

# Reading

- 1) You are going to read an article about holidays and what we expect of them. Read through the article quickly to get a general idea of what it is about, ignoring the highlights for now. What does the writer think about holidays?

## The way we travel now

### A

The prospect of a holiday is liable to persuade even the most downcast that life is worth living. Few events are anticipated more eagerly, nor form the subject of more complex and enriching daydreams. They offer us perhaps our finest chance to achieve happiness – outside of the constraints of work, of our struggle for survival and for status. The way we choose to spend them embodies, if only unknowingly, an understanding of what life might ideally be about. However, holidays almost always go wrong. The tragicomic disappointments of travel are a staple of office chat; the half-built hotel, the sense of disorientation, the mid-afternoon despair, the dreary fellow travellers, the lethargy before ancient ruins.

### B

I remember a trip to Barbados a few years ago. I looked forward to it for months. But on my first morning on the island, I realised something at once obvious and surprising; that my body proved a temperamental partner. Asked to sit on a deckchair so that the mind could savour the beach, the trees and the sun, it collapsed into difficulties; the ears complained of an enervating wind, the skin of stickiness and the toes of sand lodged between them. Unfortunately, I had brought something else that risked clouding my appreciation of my surroundings; my entire mind – not only the part that had planned the journey and agreed to pay for it, but also the part committed to anxiety, boredom, self-disgust and financial alarm. At home, as I had pored over the photographs of Barbados, I had felt oblivious to anything besides their contents. I had simply been in the pictures; alone with their elements. But melancholy and regrets were my bedfellows on that Caribbean isle, acting like panes of distorting glass between myself and the world.

### C

There was a trip to a hotel in France a friend took with his wife. The setting was sublime, the room flawless – and yet they managed to have a row which, for all the good the room and setting did them, meant that they might as well have stayed at home. The row (it started with who had forgotten the key in the room and extended to cover the whole of the relationship) was a reminder of the rigid, unforgiving logic to which human moods seem subject – and which we ignore at our peril. Our capacity to draw happiness from aesthetic or material goods seems critically dependent on first satisfying a more important range of emotional or psychological needs, among them the need for understanding, for love, expression and respect.

### D

It may be necessary to accept that the anticipation of travel is perhaps the best part about it. Our holidays are never as satisfying as they are when they exist in an as-yet-unrealised form; in the shape of an airline ticket and a brochure. In the great 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel, *Against Nature*, by JK Huysmans, the narrator goes on a few holidays which go wrong and then decides never to leave home again. He has the itineraries of the major shipping companies framed and lines his bedroom with them. He fills an aquarium with seaweed, buys a sail, some rigging and a pot of tar and, with these aids is able to experience the most pleasant sides of a long sea voyage without the inconveniences such as sea-sickness, storms or uncongenial fellow passengers. I continue to travel myself but there are times when I too feel there might be no finer journeys than those provoked in the imagination by remaining at home slowly turning the pages of an airline timetable.

2) You need to decide in which part of the text you will find the answer to the questions.

**Which section mentions:**

- a) a number of unanticipated problems faced by the writer?
- b) the possibility of the writer altering a previous pattern of behaviour?
- c) negative emotions being ever present?
- d) the fact the some conditions must be met for other aims to be achieved?
- e) the frequency of a certain topic being raised?
- f) the possibility that an unfulfilled objective may be more desirable?
- g) the writer finding it impossible to achieve his goal?
- h) the belief that the selection of a holiday is a product of an unconscious desire?