



A World of Your Own



After avoiding two winters through a year of travel, there's a keen sense of delight in watching autumn colours scattered across my lawn and feeling the chill of nights closing in. Friends say I'm crazy, but it's a joy to pull merinos and cosy woollens from the back of the wardrobe, to toast toes on the heater and climb into a warm bed while rain pounds on the roof.

Actually, though, my love for the current season is far more about variety than cold. Just as you can have too much cold weather, so you can long to leave 40 degrees in the tropics. It sounds far-fetched, but trust me on this one! Lurching from outside heat to inside cold can be just as wearing as the opposite.

Our wonderful brains crave both continuity and contrast, and we go to all sorts of lengths to get it. Just as salt flavours food, so too variety flavours life. Yet too much of either spoils the effect. Too much comfort becomes a rut, killing creativity, enthusiasm, and innovation. Constant change is just as big a trap, with uncertainty and instability leaving us worrying about whatever is around the corner.

My friend Victoria knows about this. We met last year, in a corner of Singapore airport. She had stepped out of her rut of corporate comfort and security, and was heading to Cambodia to work in a rural women's programme for a year. Hers is a conscious shift, to see what she learns, how she responds, and who she becomes in a very different environment. And that's the thing. Imposed change drains us, whereas choosing disruption is energising.

In winter, the temptation is to hunker down and try our best to ignore the weather, knowing that this too shall pass. Yet I reckon it's the absolute best time to get bold. Pushing yourself out of comfort takes more effort in winter, but greater effort usually means greater reward.

So this month, I'm taking a leaf out of author Julia Cameron's pages. Recognising the rewards that variety brings, she encourages us to commit to what she calls an 'artist's date.' And yes, this is for everyone, not just artists. It's a weekly appointment with yourself to do something different. Whether it's attending an exhibition, going to the movies, having your morning cuppa at a different café or walking an unfamiliar park. The key is to do it on your own. Boldly!

Really, some will say. Why go alone when it's far more fun with a friend? Sure, but if much of your time is already spent with others, then going solo is exactly the contrast that will light you up.

When you choose adventures on your own, several things happen.

You see things differently – through your own eyes and preferences, rather than under the influence of others' opinions.

You notice details – because going alone means you can take your time. Linger as long as you like - it's your timetable.

You please yourself – when did you last compromise on the movie or the restaurant because it was easier to please someone else?

You can experiment with places and experiences that are far from your usual, because there's no-one to say 'Oh, you wouldn't like that...'

You meet interesting people, because when you are on your own, you're far more likely to strike up a conversation with strangers.

I know many people who would never go to a movie or eat at a restaurant by themselves. Our lack of ease with our own company is conditioned by society that encourages constant connection. But doing things alone is as much a contrast as summer and winter. Exploring the world on my own makes me appreciate time spent with others. Yin and yang. We need both.

So if you were to plan a date with yourself, what would you do? Where would you go? All you need is curiosity and a sense of adventure. I promise you, it's addictive.

I can't wait for the Fabric Art Exhibition, on at the Waikato Museum from mid-May. Several friends have suggested going, but I'm being suitably vague about plans. I adore fabrics, texture and colour, so this one is mine alone, especially on a wild winter day and followed by a hot chocolate at my favourite café. Oh, and if you see me there, please don't mind if it seems like I'm in a world of my own. I will be! *

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