

The Spectrum

Edition **127** July 2026



**produced
by and for
autistic
people**



About the Spectrum

The Spectrum is produced by and for autistic adults. We welcome submissions on any topic from autistic people who are over 18.

The Spectrum is published quarterly, in January, April, July and October, in print and online.

To submit an item to *the Spectrum*, please go to **autism.org.uk/theSpectrum** and follow the link to submit your work.

Although most issues are themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the magazine's content will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel and for fitting the space available.

Please note that *the Spectrum* receives many submissions each quarter, so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed. Discussions on editorial choices will not be entered into.

Pieces that appear in *the Spectrum* are credited using the author's first name only, unless the author requests an alias. This is done to protect their privacy.

The National Autistic Society promotes *the Spectrum* on social media using pieces selected from the magazine.

Please note: the views expressed in *the Spectrum* are not necessarily those of the Editors, the National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the magazine.

The Spectrum online version is available at **autism.org.uk/theSpectrum**

You can email *the Spectrum* at **spmag@nas.org.uk**

History

This magazine was founded as *Asperger United* in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of the National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised lack of services for autistic people and the potential for self-help and networking as a means of support.

The purpose of the magazine was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at.

The name *the Spectrum* was suggested by dozens of people and chosen in an online poll in 2018.

The former Editors and Sub-editors are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce, the Goth and Charlotte.

In 2024, Fiona and Charlotte, autistic members of the National Autistic Society's Content team, became joint editors. In October 2025, Helen, another autistic member of staff, took over from Charlotte as Co-editor.



Welcome to the July issue

It was interesting, and not surprising, just how many holiday submissions had to do with nature, the seaside and open landscapes. Yet, whether it's a scenic getaway, city break or staycation we're after, holidays can bring many mixed emotions. Sometimes, it takes a while to figure out how to manage holidays in a way that feels calm and truly enjoyable.

As you'll explore in the selected reflections, there can be joy in the planning and sensory experiences of deeply immersing yourself in the places

you visit. There can also be anxiety, with emotionally draining expectations and problems to solve – maybe for some of us, it's a mix of both. Taking more time and care to plan holidays and what you'll do each day can create the kind of holidays that help us rest and recharge, no matter if what we enjoy looks different to others.

You will find our suggested theme for the October issue on page 13, but we also welcome submissions on any topic of your choosing. Remember to complete a permissions form for your submission, as we can't publish anything without it.

Please submit your work at autism.org.uk/the-spectrum/submit-work.

Yours,

Fiona and Helen

Contents

Paws for thought
- artwork by Natasha front cover

Four reasons why planning a routine in the summer holidays can help autistic kids
- article by Abbie 4-5

Bouncer - artwork by Grace 5

Home in motion
- article by Donna 6

But will I find calm there?
- article by Paul 7

Travelling solo as an autistic woman -
article by Lauren 8-9

The ocean - poem by Ella. 9

The best bit
- article by Rosalind 10

Nomadic at soul - article by Roxanne.. 10

Holidays on the edge
- poem by Macy 11

"Going somewhere nice?"
- poem by Nigel 12

Cross stitch - artwork by Chandan 13

Next issue's theme..... 13

Never doing it again
- poem by Paula..... 14

The holiday question
- artwork by Sammy. 15

Beyond the comfort zone
- article by Harry 16-17

Holiday home
- poem by Varosha 18-19

How to subscribe to the magazine 19

Rocks - St. Ives, Cornwall
- artwork by James back cover

Four reasons why planning a routine in the summer holidays can help autistic kids

By Abbie

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Having some kind of routine can help autistic people to be able to regulate themselves. As an autistic person myself, I've found it really useful to have some kind of routine in place when there isn't the consistency of school or education to guide me in the holidays. So, I'd like to share four reasons why putting in place some kind of routine over the summer holidays can be beneficial to finding the new normal before school starts again.

1. Activities

With schools being out for the holidays, it means any sense of routine has completely gone. The safety blanket of that routine has gone. So, this is the time to plan things to do. Using a calendar to plan what you're doing each day can help give some structure. Going away for a holiday? Note it down so you can plan activities around it. Get the kids involved so they have some control over what they're doing.

Sadly, British weather can rain on those plans if they're outside. Having backup ideas can be beneficial should playing outside be a no-go. If you'd planned to go to the park but it starts raining, having an activity or two, like painting or playing board games, in reserve can avoid panic if your plans have to change.

2. Change preparations

Scheduling your summer holiday means you can plan for preparing your child for any changes. With a change in school or school year, there can be some understandable nerves with the unknown. Planning in time to prepare them for what comes next can mean they're a little more comfortable with the knowledge of what comes next. Involve them in decisions like their pencil case, backpack and stationery they will need, especially for exam seasons.

Involving them in these decisions can give them a sense of control when everything else feels like they have none. For those going to a new school, if you're able to, plan a few times travelling the route/s they're likely to take to their new school. Familiarity can make the journey less daunting if they know where they're going. One less unknown for their first day.

3. Uniform

A new school usually means a new uniform. We know how this can be: itchy shirts, irritating tags, stiff fabrics – sensory overload ready to happen. Sadly, there's not a lot of choice in the uniforms, as the schools set out certain clothes that need to be worn. Parents are likely to get this list from the school of what uniform they need to get. This is where we get the kids involved.

Giving them a chance to have a feel of the fabrics beforehand means you have time to sort things before they go to school. If the tags are too itchy, you have time to cut them out and keep them somewhere safe for washing instructions. Making a scrapbook of their clothes could help with this. By taking a picture of the garment and attaching the tag beside it, you then know exactly what the tags are for.

If the fabrics are stiff and start to rub, especially the collared shirts, this gives you a chance to wash them early so they can soften before use. If you have multiple children to get into uniforms, see if you could use iron-on labels with their names or add a coloured dot of thread for each child on a seam where they won't feel it so you can immediately spot whose uniform is for who. It's quite useful if the kids are of similar ages. It means the kids are also less likely to fight over whose clothes are whose in that morning rush when school starts again.

4. Recharge

School isn't always the easiest place to focus. Using the summer holidays as an opportunity to rest and recharge allows them to build up resilience before going back into school. If school is really difficult for them, try to use the time to talk with them about what makes school really difficult. Finding coping mechanisms that work for them means they're more prepared to go back. It also means you're more informed about what your

child struggles with should you need to talk with the school. Scheduling in what activities, day trips and holidays you're going to be doing with your child can allow them to have some routine away from school. There may still be points where stress creeps in. It happens to all of us. Allowing them a voice, whether verbal or through a device, will help them to have a chance to enjoy the holidays.

So, I wish you the best of luck and happy holidays!

Bouncer

By Grace

© Grace 2026

Artwork



This is Bouncer, who was my best friend for 18 years. We got him and his brother Tango as kittens in 2004 when I was 11. He loved routine and sensory comforts, and we often joked that he could be autistic himself. He would strongly fixate on his favourite things: me, boxes, and unusually for a cat, water. This is him wading through the paddling pool to cool off during the summer holidays.

Home in motion

By Donna

© Donna 2026



As I sit here with my equally neurodiverse partner, aiming to write this piece, I am instantly reminded of the reason we benefit from getting away. Despite our habit of writing first thing in the morning before getting out of bed, his dyspraxia often leaves him flustered. Trying to get the laptop table set up and the suddenly unwieldy duvet out of his way, he pinches his finger, drops the mouse and the laptop slides off. I chuckle as he eyes me over his shoulder and cutely offers an exasperated “hello”. We have a particular view on what it means to get away, away from a home that we love, where we can regulate a sense of calm that often eludes us when in an unfamiliar place.

I am sure many of you will be able to empathise with the compulsions and routines that a neurodiverse person associates with being at home. Having a large dose of ADHD and autism means that we tend to be quite specific amidst the daily chaos that tends to ensue. Can I claim to be both messy and tidy in one sentence? The constant challenge of getting oneself in order reaches a wonderful crescendo in the lead-up to getting away. A love for lists hits a heady new height when perfecting what needs to be packed; however, this is a time when differences in processing often show. While Paul paces the floor, anxious to get the main luggage bag in the car boot, I prefer it to be left out until the very last item has been crammed in. With practice and experience, we can walk out the door with increasing efficiency through a level of compromise that makes holiday preparation far less stressful.

Paul is an astonishing mapper of landscapes, whereas I am unaware of the network of roads and numbers. I find scheduling totally overwhelming, whereas he seems able to book the world in advance. We are both spontaneous!

My mind links other details, which make me far more likely to pack the Mini Cheddars he loves to snack on while driving and to organise the necessary meal at the far end of a long journey, a planning task that typically overwhelms Paul. Sharing the driving avoids headaches and exhaustion associated with hyperfocus.

Our skills and attention to detail complement each other. Neither of us is precious about the tasks at hand. We are simply two travellers who mindfully work together with the shared aim of a positive travel experience. Leaning into the planning process while allowing for each other's quirks ensures that the bulk of holiday stress can be avoided. Simply knowing that another person has your back brings with it a calming sense of unity. As a result, the hours seem to fly by, however many miles are spent travelling.

Historically, I have often found holidays taxing, but now that they are executed with autism at the forefront of consideration, they can be really enjoyable. Taking into account each other's needs and preferences, any moments of overwhelm or frustration are expressed honestly in a safe space that is respected by the other person. Released from the pressure to perform household rituals, we can both focus on the creative activities we love. It is a pleasure for me to witness Paul's enthusiasm for nature and long-distance walking, while the artist in me loves to point out small or unusual details. With some mutual encouragement, we are increasingly committed to using photography to capture these experiences. Neither of us is good at small talk, but fostering shared interests by travelling together means that we never run out of new ideas to discuss.

But will I find calm there?

By Paul

© Paul 2026



Holidays: in medieval times, rare breaks from the grind of life, but in the 21st century, for the majority, an expectation of leave, getaway or staycation. Some take holidays for granted; most cherish them. Others can't begin to imagine they could afford or cope with time away.

For many years – all the way back to childhood – I had mixed feelings about holidays. Changes of routine and scene excited me but also created tensions. Given this was how it was in everyday life, it's no surprise that holidays sent the stress dial way to the right. The quiet spaces I found at home – my hiding places – weren't there in a strange location. Once old enough, I'd wander off on my own to explore the dunes or splash in rock pools. If other children were part of the holiday, I'd decline 'gang' membership. Sometimes, I'd angle to stay in the family car when others were getting into the spirit of things. Perhaps this was because the car was the obvious link to home. I did, after all, enjoy the long drives at the start and end of a holiday better than anything.

The pattern was set for how I felt about holidays. Anxieties about logistics, together with sensory issues around sand and water, heat and bright light, meant that I wasn't a natural for the time on the beach that others loved. The feel and smell of sunscreen on my skin was a one-way ticket to a headache.

Going away as an adult – those years when I was a superficially functioning family man – was demanding. I'd arrange and deliver, organised to the last detail, the stereotypical holiday package. Beaches, mountains, planes and pools – the family did them all. These were the 'masking' years, when I proved myself able to put on the clown's face, which brought jollity to the party, while all the time concealing feelings that I wasn't a fully paid-up member of the tour group.

I compromised on holiday destinations, as many do. But the strain sometimes showed through, starting with the packing. Few things rivalled that for putting me on edge. There were times I heard myself called a killjoy. I hid most of the headaches. Of course I did.

Only in later life have I discovered a greater ease on my travels, on trips where I let my legs do the talking and find an inner peace from allowing myself to blend into the landscape and observe nature in every step. The simple, repetitive act of walking, often over many miles, relaxes my whole being as nothing else can – a truly transcendental experience. And did I say this greater ease started when I began to head off solo? Quite simply, and initially without strategy, I stopped being Captain Logistics and took my leave from being Mr Entertainer. Before long, it dawned on me that I'd stopped thinking of time away as 'holidays' or 'treats', instead seeing it as simply 'recreation'.

I now go away to re-create myself, to feed my body, mind and soul with new imaginings. And I am now relaxed from the moment I head off with a partner who understands that loading the car can be overwhelming for me, shares the burden of driving, sees the miles we walk as opportunities rather than a curse and encourages me to watch birds and butterflies for as long as I want. We consider time away as part of our shared purpose, meaning that holidays are not thought of as 'escape'. I'm now able to embrace them fully, considering them integral to the flow of life. They are spaces in which I can carry on being myself, just in a different location.

It's taken a long time for me to learn how to manage the excitements and tensions of 'holidays', but I made it in the end.

Travelling solo as an autistic woman

By Lauren

© Lauren 2026



Who am I and why am I doing this?

This is a complex question that I am still grappling with. All I know for definite is that after having been given a five per cent survival rate at birth, weighing just 2lbs and having a hole in the heart and daily brain haemorrhages, I am here for a reason.

Travel is one of my biggest passions. When travelling, I enjoy learning about the culture and history, exploring old ruins, castles and museums. Although I often do plan a beach day too! To me, travel is more than a hobby or just a 'holiday'. As an autistic woman who has struggled to find her way in life, travel is a way of bringing me back to myself, understanding the purpose of my life and developing my confidence and independence. When I travel, I feel as though I belong. I do not feel like an outcast or an alien in a foreign land. Travel brings me peace.

To date, I have explored over 18 countries. From the United Arab Emirates to the closest point to the North Pole and wonders in Europe and the UK, I've had some wonderful experiences and have made memories that I will cherish forever.

The star of the show

Here, I'd like to introduce my faithful travel companion... Truffles! He has been sharing these special moments with me for nearly ten years. He may be a tiny elephant, but he is mighty. He has a caring soul and always strives to do his best. He brings joy to others and is one of my motivators. His favourite thing to do when travelling is to marvel at crystal clear waters and ponder over life on sandy beaches. He does experience anxiety when trying new things and meeting new people, but we are working on this together.

Solo travel

I debated. I overthought. I panicked. I was brave. I was liberated. I was exhausted.

People say travelling solo can be the most terrifying yet liberating experience of your life. It's true. Being an autistic woman brings its added challenges. My first solo trip, which was to Greece, was exhilarating. I explored whitewashed buildings, hiked up a volcano and nearly fell off a cliff! Travel has shown me my limits, strengths and challenges. Whenever I travel, I realise everyone experiences anxiety at times. For example, people may feel anxious about misplacing their boarding pass or missing their flight. I realise everyone makes mistakes and that it is okay to ask for help when needed. I will now list a few ideas of what has helped ease my travel anxiety.

Helpful strategies

- Talk to friends/family or watch YouTube blogs of those who have travelled solo.
- Preparation is key. Create a mind map of possible places to visit – consider your interests, the weather, costs, travel times, food etc. Write down activities you want to do – you may want to join a group tour. Keep a note of where/when to get transport. It may also be a good idea to check opening and closing times for any attractions you wish to visit to avoid disappointment.
- Conversation cues and prompt cards can help remind you of what to do in certain situations – this can be helpful when you need flexibility eg due to unreliable transport or changing weather.
- Use Google Street View to check out the area beforehand.
- Print a basic map of accommodation and tourist places beforehand.

- Start with a short flight and a short stay first – build up to longer breaks gradually.
- Reserve a plane seat – I prefer having a window seat as this reduces stress when disembarking the plane, and you can take lots of photos!
- Wear the sunflower lanyard and book special assistance at the airport.
- Buy some extra supplies of your favourite food at the airport in case they do not have the foods you like.
- Pre-book a transfer from the airport to your accommodation or book a package holiday with a transfer included.
- Take a book/listen to music or a podcast/have something to distract you.
- Have a focus throughout the holiday – for me, this is photography.
- Use Google Translate if you find it hard to understand the language.
- Keep in touch with family and friends during the trip. For safety reasons, I always give Mum details of my travel arrangements and accommodation.
- Listen to your body – it is okay to rest and give yourself extra time to process everything. It is okay not to cover everything on your itinerary. Go at your own pace.
- Lastly, a little self-belief goes a long way. There is so much beauty in the world. Have the courage to explore it.

The ocean

By Ella

© Ella 2026

The suitcase is open, clothes spill over the side, the wardrobe is open

One more t-shirt?

And probably this other moisturiser

Oh and what if we decide to go out for a nice meal, I should bring my lipstick

Do I need another pair of shoes?

I am on the plane

I am by the window

I am rocking

Shards of lemon in my mouth

Three songs on a loop

I am rocking

A baby is crying

My partner is asleep

I am rocking

Bags get dumped and food gets sourced
The heat is a wall and none of the sandwiches are simply just ham
and now we are moving and there's just so much to see and to do and to hear and to smell and the beach is here and the sand is everywhere, along my skin and between my toes

I can taste the salt and feel the wind
My hair cuts my cheek as I try to walk; a wobbly toddler, arms splayed, bracing myself

I dodge the seaweed and the shells, entirely focused until.

I stand in the ocean and I am free.



The best bit

By Rosalind

© Rosalind 2026

The best bit of the whole holiday is planning it. I love the research. I'll find where to go, how far it is, where we could stop en route to eat or for the dog to run around. Then I'll check the menus of the places we could stop to eat at to make sure my daughter's food restrictions are manageable there.

Then it's packing lists. Will it be sunny, cold, wet? Will we swim, walk, surf, skate?

Every pub and restaurant within ten miles of the campsite is checked. Dog-friendly, kid-friendly, something for her to eat, something for us to eat? Can we walk there? Is it expensive?

Shopping lists next. Making sure we have enough food that she will eat, enough food for everyone else, enough variety to ensure we don't go mad, but enough familiar stuff too.



Everything planned, researched, explored, to ensure I know exactly what can/should/will happen. I like to camp best of all because then it's my den, my things, my way.

But when we get going, we're always later than I thought because not everyone works to my schedule. So we can't stop where I thought, and it's all downhill from there. Not everything is exactly like it was in the pictures. The menus are 'new for summer', or the toilets are darker, or the walk to the pub is overgrown. She's tired. He's bored. Everyone is on their phones. I'm exhausted from things still being different and overwhelming.

So perhaps the best bit is when we get home again. Where the smells and the light and the kettle are exactly as I remember.

Nomadic at soul

By Roxanne

© Roxanne 2026

I'm never not planning my next getaway. According to my booking.com, I'm staying in various boutique hotels in five major cities next year. The notes app in my phone is neatly organised into countries and ideal itineraries within them. Some people say I should have worked for MI5 or been a detective. Research is my thing but it doesn't mean it always becomes 'a thing'.

I'm never not thinking about escaping the humdrum. I am nomadic at soul but familiar at heart. I hate change but love



the idea of running away with the circus. Travelling across countries in a caravan appeals to me as I hate flying. I'm not sure I actually hate flying or if it's just the smell of the aeroplane that I hate the most.

I'm pretty sure I've never worn an outfit again once I've flown in it. My dad always says you must have a dream; so sometimes I dream so wildly that it feels like I have really lived it. And I don't need to go to that place on the smelly aeroplane. I just add another folder to my notes app and dream some more.

Holidays on the edge

By Macy

© Macy 2026



People talk about holidays
like they're postcards.

Golden beaches.
Suitcases.

Ice cream melting in the sun.

But my favourite holiday
was never a place.

It was the rare moments
when I didn't have to pretend.

No rehearsing conversations.
No forcing eye contact.
No studying everyone else
to work out how I should act.

Just silence.

The kind that feels safe.

The kind that lets your shoulders drop
without even realising
how long you've been
carrying the weight.

For years, I thought holidays
were destinations.

A week away.
A different view from the window.

Now I think a holiday
is any place where you can exist
without apologising for who you are.

A person who doesn't ask
me to be louder.
A room that isn't overwhelming.
A day where my differences
aren't treated like problems to solve.

Maybe that's why I've spent
so much of my life
searching for somewhere
that feels like home.

Not a country.
Not a city.

Just a space where being autistic
doesn't mean being misunderstood.

A space where I can take off the mask
and leave it behind.

Because after all these years,
the greatest holiday I can imagine

is finally getting to rest
from being someone else.

.....

“Going somewhere nice?”

By Nigel

© Nigel 2026



I cut my own hair
And one of the reasons
Is how bad it felt
During holiday season.

They'd ask
"Had I been?"
Or
"Where was I going?"
Completely benign,
They had no way of knowing.

That I never stop,
It's all give
With no take.
I just haven't the time
For a holiday break,
And the thought of the
Planning
The booking
The fare,

And what will I find
If I ever get there?
Yet I love to relax,
By the sea, in the sun.
And holidays sound like
they ought to be fun.
But to go or to stay,
I get caught in between,
So it's easier to stay
And retain the routine.

But it's later in life,
When you're finally aware
of the cost of not going,
No memories to share.
For Avoidance is 'safer',
But can end in despair.

And it's one of the reasons,
I cut my own hair.

.....

Cross stitch

By Chandan

© Chandan 2026



"During holidays, I have a lot of free time and don't know how to fill my time. Then I took up embroidery and have done a few pieces that I have framed and gifted to family. They loved it! I find this very fulfilling, and it fills my free time nicely."

Next issue's theme:

The suggested theme for the October 2026 edition is: Fear and fiction - the stories told about autistic people.

You are invited to interpret this any way you like and respond to it in writing or with visual art. You may want to share something about the real fears autistic people face in this world, misinformation about autism, what the media and politicians are saying about us or opposing harmful narratives, stereotypes and myths.

We also welcome submissions on any other topic of your choosing, unrelated to the suggested theme. Remember to complete a permissions form for your submission, as we can't publish anything without it. Please submit work at autism.org.uk/the-spectrum.

Never doing it again

By Paula

© Paula 2026

One year in advance

Would I like to go on holiday?
Oh yes, I would
The colour, the sunshine, the food, the
markets, walking new streets, no work
Count me in!

Six months in advance

I must think a little bit about where to visit
There are so many options
The reviews all have something
bad for every place I research.
I feel a little anxious, but I
am sure it will be okay

One month in advance

My work schedule for the month
ahead includes my holiday
I'm not used to not being at work
I will miss my routine
I need to think about what to pack
and how to get to the airport
and any shopping I need to
do and who will water my plants...

One week in advance

I've started to gather my things
I don't know what the weather will be
There are some things going on next
week that I will not be here for
People might forget me



What if I die when I'm away?
Have I done my will?
How will my family cope without me?
I feel sick

The day before

I wish I hadn't said yes to this
I know what I'm like
Why did I think this time
would be different
I am sad to leave my home
I may never return if
something goes wrong
I hate planes and travel and people
I can't sleep, I can't eat, I'm so anxious
I feel ill and so so upset

The day

Exhausted, sad, tired, regretful, lost
The holiday
I'm here, I'm safe so far
There have been some nice things
It's taking me a while to adjust
I had to move rooms because of noises
The hotel smells funny
I must keep busy
I'm doing well

After the holiday

I am proud of myself that I went
I'm never doing it again

The holiday question

By Sammy

© Sammy 2026



Artwork

THE HOLIDAY QUESTION
A BREAK from the NORM
ESCAPE!
A CHANCE to TRAVEL
NEW DESTINATIONS
— CHANGE —
I DON'T LIKE CHANGE
Get Away from it ALL
RESPIRE CARE · SLEEPING
OH YES! I LOVE SLEEP
I DO ENJOY A
full BREAKFAST
MORNING COFFEE
BIRD WATCHING
STRAWHATS · SHADES · SHORTS
LOUD HAWAIIAN SHIRTS
BRUNCH · 2ND COFFEE
COASTAL WALKS
BEACH COMBING
EARLY DOORS
with BARSNACKS
deliberations · conversations
to MURMURATIONS
A GLASS OR 2 of RED
WATCHING the SUN GO DOWN
TOASTED CHEESE · CHEESE ON TOAST
— BED —
HOLIDAY DREAMS
LET'S
GO AND PACK
here comes the
SUMMER

Beyond the comfort zone

By Harry

© Harry 2026



My name is Harry, and I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at nine years old.

So far, I have travelled to 87 countries and territories. That number often surprises people. Travel is usually associated with spontaneity, unpredictability and effortless social interaction, three things that do not always come naturally to autistic people, myself included. Yet travel has become one of the defining parts of my life.

I did not begin travelling because I was fearless. I began because I was curious. I wanted to understand how the world works, how different places feel and how people live beyond the patterns I grew up with. What I discovered was unexpected. Travel offered structure through planning, comfort through routines I could control and purpose through deep interests in geography, transport systems, history and conservation.

Where it began

That curiosity became reality when I left school and spent ten weeks doing voluntary work in Tanzania. It was my first time being so far from home, fully immersed in an unfamiliar environment.

Everything felt different, the sounds, the pace of life, the expectations. It pushed me far beyond my comfort zone. But it also showed me that I was more capable than I had believed. I gained independence and perspective, and I realised something important: travel did not have to mean chaos. With the right preparation, it could be manageable and even grounding.

Why travel works for me

Travel gives me a kind of clarity that everyday life often does not. At home, unspoken social rules and expectations can feel draining. In unfamiliar

places, those expectations reset. I am not confined by the same roles or assumptions. I can observe, learn and move at my own pace.

Although travel appears unpredictable from the outside, I build strong structure into every trip. I research extensively. I create detailed itineraries. I plan transport, accommodation and downtime. That preparation makes me feel calmer and more regulated than daily life.

Travel also allows me to engage deeply with my interests. The objectives are clear: reach this place, learn its history, experience its landscape. The goals are tangible. Progress is visible.

Travel can still be overwhelming. Airports are noisy. Cities are crowded. Plans change. But the challenges are defined, and that makes them easier to process. Travel is not an escape from my autism. It is something that works with it.

People often focus on the number: 87 countries. It sounds impressive, but the number itself is not what matters. It is the setbacks, the problem solving and the small wins that have shaped me. Each trip teaches me more about how I manage sensory overload, communicate under pressure and adapt when things go wrong.

Counting countries is easy. Learning from them is what truly counts.

The importance of organised tours

I usually travel with organised tours, and they are essential to how I explore the world.

Tours provide predictability in environments that might otherwise feel chaotic. Knowing the itinerary in advance and having someone else coordinate logistics significantly reduces stress. That predictability helps me conserve energy

and manage sensory overload.

Tours also provide a safety net. If something goes wrong, there is a guide or group to turn to. I do not have to constantly make decisions about routes or timing. That mental space allows me to focus on learning and experiencing.

For me, organised travel is not restrictive. It is enabling. It turns something potentially overwhelming into something sustainable.

Building independence

Recently, I took a major step. I planned and completed a two-and-a-half week trip to Japan and South Korea independently.

I would not have had the confidence to do that without years of travelling on organised tours first. Those tours taught me how airports function, how to navigate train systems and how to pace myself. Within that framework, I learned the mechanics of travel.

With that foundation, I created my own structure by mapping routes, booking accommodation, building rest time into my schedule and preparing contingency plans. It was challenging at times, but completing the trip showed me that I can trust my preparation.

My favourite city in Japan was Kyoto. Its history and cultural traditions made every street feel purposeful, especially the hike through Fushimi Inari Shrine, where thousands of torii gates climb the hillside. The highlight was an evening walk through Gion, where I learned about the discipline and artistry of geisha. It deepened my respect for the dedication required to preserve such traditions.

When structure matters most

Not everything goes smoothly.

Arriving in Delhi was overwhelming. When I reached my hotel, I was told it was unavailable and that I would be moved elsewhere. For many people, that is an inconvenience. For me, sudden change creates uncertainty, and uncertainty destabilises me.

Instead of reacting, I asked for specifics: the name of the new hotel, the distance and the transport plan. Each answer restored a piece of structure.

The next day, I was due to travel by train to Ranthambore National Park for a safari. Instead, I was taken to the wrong station. I stood alone on a crowded platform, unsure whether I was in the right place. The problem was not the crowd. It was uncertainty. I could feel a meltdown approaching.

So I narrowed the problem. I checked the train number. I confirmed the departure time. I reminded myself that someone was expecting me at the other end. I did not need to solve the entire journey. I only needed clarity about the next step forward.

Eventually, a representative found me and guided me to the correct carriage. Once I was seated, with certainty restored, I could breathe again.

The following day, all of that stress felt worthwhile. During the morning and afternoon safaris in Ranthambore National Park, I had two sightings of wild tigers. Watching them move silently through their natural habitat was surreal, calm and powerful.

In that moment, the uncertainty of the previous day no longer defined the experience. The reward was not just seeing the tigers. It was proving to myself that I could endure the difficult parts to reach something extraordinary.

What travel has taught me

Travel, as an autistic person, is not about being fearless. It is about preparation, structure, self-awareness and persistence. It means understanding how your mind works and building systems that allow you to thrive within it.

Eighty seven countries later, I am still curious and still learning.

This article first appeared in *Beyond Travel* magazine - gobeyondholidays.com/beyond-travel-mag.html

Holiday home

By Varosha

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Our holiday home is a borrowed space
A breath of fresh air, a valley view
We pitch our tent, slow our pace

Time marked out not in alarm clocks,
Not by appointments, schedules
Or unreliable bus timetables

But by sunrises, sunsets
The morning burst of birdsong
And the staccato swoops of bats at dusk

By the regular rumble of the train
In the valley
And we count them
Three carriages
Two carriages
Three carriages

And then twice a day the long thunder
and clank of 24 cargo carriages roaring
past

A home from home this field
A yellow vista, buttercup filled

We build our canvas half term home
Cosy it up with pillows and quilts
Festooned with bunting and lights

No roughing it for us

We catch up with the campsite clan
We've seen them grow and build their
lives
They've seen our children grow,

from the kids they were to the near adults
they are now
Whilst we've just grown older

They're like the children of old friends now
That we're so fond of, proud of...

Days here aren't spent
But dawdled, lazed

Reading, writing, painting
Games and cards and campfires.

Those giant blue bags
Are packed up for beach trips

What did we do before Ikea?

Towels and rugs
Fruit, sandwiches, crisps

We'll still have to get some Magnums and
chips

Wetsuits, Boards
Games, balls
Books, notebooks
Paints, pastels

It seems like everything we own
Far too much as we trudge down

But it gives us time
Time to sit
And play
And swim
And time



For staring
For watching

At the sea
The sky
And the year gone by

And then back to our place
Our field
Our home from home

We adorn our pitch once more
Festooned now with damp towels and
sandy wetsuits

Ribs surfboard sore
Legs bruised

Skin sun warm
Salt kissed
Sand dusted
And that salt water sun cream combination

Better than any hair product you can buy...

And we're ravenous, eat the meal that we
had planned
but also extra fruit, then sweets,
hot chocolate marshmallows

Eat whatever - insatiable, exhausted from
our outdoor, sea air day

We play games on the grass,
Talk by campfire glow,
Read our books by headtorch light

And with the molten sun the day slips away
And is replaced by the soft grey of full
moon but cloudy sky

Our holiday home
It's not ours exactly
But we make it ours again each May

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