

# Bringing something back

As the summer holidays approach **Stephen Hancocks** gives a thought to what we might bring back with us to share with the team.

Very few things in life come without some duties attached and even the pleasant activity of going on holiday has its fair share. Sending postcards is perhaps less popular than it once was. With the advent of the Internet, places that seemed so far away can now be connected in a split-second of time to the folks back home, or even the folks at work. Dodging into an Internet café from Cumbria to the Greek Islands, a Barbados poolside or a Thai mountain base means instant access that somehow makes sending a postcard that arrives three weeks later seem a little redundant. Plus there's the opportunity to send pictures taken on a digital camera or a mobile phone and downloaded for the benefit of friends and colleagues still slaving away while you're having fun.

But if the chore of postcard writing is less

of a duty than it once was, although there are still people not web-connected who will appreciate the traditional 'wish you were here' approach, there is still one obligation that you can't shrug, try as you might – bringing something back for the team.

Why do we do it, or expect it? I suppose the psychologists would tell us that it is some deep seated hunter-gather instinct which requires us to prove that we can leave the safety of the cave and still return safe and sound with a wealth of spine-chilling anecdotes of daring-do but also with a pelt full of exotic and hitherto unimagined goodies. For better or worse I guess it was how we got the potato, tobacco and Kiwi fruit.

But what to bring back, that's the worry and the responsibility? Something to eat is often a firm favourite, chocolate being high on the list. There is a sense that sugary snacks and sweetmeats are not perhaps the most

appropriate gifts to arrive back bearing to a dental practice.

But then again there seems to be a default position in that 'it only happens once a year' and so it's probably acceptable as long as the patients you've just been harassing about cutting back on refined carbohydrates in their diets don't see the staff scoffing toffees.

Having said that, there is a great variation in the quality, flavour and taste (literally and metaphorically) of some of the offerings. With the arguable exceptions of Swiss and Belgian varieties, chocolate from elsewhere in the world can leave a little something to be desired on the palate and a great deal to be undesired on the taste buds. Keep firmly in mind that the 'delight' in Turkish Delight is not an

accurate description for many (quite apart from depositing a layer of fine sugar powder over everything for about a week after you get back), peanut butter chews are a minority sport and Tibetan gooseberries covered in aromatic herbs and dipped in yak's milk may not be the most digestible snack-ette between scale and polishes however scrumptious they seemed to be while on the scenic paths of backpacking.

But if it's not going to be food then what else can you return with? Drink is difficult. Fine to have alcohol at home but not really a good present for working hours. Not good for the practice image if the patients can too readily sniff that someone has returned from a great break in Scotland and brought back the malt. Teas are a not uncommon offering. Selected dried sachets of esoteric zests which look so pretty in the packets but then strangely seem to hang around in the staff room cupboard right the way through until you bring back a similar set the following year, which is when the penny drops that they're maybe not such a popular choice after all.

Then the list of possibilities does get a little threadbare. There's tea towels of course, often a momentary crowd-pleaser; or really boldly a picture or ornament. The wickerwork donkey with the straw hat with a flower in it has been a longtime memento of Mediterranean returnees. But that is not to discount a small glass lighthouse with coloured sands from the Isle of Wight, and clusters of sea-shells stuck together in the shapes of almost anything from a mermaid to a combine harvester can have a certain charm. Models of the Leaning Tower of Pisa are of course mandatory but where to put all this stuff in a lounge never mind a busy practice?

Ultimately, if your imagination, your holiday budget or your baggage weight allowance fails you there is honesty to save the day. "Sorry guys," you announce as you burst back through the surgery door, "I completely messed up on the bringing something back thing – here's a box of baked-today doughnuts." It'll be an instant hit plus no one will feel the need to ask you where you've been!

