WHEN YOU’RE HAVING FUN

TIME SEEMS TO fly at certain moments and crawl in others, for reasons scientists are just beginning to understand. Here, a few examples of how you might subjectively experience the passage of time during a spring jaunt through Europe. —Jill Coody Smits

HITTING THE ROAD
Are we there yet? Whether you’re driving across the state or flying across the Atlantic this spring, the outbound trip will feel longer than the return leg. It seems we mentally block out a huge, familiar geographical area as home (so the sensation of being “almost there” crops up sooner), whereas new destinations are a journey right up until the minute we arrive at the hotel, according to a recent study published in the Journal of Consumer Psychology. So get comfortable—that 10-hour international flight will seem to stretch on and on.

SKYDIVING IN THE SWISS ALPS
As your plane takes off and you vividly imagine your parachute falling, a not-yet-understood cognitive process slows down the clock—putting the terrifying moment as far off as possible, posits University of New South Wales scientist Richard Bryant. But once you jump, excitement replaces terror; you’re distracted from the passage of time, and the long descent zooms by, according to Bryant’s study of novice skydivers.

TOURING THE ANNE FRANK HOUSE IN AMSTERDAM
Emotional events make the minutes crawl. It seems our internal clocks are directed in part by physiological sensations like heart rate and body temperature. When the body’s aroused (in response to, say, the very moving displays at the Anne Frank Museum), each moment lingers—you essentially pack more into each minute. Both joy and sadness can cause slow-mo, researchers from Blaise Pascal University note.

LISTENING TO YOUR IPOD ON THE TRAIN RIDE TO ITALY
Up-tempo music (from Vivaldi to Vampire Weekend) makes time fly, a new French study reveals. Both cheery and eerie quick-stopping tunes keep your mind off the clock.

THREE PASSIONATE DAYS IN PRAGUE
Found your Czech soul mate? Trips lend themselves to sped-up romances because they’re finite, they inspire expectations of fun, and they occur infrequently (motivating you to cram in as much as possible), a Cardiff University study finds. Vacation relationships follow a normal sequence, but at a clipped pace that leads to rapidly established trust and prompt sexual activity.

READING LADY CHATTERLEY’S LOVER IN NICE
Okay, so maybe you prefer Nora Roberts to D.H. Lawrence—reading either one will make time whiz by. We pay closer attention to sexy words than to mundane ones; that tunnel vision distracts us from the clock and causes us to underestimate the time, explains University of Hull psychologist Jason Tippett.

Illustration by PETER HOEY

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