

The history of school holidays

As children have been enjoying the school holidays, it's interesting to delve into the origins and development of this precious time. The concept of holidays for the general populace first arose in the mid Victorian era, when railways and additional worker's rights advocated by unionists and chartists alike enabled families to leave their towns for the first time. Beaches such as Brighton and Blackpool became incredibly popular destinations, and the iconic British summer holiday was born.

However, to understand how society reached this point, it is necessary to look further back. In 950 AD, the word halidaeg in Old English meant holy day, and by the 1460s, the modern spelling and definition had taken precedence. Until recently, children would only have religious holidays, as the summer holidays were essentially non-existent. However, in the 1840s, American educator, Horace Mann, proposed the revolutionary idea that it would be better for students' wellbeing to spend an extended period of time away from the classroom to relax and renew and so the iconic school summer holidays were born, gradually gaining traction in Europe. However, it was not until the 1930s that adults also got to share in the summer sunshine (or summer rain if you stay in Britain), when the socialist-controlled French government forced companies to give workers at least two weeks of paid leave a year, setting a precedent for labour unions and workers' rights groups across the world, as well as encouraging a significant rise in tourism.

Tourism has its roots in the 17th century, when nobles would tour Europe, engaging in a mix of cultural appreciation and carousing. One of the most famous examples is perhaps Lord Byron's Grand Tour, which included stops in Geneva and Greece. In the mid-19th century, Englishman Thomas Cook founded the first travel agency, opening up the concept of travelling for fun to a wider society. Popular Victorian holiday destinations included Brighton, the South of France, and Pompeii.

These two concepts combine today to form an iconic British summer, where children have six weeks off from school and are free to do with it what they will, often travelling with family. I personally think that after lockdown, young people will appreciate this precious time a lot more.

THOMAS YIANNIKOUEMU, ARCHER ACADEMY

Home for summer – finally

For many, summer is a time to travel abroad to new, sunny places and enjoy the beach, explore foreign cities with lots to offer or even just stay at home and relax. But for some, the six-week break is a time to go back home, spend time with family and friends, visit places where you grew up, and do things you aren't able to do where you currently live. I, like many Londoners, have parents who have immigrated to the UK, and who travel back to their home countries in school holidays so, in summer, I always spend my six weeks in Canada.

It's a feeling many can relate to, going home for summer, especially this year as COVID restrictions loosen and countries open back up again. After three years of not seeing family, this summer finally feels like the warm sun against your skin, which is what summer should feel like. For kids and teenagers, summer is a break from school, exams, and stress: a time to relax and have fun! I couldn't think of a better, more fun but relaxing holiday than my summers in Canada, spending almost every day by the lake, swimming and having campfires, doing puzzles and painting, and of course spending lots of time with my family.

Whether travelling back home means going to the middle of nowhere and being in nature, hearing crickets and seeing the millions of stars in the sky, or if it means going to a city, going out for dinner, and seeing the city's shining lights, going home is always a cathartic feeling. For most, summer is usually filled with smiles and ice creams, but there's something so special, yet bittersweet about summers like mine, because even with the smiles and ice creams and cherished memories summer does eventually come to an end and everyone must leave their sunny places and cities, and come back to London. But despite my summers going back to what feels like 'home', London will still be home.

SUSANA RIO, ARCHER ACADEMY

The season of summer

Here in the UK, we have a very clear idea of what the season of summer should look like. Time by the beach, a scorching, golden sun, 30-degree heat, sun cream, and cool evening walks. This is reinforced by the many American and British shows we watch, all of which display this same summer in some way, shape or form. We know that every country has warmer and colder seasons, but rumours that 'in Australia, people spend Christmas on the beach' frequently circulate each year; perhaps people we know have even experienced this. How could this be possible, and why?

Despite popular belief, it has nothing to do with the proximity of the Earth to the sun at each stage of its orbit – at any point in our orbit over the year, the difference in closeness causes a minimal difference to our weather. On our orbit around the sun, we are closest to the sun during 'perihelion' (4th January), and furthest during 'aphelion', (5th July), and yet we have some of our coldest temperatures in the UK during January, while at our closest to the sun thus proving proximity is not the cause of seasons. The answer lies in the angle the Earth orbits at, and how directly sunlight hits the Earth. Our planet is actually not perfectly oriented with the south pole at the bottom and the north pole at the top. Instead, it is tilted at a 23.5-degree angle. This means that the northern and southern hemispheres are exposed to the sun's rays at different angles, and this is the reason why seasons occur. When the northern hemisphere is tilted more towards the sun, light hits it at a right angle, and this is more direct than any other time of year producing summer conditions. Meanwhile, the southern hemisphere is further away and light hits at angles closer and closer to 0, becoming increasingly direct and causing it to be winter.

This is the same reason why, around the equator, countries do not have the four seasons we have – they are never tilted at an angle because they are located around the centre of the planet, and so instead they have wet and dry seasons. The wet season is long and results in the giant rainforests along the Equator. Consistent rainfall and a warm climate create a desirable environment for agriculture, and as a result, farming is a thriving business in many of these countries.

But why is the earth tilted? It is thought that around 4.5 billion years ago, an object the size of Mars (known as Theia) crashed into our planet when it was newly formed. It knocked our planet, rotated its axis and caused it to lean at an angle. Many scientists also theorise that all of the rubble sent into orbit by the crash gathered to become the moon.

So, this summer while you enjoy the sweltering heat, countries in the southern hemisphere are experiencing winter, and as the weather begins to get cold again here, their summer will only just be beginning.

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