The problem with vacations

By Anderson Cooper

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Does anyone actually take vacations anymore? Pack up the wife, Alice, and the kids, go to the Grand Canyon, get lost, meet an Indian boy named Jimmy?

I don't think so.

Sure, celebrities take vacations, but that's part of their job. How else would Us Weekly survive?

Do you think Brad and Matt really want to be frolicking at Clooney's place on Lake Como? Do you think Al Reynolds enjoys smearing suntan lotion on Star Jones like butter on a lobster at a Jamaican resort?

That's work, people.

As a kid I used to look forward to summer, but here it nearly is, and I don't have any plans.

Paris Hilton has a house in the Hamptons, Rosie O'Donnell is planning a cruise, I've just got work.

I used to think the more successful I became, the more vacation time I could take.

Technically, that's true, but the reality is the more responsibilities you have, the less time you take off. You have too much to lose.

I'm convinced a big reason I got my own show on CNN was the fact that I kept filling in for people who were on vacation. Now if I leave the anchor chair too long, I worry Eve Harrington will take my place.

Even if I felt comfortable taking time off, I don't do vacations very well. By the second day I'm bored.

I used to think the problem was where I was vacationing, but it's not; the problem is me.

The last time I took a vacation, I went to a bed-and-breakfast in Vermont.

Online, the place looked great: a Victorian house, cozy rooms, sumptuous food. I envisioned myself sitting by a crackling fire after a long day cross-country skiing, reading a book, savoring a hot, homemade cinnamon roll.

I must have been smoking crack.

The truth is, no matter how nice they appear in online brochures, staying at a B&B is always the same.
Every morning you end up eating breakfast at a communal table in the kitchen--cum--dining room while a woman named Shirley in stretch pants cooks scrambled eggs, and the other guests regale you with stories of what they did before they retired.

Isn't the whole idea of getting away from home, getting away from home? Why leave your home to stay in someone else's?

I do love nice hotels. There's nothing sexier. Perhaps it's the anonymity of it, the ability to just stay inside ordering room service, watching fishing-lure infomercials all night long.

But the problem with hotels is that it's impossible to resist the DSL connection in the room. No matter how many times I swear I'm not going to check my e-mail, I end up searching the desk for the connection cable, and once I'm plugged in, that's it. Vacation over.

I used to think I was the only one not taking my vacation days, but I recently saw a survey conducted by Expedia.com that said Americans fail to use 415 million days of vacation each year. Which helps explain why the average vacation in America has dwindled to just four days.

Europeans take off a month -- and that doesn't include siestas, strikes, or cigarette breaks.

Sure, Europe hasn't really produced anything of note since the Black Death, but who has time to gloat? We're too busy working.

What's even worse than not taking vacation days is taking them just to catch up on all the work crap you've been avoiding.

I did this last month. For two days I organized files, paid bills, and filled out old expense reports.

When I came back to work everyone assumed I would be all rested and ready to roll up my sleeves. My sleeves had never been unrolled.

I'm no social scientist, but I'm convinced there's a correlation between the decline of vacations and the rise of fancy soaps.

Here's my theory: Unable to take vacations, people are giving themselves miniature mind vacations.

My friend Dave, a computer programmer, is a perfect example: Under constant stress at work, and afraid to take too much time off, he has transformed his bathroom into a Bath & Body Works outlet store. Dead Sea bath salts, lavender moisturizer, mint foot balm.

"I may not be able to go to Aruba," he says, "but after a long bath and a loofah, I don't really care."

I'll take his word for it.

Me? I'm thinking of taking up yoga, I've just got to find the right day to schedule a class.