

Why you shouldn't set a goal on your next "stayventure"

It took moving away to realise what we have on our doorstep in the UK.

I have just moved back to the UK after nearly a decade of living and working in Hong Kong. It was a long time to live abroad, but I knew my time there would be finite, so I explored every inch of the area.

As I prepared to move back, I looked with satisfaction at the map of Hong Kong. There was nothing left for me to do, and nowhere left for me to travel. Hong Kong is (surprisingly) 40 percent Country Park, and I had hiked, ran and kayaked to every corner. There are steep mountains, remote beaches and distant uninhabited islands - I travelled to them all, and with each adventure I felt more connected to my adopted home.

As I flew back to Scotland, I was already dreaming of visiting the Alps, or taking holidays to the Mediterranean. Why did I not have the same sense of urgency to see every inch of my own country, as I had with my second country Hong Kong?

I had always assumed that wild expeditions were more rewarding the further from my home. But there is no correlation between how awesome an adventure, and how long it takes to travel to the start. My assumptions melted away under the slightest scrutiny as a quick scroll through Instagram's #Scotland showed steep mountains, remote beaches and distant uninhabited islands.

But even after researching, I was not prepared for the incredible adventures ahead and their profound impact.

With a new found urgency to explore my own country, a friend, Paul Loudon, and I set out to kayak 700km around the West Coast. The wilderness we found blew our expectations out of the water.

Forget staycations. This was a "stayventure".

We set off from Oban with a month's worth of Expedition Foods and a 17 Watt solar panel with V250 battery courtesy of Voltaic Systems, to keep our phones charged for tides and navigation. The plan was to kayak around the west coast of Mull, across to the Small Isles, over to Skye. We were then going to cross to Uist and Lewis, go all the way round and back to Skye.

As we paddled around Mull it took our breath away. As Skye is more famous, we assumed Mull would be a nice place to start, but not a highlight. Immediately, we were corrected. We passed soaring cliffs that dwarfed us. We expected white beaches on Lewis, but we were already seeing pristine beaches on Mull.

When the wind picked up, waves broke over our bows, forcing us to work hard and concentrate until we were in the lee of yet more sea cliffs. When the sun was out, the water turned a clear turquoise like the Caribbean. We did not see another soul. We did see eagles, dolphins, seals and otters though.

By the time we were preparing to leave Mull and paddle across to the Small Isles, we changed our mind. We were not trying to set a record or achieve a particular goal, aside from having fun. Mull had blown us away so why were we hellbent on leaving it? We decided to kayak all the way around the island and it continued to deliver unexpected scenery, breathtaking sunsets and hidden coves.

Once around Mull, we headed up towards Fort William via Loch Linnhe. We reached the top and we ended our adventure. It had been 12 days, out of a planned month. We wanted to see Scotland as we never had before. We wanted to experience the isolation of the west coast. We wanted to feel nature's power and beauty, and we had seen both in storms and sunny skies. We had got everything we wanted out of the adventure in 12 days, so why go on for the sake of it?

Adventure is what you make of it. You can find adventures anywhere with the right perspective - it can be areas of a city you have never visited before, a day trip to a nearby hike, a walk or a weekend camping. It does not have to be a month-long kayak trip. It does not even have to be about a new location. It can be a new activity. If you have never run 10km, then it is an adventure to build to it and explore new limits.

And it can be liberating not to have a defined goal. It's tempting to declare a specific route, record, first, speed or victory. But specific goals create binary outcomes - success or failure. If your goal is about enjoying your experience, as was our aim, then you are free to do as you please to meet that end and judge your success on your own terms.

It took me leaving Scotland to realise staying put and being adventurous are not mutually exclusive. With the right attitude, stayventures are every bit as challenging and fulfilling as travelling to the world's most remote corners.

So what are you waiting for? Get outside in Britain. Cycle, hike, run, kayak, sail, walk or whatever you want. If you need a goal to stay motivated, set one. But remember, staying aimless can be every bit as rewarding.