key to optimal wellness. Oftentimes we forget that our mental and spiritual state needs attention and balance. Beyond vigorous exercise and prescription medications, there is a simple and successful way to restore the mental and spiritual states through the lovely journey of traveling.

The concept of "wellness" was adopted in 1959 from an American doctor named Halbert Dunn and later redefined by other researchers. Wellness is known as a "state of health featuring the harmony of body, mind and spirit."

Nowadays people of all health statuses have access to health and wellness tourism for spa treatments, detox packages, stress-reducing cruises and meditation or religious workshops. But travelers do not have to experience these treatments to receive the benefits of clarity, stress reduction, self-discovery or spiritual awakening.

Traveling locally, domestically or internationally provides benefit for people to escape the daily stresses of life, to explore nature or possibly a new culture. Recreation and tourism go hand in hand, whether it is traveling to run a marathon, photographing wildlife or hiking mountain trails.

National parks, forests or recreation areas generally feature pristine landscapes that are often dramatic and calming to the eye. Some travelers say they have awakened spiritually in the solitude of these magnificent areas. Located in Maui, Hawaii, is the 10,023-foot "power center," Haleakala National Park. This special site is known for the remarkable sunrise, which is compared to watching sunrises from space.

Mark Twain described the sunrise at the summit of Haleakala, "...the sublimest spectacle I ever witnessed." There is something powerful but majestic about the planet's natural state that sometimes brings travelers back to life mentally and emotionally.

Steve Lenz, a professional photographer and advertising designer at the Union-Bulletin, recognizes that traveling seems to be the "cure" to finding balance in his life.

"When the complications of daily life and society and all its subjective rules overwhelm me, I can count on Mother Nature and her simple constant laws that will never abandon or betray me, to instill a stability and rationale that brings me peace," he says.

As stress builds from work pressures, family responsibilities and financial struggles, people use the "pause button" when traveling to restore life. Traveling is an educational tool on various cultures and languages, and can be the "device" to help people with physical, mental or emotional complications.

"I struggle with an addictive personality and depression. Traveling gives me a sense that there is something bigger than my problems, bigger than me," Lenz says.

"It helps me surrender control to a world that is larger than I am and through surrendering helps me find peace and release the anxiety associated with trying to control my life and my world. I also like to explore while I travel so I get more physical exercise doing that. The exercise also brings about a healthier physical and mental way of being."

But many people take a pass on the opportunity to get away. Expedia.com found that one third of Americans do not use at least three entitled vacation days annually. According to a 2008 New York Times article, there is real evidence to how the body responds to stress and the need for vacations.

A study published in 2000 surveyed for nine years 12,000 men who had high risk of coronary artery disease. Results showed that the men who did not take an annual holiday were 32 percent more likely to die from a heart attack.

Stress "kills" the mind and body, which are naturally restored and rejuvenated through traveling. Smiling, laughing, bonding and learning are all a part of traveling, and I advocate travel for everyone to learn, grow and restore.

Elizabeth Kovar has been working in the fitness industry since 2006 with international experience in India and Australia. She has a master's degree in recreation and tourism and is a programs coordinator at the YMCA where she trains, instructs fitness classes and assists in marketing projects. She welcomes questions and comments and can be reached at [ekovar@wwymca.org](mailto:ekovar@wwymca.org).