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YOU take it everywhere with you. When you wake up, the first thing you do is check your mobile phone(s). And when you don't look at the screen for a while, you get restless. At the restaurant, you don't talk much. But when the food arrives, suddenly, you scramble to capture an Instagram-worthy picture.

If this sounds like your life, perhaps you need a "digital detox" – a temporary break from digital devices to be mindful of the physical world, reconnect with yourself and interact with others face to face, and yes – offline.

While technology is deeply entrenched in our lives, apparently, most Malaysians just can't seem to switch off for a while, even on holidays or a break from work.

Malaysians love taking vacations but while they are chilling by the beach, many are happily tapping away on their mobile devices.

Malaysians spend an average of more than three hours on their smartphones daily, according to a recent report by Vserv, a leading smart data platform for mobile marketing and commerce.

Each Internet user in Malaysia has an average of four types of social media accounts, reveals the Internet Users Survey 2016 conducted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission.

The top accounts are Facebook, with 96.5% of Internet users in Malaysia having a profile, followed by WeChat Moments (61.2%), Instagram (46%) and YouTube (42.1%).

These social media users spend an average total of four hours a day browsing such platforms through their various digital devices.

More worryingly though, the survey shows that there are 4.1% of users who spend more than 12 hours a day on social media.

On the other hand, in Western countries, more people are using holidays to have a digital detox session, with wellness tourism becoming a growing business, according to newswire DPA.

The term "digital detox" was

No 'off' button

Malaysians love going on holidays but there is no break when it comes to their smartphones and other digital devices.

first used by Levi Felix and Brooke Dean from California in 2012, with the two conducting retreats for those who want to "detox" from the virtual world and reconnect with themselves and the physical world around them.

Apparently, Malaysians are not ready to embark on such a digital fast just yet.

In fact, it is quite the reverse for Malaysians who constantly ask for free WiFi connection when they travel, observes Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (Matta) president Datuk Hamzah Rahmat.

"Malaysian holidaymakers actually start complaining if there is no WiFi access at the airport!" he says, adding that Malaysians are very much into their smartphones and digital devices even while on vacation.

"It's sad to point out that some Malaysians are constantly on their phones in places of worship and when taking part in religious ceremonies," Hamzah remarks.

He remembers that there were hardly any tourists who posed for selfies at religious places in the past but with the advent of technology, it was now happening "all over the place".

Hamzah notes that these days, almost all guests expect a hotel to have good WiFi connection.

"When Malaysians go for a getaway at a five-star hotel, they expect it to have fast WiFi and tend to frown upon properties which do not provide such services," he says.

However, Hamzah stresses that whether the people wanted to go on or offline while on holiday is a personal choice.

"The trend is for people to be closely connected wherever they go. Technology has driven us to be on top of a situation and constantly have updates.

"Perhaps, some people who go on holiday snap pictures and post

it online to be the envy of friends while some just want to share their joy with others. But if it makes them happy and helps them destress by taking photographs of new places and what they ate there, so be it," he says.

Hamzah says that a person takes a vacation to destress and it ultimately depends on the individual how he wants to do it.

"But in anything, there is always a limit. People can capture a nice scenery with their smartphones but not to the extent that you do not realise there is an oncoming car or you miss out on enjoying an amazing moment," he says.

He also points out that the digital world has helped the tourism industry, with users sharing reviews online and encouraging others to hunt for much-raved about dishes or tourist attractions.

And perhaps one of the reasons why Malaysians can't and won't go off-the-grid during holidays is ironically because of work.

Bosses may need to contact their employees for urgent matters, says Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan.

"We do not encourage employees to be completely uncontactable during their days off, as it is unreasonable.

"Workers should be contactable at all times. Normally, bosses only need their employees to take 30 minutes to an hour of their time to do some urgent work. Bosses usually do not constantly contact them," he says.

Shamsuddin says the need for workers to be contactable is also compounded by the globalisation factor, with companies dealing with offices and clients in different time zones such as in Europe and the United States.

"Even in Malaysia, different states observe different days of the week as rest days. Kedah,

Kelantan, Johor and Terengganu have Fridays and Saturdays off compared to Saturdays and Sundays in other states," he points out.

Fortunately, Shamsuddin says most employees do not have a problem with being contacted during their days off.

Bosses are more concerned with employees not being productive at the office because they are surfing other things online that are not related to work.

"Even if employers decide to bar certain sites like Facebook, workers can always access them via their smartphones.

"Employees must be honest and do what is expected of them during working hours," Shamsuddin says.

Urging the public to practise some self-discipline, Health Ministry deputy director-general Datuk Dr Jeyandran Sinnadurai says being too absorbed in gadgets can lead to a break down in social skills.

"Perhaps a digital detox is too extreme at this juncture, but rather, people need to determine how and when they would like to respond to the various messages that they receive, to strike a balance," he says.

Dr Jeyandran suggests that people use different notification tones on their devices for work contacts and for social messaging so that they know how to prioritise their responses.

"If you can discipline yourself, the need for a digital detox may not be necessary.

"However, it is a common sight to see people so absorbed in their phones.

"Perhaps families should have a policy to leave their phones behind when they are having meals and just concentrate on having conversations with their loved ones," he says.

Going unplugged

- A **digital detox** or digital fast is a period of time in which a person abstains from using digital devices like smartphones, computers and tablets.
- The purpose of going unplugged is to focus on **interacting** with people in the **physical world**.
- Its aim is also to **reduce stress** and prevent a user from being addicted to the Internet.
- In 2012, Levi Felix and Brooke Dean, from California, USA, coined the term "digital detox" and have led programmes to encourage people to **disconnect from devices** and reconnect with the world around them.