

Word of the month Vacation

I'm struck by the way this word has caught on in new guises. It's a very old word: Chaucer used it, as did Shakespeare; and it became routinely used for any formal break from an activity, such as between university terms. It developed the general meaning of "holiday" in American English during the 19th century, and during the 20th this spread around the world, so that many British people now readily talk about "going on vacation" instead of (or as well as) "going on holiday".

People have been playing with the word for years. *Staycation*, for example, has a first recorded usage as long ago as 1944. But it's the pandemic that has inspired a remarkable number of neologisms using the *-cation* ending. You can find all of the following online from around the English-speaking world.

Where will you go? You can stay at home (a *homecation*) or – if you own a caravan, dormobile, or the like – just outside (a *drivewaycation*). You can go to a place not far from your home (a *nearcation*). You can go to stay on a farm (a *haycation*). And several seaside resorts have advertised themselves as *baycations*. Usage can vary: in America, if you



The Hairy Bikers: on bakeation

have a *staycation*, you're staying at home; in the UK, it usually means you're not going abroad.

When will you go, and for how long? A weekend? (A *waycation*.) A day out? (A *daycation*.) A particular day of the week? Choose your day: *Mondaycation*, *Tuesdaycation* ... Or choose a time at home each day for relaxing (an *everydaycation*). And a number of travel firms offer a special deal for people

wanting a break in the month after April.

Does the *vacation* have a particular purpose? A *birthdaycation*, perhaps? Several companies offer *playcations*, with children in mind. (And yes, as you were asking, there are adult options too.) Hobbies and skills are a fruitful area: spend the time making ceramics in a *claycation*; learn a new language in a *saycation*; go trainspotting in a *railwaycation*; stop worrying about the scales in a *weighcation*; and go horse-riding in a *neighcation*.

On the BBC, the Hairy Bikers a few years ago took a gastronomic road trip to find artisan bakers. They called it a *bakeation*. I'm just waiting now to see a programme about what Father Christmas does during the rest of the year: they will doubtless call it *sleighcation*.

Closer to *Herald*-home, those conscious of the importance of the sabbath will presumably have a *Sundaycation*. On other special days, maybe a *feastdaycation* or *holydaycation*. And there are several centres now offering *praycations*.

That's enough ludicity for now. Time for a *wordplaycation* – until next month.

DAVID CRYSTAL