

Same as last year, the recipe for holiday bliss

Millions of people each year go back to the same holiday destination as before, including DICK LUMSDEN who wonders if it is because of old age or habit

WHEN I was a teenager I used to bite my nails. Maybe it was teenage angst, maybe it was because I used to pound a manual typewriter every day in a small provincial newsroom – or maybe it was just habit.

I've been thinking a lot about habits lately, because as I have grown older I seem to be developing more and more of them. Nail-biting was dropped somewhere along life's journey, but has been replaced with an endless number of little rituals and repetitions which define the way I live.

From the minute I wake up, each day is punctuated by habits and guided by routine – from the snatched breakfast, to catching the train, getting the first coffee of the day, writing my to do list, work, getting the train home, falling asleep in front of the TV and getting a dig in the ribs for snoring.

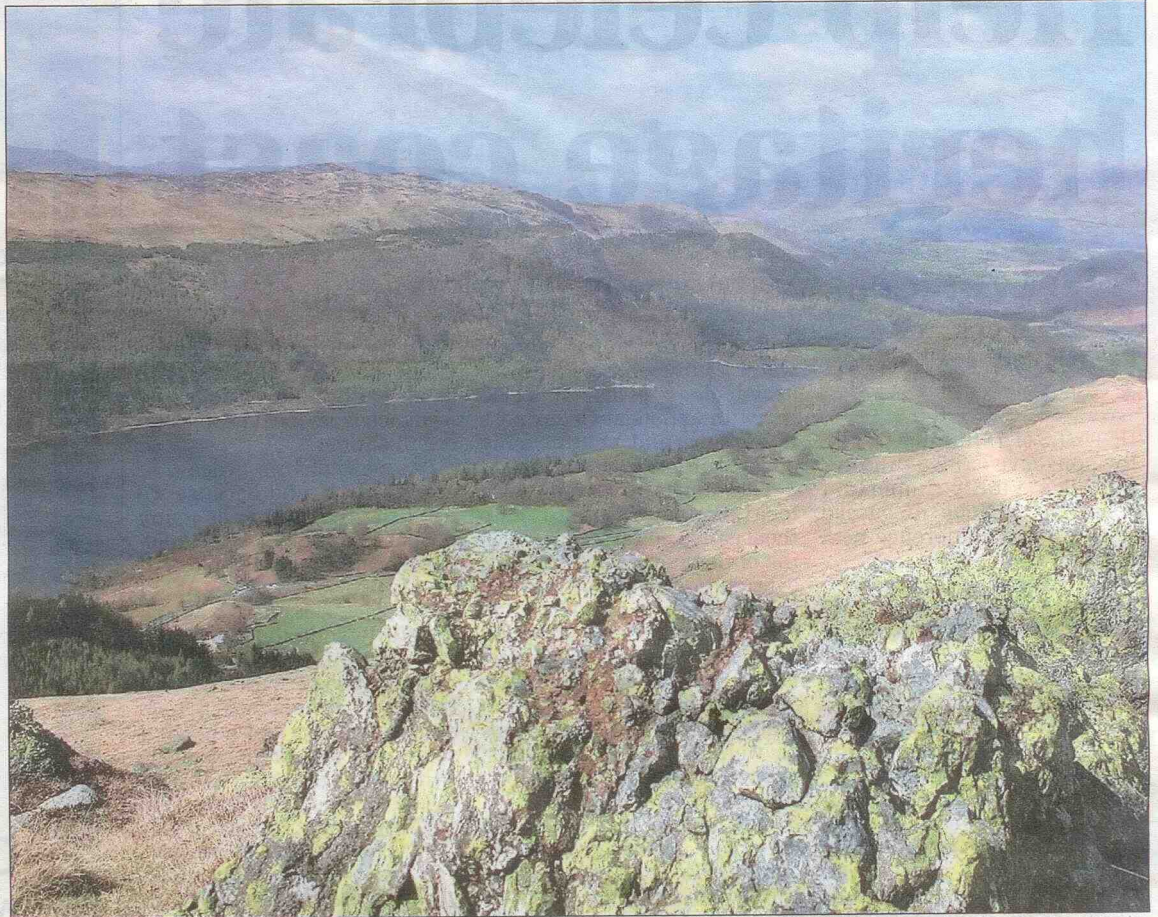
I guess habits are what form our comfort zone, and the older we get the less happy we are when anything threatens to take us out of our comfort zone. One of the best examples of this is where we take our holiday. Every year in the UK, millions of people go back to the same place as they have before, whether that is an all-inclusive resort in Benidorm or a cottage in the Lake District.

The familiarity of the surroundings is comforting, there is no need to find your way around, and you know what to expect.

When I was young I was adventurous, curious to find out about the world, and travelled to many different places. Now, I am that person who goes every year to the same place in Spain... and to a cottage in the Lake District. When did the change creep up on me? Did I pass a certain birthday without realising it?

In the animal kingdom, salmon travel thousands of miles to spawn in the same place, birds migrate round half the globe for a bit of warmth, and killer whales swim for thousands of miles just to catch a seal pup on the same beach each year.

Every summer I head for the Costa Blanca and a plate of sardines at the little café just inside the harbour gates in Torrevieja. If that café ever closes I'll be as devastated as the killer whale who arrived too late.



IN HIS COMFORT ZONES: When did his holidays in Spain and the Lake District become habit-forming, wonders Dick Lumsden

Photograph: EADT

every Easter for the last eight years. We went to the same cottage as last year, walked the same walks as last year and visited the same pubs as last year – and we all loved it.

Over the years of going to The Lakes at Easter, we have discovered that after a full day's walking, it is infinitely more pleasurable to come off the hills, have a few beers in a lovely local pub, then retreat back into our cottage for a comfy dinner, than go out and fight for a table at an expensive restaurant.

So now we even take our food with us... shepherd's pie pre-cooked at home, frozen, and taken up for the first night. Frozen lasagne for the second night, a roast chicken for Sunday lunch, and enough bacon and eggs for a cooked breakfast every morning... same procedure every year!

We haven't though – as yet – gone as far as many thousands of people who go abroad every year

people going self-catering will pack items such as baked beans, bacon and even cheese in their luggage.

I love a good cheese and pickle roll, but I'm not sure I'd want one that much that I'd pack it in Ryanair's hold all the way to the Mediterranean.

Having a Spanish sniffer dog panting over my suitcase as I lug it through Alicante airport and having to explain in broken Spanish to a couple of paramilitary customs officers that it is a block of mature Cheddar and not half a pound of Semtex, is not something I want to experience any time soon.

I can understand inexperienced travellers not wanting to try the street food in certain parts of the world.

I did once in Thailand, and what looked like a well cooked, tasty sausage, in fact tasted like it had been picked up from the floor of a dog kennel.

Ambleside (although as an aside, there is a pub there called the Golden Rule which does the best home made scotch eggs I've ever tasted... mmmm).

So if you are a creature of habit like me, I wish you well in this year's trip and I hope you have a secret café or bar that you will be making a beeline for. If, on the other hand, you haven't reached that stage in life yet, then good luck to you. Because when you arrive at your destination and your luggage turns up in Venezuela, that's the last you'll ever see of your jar of Marmite. Happy holidays!

■ Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to older consumers. If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some