

## Just do it!

If life is passing you by in a haze of work and chores, Heather Barker reveals how you can make more of your spare time in the Caribbean.

I faced a dilemma some weeks ago. It was Monday morning and I was typing feverishly on my laptop. Then the call came. I was mandated to down tools and set off into the hinterland of Barbados. I was flustered. I was self-employed and had work to do!

When my ride arrived, I resisted. "Give me a minute", I begged banging on the keyboard, rabid-like. "That's the problem," my wise tour guide intoned, "another minute is always needed." I relented. We arrived at the Flower Forest, a beautiful enclave swathed in colourful flora and enticing textures. As we stepped deeper into the forest I escaped from thoughts of business and fully experienced the beauty around me.

I can't even recall which PR project I worked on that morning (I do know it was completed). But I'll always remember my foray into the Flower Forest – the undulating vista of the greens and browns of rural parishes, the potpourri of colour, and the spongy tufts of grass tickling my feet.

### Rest to escape a rut

More recently, after a series of teachings at church about rest, I decided to spend an entire Saturday devoid of work. I completed most of my chores by Friday. Then I flopped into bed, tired but expectant. On Saturday morning I awoke, but lay still. Eventually I rolled off the bed and swaggered to the kitchen. I ate in slow motion. I lounged on the sofa. I laughed out loud, stretching my arms heaven ward. I rested. I called friends and family I'd not heard from for a while and listened to them, really listened.

Later I took a leisurely journey to and through the Barbados Museum with my partner in adventure. (I'd called ahead and knew the hours of operation and price – free for locals). This treasure was virtually empty, but we enjoyed its nooks and crannies even more. Then we met some friends and enjoyed succulent desserts while watching Bridgetown uncoil after a long week.

Yet in the Caribbean our calmer approach to work (not to be confused with indifference and laziness) is under threat from a capitalist imperative that dictates that money is god. We have been thrust down a rabbit hole to a colourless land of stress and misplaced priorities. We used to have far more work/life balance. As Grenadian playwright and public education specialist, Francis Urias Peters says, "We get too drawn into the material things in life. The big houses, the vehicles and look at us, we're more self-centred and unhealthy as a result."

### Combating chore bore

On weekends it's not uncommon for us to move around in a robotic trance – especially women. However, Jennifer Downes, a wife and mother of two, is determined not to get bogged down in the minutiae of housework. "I don't do the boring mundane stuff at weekends, because I grew up seeing my mother washing, cooking and cleaning the house, then complaining about being tired. I want to have an actual weekend, so that when I return to work on week days I feel renewed and refreshed." Instead she does much of the housework on week days. "I am not about slaving. That's nonsense. We, as black women, spend too much time on housework and are often fanatical about it."

Billie Sterling, a Counsellor in Antigua, agrees. "Saturday is mine, so if I want to lie in bed until the sun sets I feel

quite comfortable doing so. I do not have to worry about work and since I have no family of my own I revel in the laziness.&rdquo;

Marissa Gaskin, a 29-year-old writer, multi-tasks whilst doing her weekend chores. &ldquo;As I&rsquo;m doing laundry, I&rsquo;m also surfing the Internet between loads, cleaning the house, watching a movie, chatting on the phone or reading a magazine. When I&rsquo;m ironing I&rsquo;m listening to my iPod or watching TV. So for me, nothing is ever mundane. If I don&rsquo;t feel like doing it, I just don&rsquo;t.&rdquo;

What chores do men tackle on weekends? Francis, 51, cuts the grass in his own yard and sometimes in other areas in his neighbourhood. &ldquo;Even though I live in the suburbs, I&rsquo;m still a country boy at heart and I&rsquo;m pretty handy with the cutlass and the weed whacker. I get a high and a good sweat from it.&rdquo; He also goes to the markets to buy vegetables and fruit and, with his love of cooking, he often prepares the meals.

&ldquo;And then I&rsquo;ll sleep a lot in the afternoon.&rdquo;

### Making the most of life

Francis admits, though, that it&rsquo;s challenging to live life to the full. &ldquo;There are times when work does not come in abundance. There&rsquo;s the mortgage to pay and other financial and family commitments to meet. Sometimes I feel less of a man when I&rsquo;m struggling to meet those obligations. Sometimes I feel the need to reach out to the younger ones in the community, but because of work and schedules I&rsquo;m unable to do so and this makes me feel that I&rsquo;m not fully accomplishing one of my ultimate goals in life, which is to help and guide young people in a positive direction.&rdquo;

It&rsquo;s important to make the most of our productive hours. Planning in advance is key. Don&rsquo;t get bogged down with your methodology. Just identify your goals then break them down into manageable steps. What I&rsquo;ve learnt is that goals are meaningless unless they are outward, not just self-focused. Focus primarily on how humanity &ndash; your family, friends, community, church and strangers &ndash; will benefit from your activity and let that motivate you.

Look at the month ahead and plan something new and useful you can experience on your weekends or down time. TV can rob us of a lot of productive time, especially the reality variety, and also the Internet. Get off the keyboard and couch and out of the house!

People living life to the full offer similar advice. Jennifer establishes standards. &ldquo;I stick to my work hours and try not to go over the time allotted. Time management is key. Once you manage that well, everything falls into place.&rdquo;

Francis says we need to realise that we&rsquo;re on this earth to be of service to each other. &ldquo;Then we would have begun the journey to a more rewarding and fulfilling existence on this planet.&rdquo;

And Billie notes that &ldquo;a great way to achieve a healthy work/life balance is to know the value of each in your life. A balanced life includes fun, family, food, joy, sadness, planting and reaping. It&rsquo;s not about trying to escape one aspect of life in favour of another. It&rsquo;s about learning to take the sour with the sweet.&rdquo;

### 5 ways to make sure you get the most out of your weekend

- 1 Attack chores during the week &ndash; scrub the shower one day, mop the next.
- 2 Plan ahead. During the week check the Internet, media, or ask friends about upcoming activities.
- 3 Get adequate rest during the week, so you're able to do more than loll around under the covers.
- 4 If you really must, ignore number. 3 and loll around under the covers.
- 5 Phone a friend you've not spoken to in a while and be fully engaged in the conversation.

### 5 top excuses we give for not living life to the full

- 1 I don't have time.
- 2 I'm scared.
- 3 I haven't been paid.
- 4 I have chores to do.
- 5 I don't want to get my hair wet (the number one excuse by ladies for not going to the beach!)

### 5 things to do at the weekend that cost little

- 1 Drive around the island or along a scenic coast. Get some friends together and pool together to buy fuel.
- 2 Go on a hike &ndash; check your tourism authority or National Trust for details.
- 3 Volunteer at a shelter, with a clean-up campaign or at church. Contact the relevant government ministry or NGO for ideas.
- 4 (For the ladies!) Watch your partner play a sport. Don a hat, tote a picnic basket and be his number one fan!
- 5 Visit a museum. Many have specials for locals or exhibits that are free for the public.

### Guess Where? 10 Incredible Caribbean Adventures you could have this weekend

Don't get caught up with chores, or kid yourself there's nothing to do &ndash; make this the weekend that you have an adventure!

#### 1 MYSTERY TOUR: Viewing The Underwater Sculpture Park, Grenada

This isn't a gimmick &ndash; Jason de Caires Taylor, creator of the world's first underwater sculpture park, has gained international recognition for his unique work. His sixty-five sculptures which cover an area of 800 Km are sited in clear shallow waters and can be appreciated by divers, snorkellers and for those who don't want to get wet, from glass-bottomed boats. For more information see [www.underwatersculpture.com](http://www.underwatersculpture.com)

#### 2 MYSTERY TOUR: Bird & Whale watching in the Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is a haven for birdwatchers with over 300 species of brightly-coloured birds that call the island home either permanently or as a migration layover. DR is also the place to come if you want to treat yourself to the awesome sight of a humpback whale. From January through March, Samana Bay is pretty much taken over by humpback whales, who make an annual trip to spend winter in the warm waters of the DR. There are tours available from Samana Bay and most offer a 99 percent sighting rate.

### 3 MYSTERY TOUR: Riding the St Kitts scenic railway

Known as the "Sugar Train," the St Kitts Scenic Railway takes approximately three and a half hours to circle the island along the coastline, offering a unique perspective on the island's culture, people, views and history. Among the scenes that unfold are Brimstone Hill Fortress, abandoned windmills and chimneys from old sugar estates, 23 bridges and a canopy of rainforest vegetation.

### 4 MYSTERY TOUR: Horse-back riding in the Mabouya Valley, St Lucia

The Heritage Tourism Association of St Lucia's Fond d'Or Nature Reserve & Horseback Riding Heritage Tour takes you through the heart of the Mabouya Valley for a truly unique experience. This tranquil nature site includes traces of Amerindian settlement, historic sugar plantation buildings, hiking trails, mangroves, estuarine forest and a wide white-sand beach.

For more information visit [www.heritagetoursstlucia.org](http://www.heritagetoursstlucia.org) or call (758) 458 1451/ 451 6058

### 5 MYSTERY TOUR: Diving the Buccoo Reef in Trinidad & Tobago

Buccoo Reef is the largest coral reef in Tobago and was designated as a marine park in 1973. This incredible dive site contains a reef system of five flats separated by deep channels. A major feature is the Nylon Pool, which was given its name by Princess Margaret, who thought the water was as clear as her nylon stockings. Depths are no greater than 7-10 feet at high tides.

### 6 MYSTERY TOUR: Road Cycling in Anguilla with Ronnie Bryan

One of Anguilla's foremost cyclists (having represented Anguilla at the Commonwealth Games) is now sharing his passion for professional road cycling with visitors to the island. Ronnie Bryan has expanded his car rental business in order to allow visitors the unique opportunity to see the island in a whole new way - on a bike! "The Eagle's Eye Package" involves cycling with Ronnie on one of his training sessions across the island. For more information contact Bryan's Car Rental Telephone: 264-497-6407 or visit [www.bryanscarrental.com](http://www.bryanscarrental.com).

### 7 MYSTERY TOUR: Visiting the Butterfly Farm in St Thomas

Within a large meshed enclosure you can get up close to hundreds of exotic butterflies, including some of the most spectacular species in the world. Arrive early in the morning and witness the incredible sight of a butterfly emerging from its pupa and taking its first flight. For more information, call (340) 715-3366 or visit [www.thebutterflyfarm.com](http://www.thebutterflyfarm.com)

### 8 MYSTERY TOUR: Hiking in Nevis

What better way to get close to nature than by pulling on your hiking boots and heading for the hills? Sunrise Tours offer a variety of hikes, one of the most popular being the Rainforest Source Hike during which you will be led through the lush cloud forest to an ideal spot for panoramic views. Along the way, your guides will point out the flora and fauna, and you'll get to see Nevis' famous Green Vervet Monkeys. For more information for [www.nevisnaturetours.com](http://www.nevisnaturetours.com)

## 9 MYSTERY TOUR: Surfing the Soup Bowl at Bathsheba, Barbados & Harrison's Cave

Surf champ Kelly Slater rated The Soup Bowl in Bathsheba on the North East Atlantic coast as having some of the best surfing in the Caribbean. However, if you'd prefer an altogether calmer and quieter watery adventure, head for Harrison's Cave, a magnificent underground cave system of stalactites, stalagmites, waterfalls, pools and even cave showers. Harrison's Cave is located in St Thomas and offers guided tours. Call 246-438-6640 or visit [www.harrisonscave.com](http://www.harrisonscave.com)

## 10 MYSTERY TOUR: Zip-lining through the Antiguan Rainforest

Billed as "the greatest adventure ride in the heart of the Rainforest", the Antigua Rainforest Canopy Tour involves an unforgettable journey high above the trees. The geography of the gorge means you are above the treetops for large parts of the exciting run, entering a corridor in the foliage at either end, where you will arrive at a rock pool and small waterfall.

For more information go to [www.antigaurainforest.com](http://www.antigaurainforest.com) or call (268) 562 6363