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What I Did on My Summer Staycation



Rob Bennett for The New York Times

Neil Callahan, second from left, playing dominoes with his buddies at Orchard Beach in the Bronx. Mr. Callahan, 38, is spending his summer vacation close to home.

By **MICHAEL WILSON**

Published: August 28, 2008

Neil Callahan is not a trendy guy. He is a 38-year-old police officer in the Bronx who roots for the Yankees, his hair cut high and tight. So when he plopped down in a lawn chair on the boardwalk of Orchard Beach during a recent week off, he had no idea he was sitting on the absolute cutting edge of the summer's cultural buzz saw.

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Sampling the great outdoors



Enjoying the great outdoors



Relaxing on a bench

"I played dominoes," he recalled. "Nothing crazy. Go to the movies. Yankee Stadium, City Island. Just stay local, basically."

Mr. Callahan did not know it, and would most likely not have told anyone had he known, but he was on "staycation." Not vacation, staycation: the happy-face answer to high gas prices and the costs and miseries of air travel.

It is a ridiculous word, but that hasn't stopped the sprouting of so many Web sites with perky "I ♥ N.Y." staycation ideas — Circle Line, a museum visit, a tenement tour and bialy on the Lower East Side.

And, admittedly, it's a very fun word to say. Staycation. How was your staycation? My parents went on staycation, and all I got was this lousy T-shirt. Our son-in-law threw his back out on staycation.

As is so often the case, this new thing is nothing new in many parts of New York City. It's just that it was never named by those level-headed working men and women who do not need a tarted-up pseudoword to enjoy a nice week without work. They don't send postcards, and they don't take pictures, but in interviews in the

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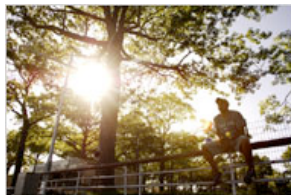
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James Estrin/The New York Times
Staying home, and together: The Mondello family of Astoria, Queens (Eileen, a nurse; John, a police officer; sons Kevin and John and daughters Bridget, Dianne and Melissa).

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Rob Bennett for The New York Times

Raymond Miles of the Bronx canceled a trip when his mother fell ill, but there was still time for a quick visit to Orchard Beach.

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Raymond Miles, 41, a grocery manager who lives in the Bronx, ended up on an unplanned staycation last week. He was supposed to fly to Jamaica, where he was born, but when his mother fell ill, he canceled the trip. His mother recovered, leaving Mr. Miles with a week and a day with nothing to do.

The staycation began last Friday. "Just stayed in bed," he said. "Don't go nowhere. Then at 2 or 3 o'clock, I had lunch. Then 4 or 5 o'clock, dinner. I watched [Oprah](#), whatever, Judge Judy, which can be pretty boring, but after a while, I thought it was interesting, because I don't normally watch TV in the day."

Vacation: Monet and Manet at the Musée d'Orsay.

Staycation: Judge Judy.

On Saturday and Sunday, Mr. Miles did a bit of fishing with his buddy and helped his brother lay some tile, typical weekend stuff. Then, on Monday, it was back to staycation mode, in bed again watching his new favorite judge. Not exactly a scene from a souvenir-shop snow globe.

"I was in bed so long, my back started to hurt," he said.

One might say that Mr. Miles needed a staycation from his staycation, but he had no ideas.

"All my friends are working," he said. "My girlfriend is working."

He finally broke up the day by stepping outdoors for a lottery ticket. Then he returned home.

"I started thinking what my vacation would be like, how I planned it, in Jamaica," he said. "But your mom comes first."

He decided to find the closest beach, and there he was on Tuesday, leaning against a wall at Orchard Beach, sipping a beer and watching the dark blue water. He is a good swimmer, but he believes that people are more likely to drown in dark blue water than light blue water like Jamaica's because the lifeguard cannot see them as clearly. So he nibbled on his chicken-on-a-stick and described the last three hours, something of an extreme staycation.

"I haven't moved," he said. "Self-control. Why come here and run from Point A to Point B when I can stay right here?"

Back in Astoria, the Mondello family dug into fat deli hero sandwiches on a park bench on Monday, a mother, father and twin boys enjoying their last day as 11-year-olds. The couple's three daughters, ages 16, 23 and 25, were at school or working. The mother, Eileen, was beginning a weeklong staycation that she requested at the beginning of the year at St. John's Queens Hospital, where she is a nurse. The father, John, a police officer in Manhattan, was enjoying his regular day off.

"When you have a large family," Mrs. Mondello said, "sometimes you schedule, and you don't have

Bronx and Queens this week, they shared what will have to pass for the scrapbooks of their 2008 summer staycations.

Brown Bino, 25, a cab dispatcher, was walking through Astoria Park near his home on Monday with his 3-year-old son, a smiling boy introduced as Little Brown Bino.

Mr. Bino frowned a suspicious "what are you trying to say?" frown when asked whether he was enjoying a staycation, but then he relaxed and described his recent time off.

"I take a walk, you know what I mean?" Mr. Bino said. "I think about what I want to eat, because this area is all about restaurants."

He said he could not afford extravagant travel. "We're in a recession, dude," he said. "You heard?"

He added: "I'm a single parent. I want to do what I'm doing now, and then step out to a cafe and have a drink. Maybe meet some women."

Then, Little Brown Bino said he had to use a bathroom, and father and son hurried away. No pulling over at the next rest stop. Just trot behind a tree near the Triborough Bridge.

Staycations do not start with a pretty girl wrapping a lei around your neck in Hawaii. They start with coffee and a roll on a park bench instead of on a subway platform. They start on the sofa the morning after two "Gossip Girl" discs and a box of wine.

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anything planned. We stopped at our favorite deli, Sal, Chris and Charlie's."

She added that they played two-on-two basketball and planned to stop at Toys "R" Us to let the boys pick out a birthday gift. "We'll probably have a little dinner in the backyard," she said. "Maybe a barbecue."

On Tuesday, the Mondello family competed in a Wii bowling tournament in their living room. Wednesday found them in Times Square in yet another Toys "R" Us, hunting for a birthday bicycle for one of the boys in a hard-to-find size. Still no luck, but Mrs. Mondello found one later that day in College Point. On Thursday morning, she took her three youngest children to the pediatrician for their regular checkups.

The staycation was timed with the approaching school year in mind.

"I just want to get them back on an early bedtime routine and get them into some heavy-duty reading," Mrs. Mondello said.

Asked if there were any special plans, she said no, not really, but then: "My oldest daughter has a boyfriend who has a boat. I was just thinking about that. Maybe we'll go out on his boat."

Michael Bombardiere, 46, an electrician who lives in Hicksville but grew up in Astoria, said he likes to bring his son, Mike, 11, along on staycation outings to the old neighborhood. ("It gives him a chance to see things that are right in front of his face.")

His modest tour will not likely appear in any Lonely Planet guide, but it includes all of Mr. Bombardiere's personal milestones. There, he pointed along the East River, is where he met his wife. There, 100 feet away, is where they had their first drink on their wedding day. Next up, an uncle on 21st Street and a buddy's restaurant for lunch.

"This is something he should know, you know what I mean?" Mr. Bombardiere said.

Mr. Callahan, the Bronx police officer, said he liked the stress-free side of staying home. "I went to Atlantic City a couple of weeks ago," he said. "Took me four hours, with all the traffic."

He has a week's staycation starting Monday. Nothing fancy: "Barbecue at home. Go to the pub. I'll probably just come out here, play some dominoes."

Mr. Miles, looking at three more days with his mother and Judge Judy before the three-day Labor Day weekend, seemed at an utter loss.

Wednesday? "I'll definitely stay home," he said.

Thursday? "I can't tell you now," he said. Maybe a little more fishing, or dinner out with his girlfriend.

"I don't have anything planned," he said of the staycation that, to borrow a phrase, was all he never wanted. "Anything could come up."

A version of this article appeared in print on August 29, 2008, on page B1 of the New York edition.

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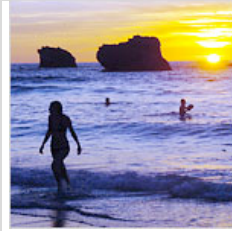
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