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Should you take your staff on a corporate away day or is it a waste of time? We look at the merits and review four of the best

Research finds that happy employees are up to 20 per cent more productive. There is value in offering thrilling and novel experiences to help a team bond. You must tailor away day activity to what you set out to achieve.

BY [RON JOBSON FOR THIS IS MONEY](#)

SHED: 08:10, 19 October 2018 | UPDATED: 14:35, 19 October 2018

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Is it worth shelling out on a corporate away day for your staff or is it just a waste of time and money for your business?

According to research carried out by the University of Warwick, happy employees are up to 20 per cent more productive than other workers.

Since workplace happiness is intrinsically linked to staff morale, it seems logical to implement initiatives to ensure that your employees feel positive as soon as they cross the office threshold.

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Team away-days give work colleagues the chance to relax, be themselves, and find out more about the people they work with

While low-key activities like a game of pool or even a pub visit suffice for some companies, there is value in offering more thrilling and novel experiences to help a team bond.

'Team away-days give work colleagues the chance to relax, be themselves, and find out more about the people they work with,' says Peter Lawrence of business consultancy firm Human Capital Department.

'Football managers recognise that teams are made up of players each with different skills. and the team stands the best chance of success if everyone plays their part, ibutes and gives of their best.

'Team bonding sessions are an effective way of building a harmonious workplace and celebrating difference and diversity.'

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Away day strategy

Organising a successful away day requires strategy. You must tailor the activity to what you set out to achieve - otherwise it could end up being an expensive but unproductive outing.

Do you seek to improve communication among staff? Consider activities where they are forced to work together towards a common goal.

Team-building activities aren't limited to the old stereotype of orienteering or even raft building. Escape rooms, treasure hunts and even talent contests are among the more modern offerings that encourage employees to work together.

Or maybe you want to reward your team for a job well done? The key here is not to do something you want to but to offer staff something they'll enjoy.

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Away days can be a productive way to discuss team strategy, or build staff's understanding of the company strategy, mission, vision and values without the daily pressures of getting on with their jobs.

'They are a great way of getting ideas and encouraging the team to contribute, participate and engage,' Lawrence says.

'They may have a wider purpose or be part of a corporate social responsibility programme as activities could help raise money for a charity, or events might involve working within the community such as in schools or the local church.'

We've put the theory into practice by reviewing some of the most popular away day experiences. Here is what we made of them.

Cookery School at Little Portland Street

Cost: £110 per person plus VAT for silver package, £140 for gold package

Activity: Cookery School at Little Portland Street, based in Oxford Circus, London, offers a host of culinary courses which are tailored for specific goals like team building and leadership training.

We opted for the gold package which is a four-hour experience spent preparing a -course meal.

Aim: The experience was designed with team work in mind. To this end our group of six was divided into pairs - with each pair responsible for an element of every course.

The result: Did it succeed in building a team? I think so. By working together, we produced three delicious course that none of us would have been confident to prepare in our respective kitchens.

For example, we learned how to make ravioli and an accompanying sauce from scratch.

The highlight of the experience was talking about it with colleagues around a large table in a restaurant-style setting as we tucked into the meal we had prepared.

TeamSport Go Karting

Cost: From £30 per person

Activity: The mini grand prix session starts from £30 per person and offers exclusive use of the track during the sessions.

These consist of a combined practice and qualifying session, followed by a short break before lining up on the grid ahead of the big race.

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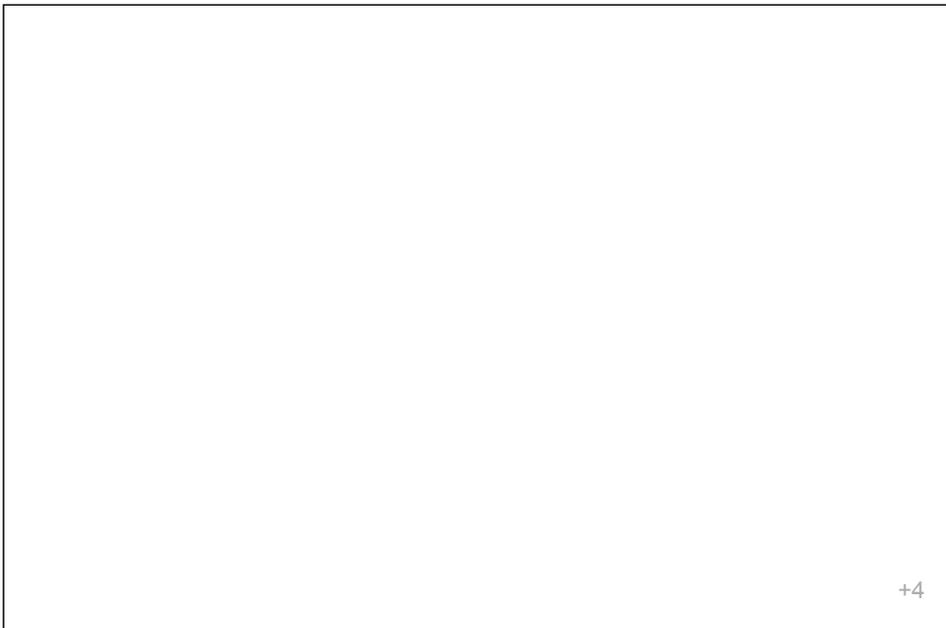
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Cookery School at Little Portland Street offers a host of culinary courses which are tailored for specific goals



+4

A lot of the fun of go-karting comes off the track in discussions on what happened in the race

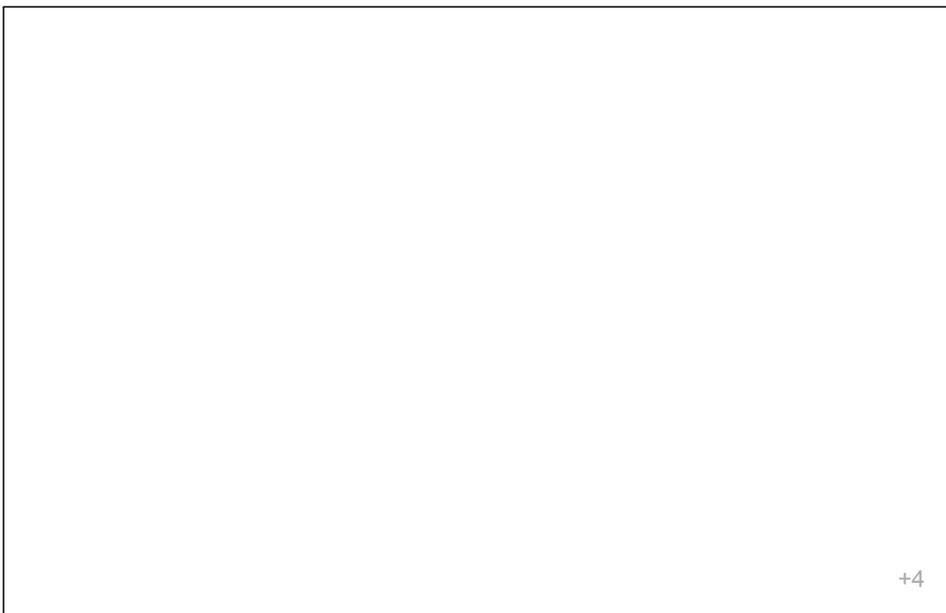
Aim: Team work is relegated to the sidelines here. Go-karting is one of those activities that will bring out your competitive streak. However, team bonding is the name of the game here.

Result: As well as the exhilaration of racing around in an electric kart that can reach speeds of 40mph, a lot of the fun comes off the track in discussions about what happened on it.

My personal highlight was overtaking a colleague only to crash into the back of another's kart shortly after. I spun out and heard a roar of laughter through the buzz gaged electric engines as the former retook his position.

It wasn't my finest hour but certainly helped with team bonding as we had a good laugh about it after the race.

Whistle Punks - axe-throwing



+4

Whistle Punk's axe throwing experience costs £22 per person during off peak hours

Cost: From £22 per person

Activity: This is one of the more oddball activities on the list but also one of the cheapest - costing £22 per person during off-peak hours. Put simply, the experience is akin to playing darts, but with axes.

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The one and a half hour session starts kicks off with a training session where participants get a few practice throws and are coached by on site staff on how to improve their technique. You then have a tournament with up to 12 people.

Unlike darts however, alcohol is prohibited during axe throwing - for obvious safety reasons.

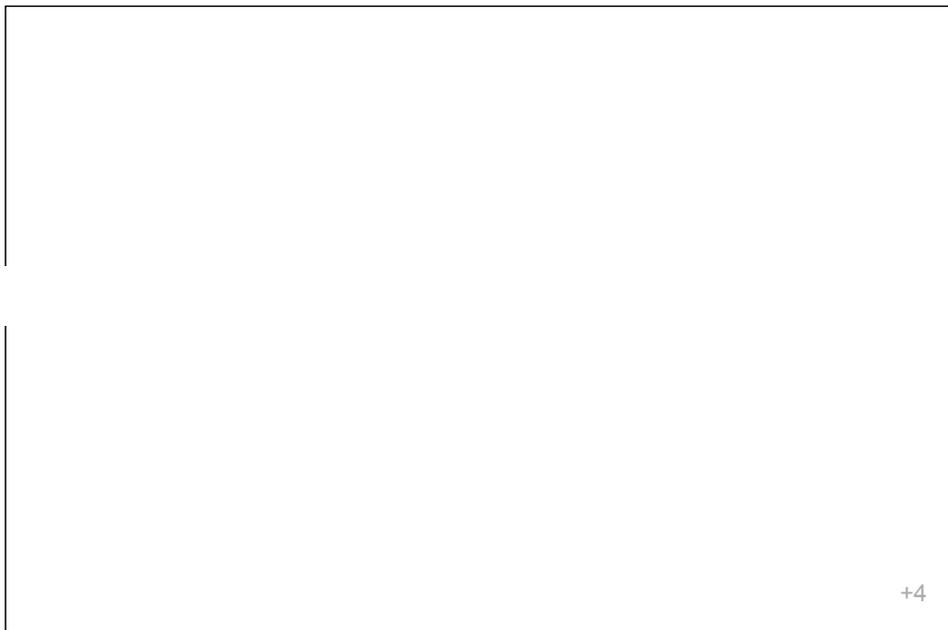
Aim: Similar to go-karting, team work is not the name of the game. The lure here is the enjoyment and banter you experience when competing against colleagues.

Result: Overall, the experience was good but the novelty of throwing an axe quickly wore off after successfully hitting the target a handful of times.

Did it help with team bonding? It did - especially once the tournament kicked off. Successful throws were met with cheers and high fives from colleagues. Unsuccessful throws were met with light-hearted banter which broke the ice for those who didn't know each other well.

Overall, while the novelty of the experience wore off before the hour and a half session was up, it is a good option for employers who wish to treat their staff without breaking the bank.

Tough Mudder



Tough Mudder Full event entrants are required to negotiate their way through a plethora of obstacles between a 10 and 12-mile course

Cost: Varies. Earlybird tickets from £49

Activity: Tough Mudder is a 10-or-so-mile obstacle course which is guaranteed to leave participants exhausted, exhilarated and covered in mud.

If that sound too gruelling, the Tough Mudder Half - a five mile course - might be more palatable.

The experience is not exclusive to die-hard fitness fanatics and it attracts people of all shapes and sizes.

These events usually take place on limited dates every year so you'd need to book in advance.

Aim: Unlike similar events, Tough Mudder is not timed and there are no winners. The ethos is teamwork and camaraderie will see you through to the finish line.

Result: The experience certainty ticks the team bonding box. The whole idea is that rank and role are left outside the course which is designed in a way that makes it

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nigh on impossible to negotiate without a helping hand - be that an actual push to help you on your way or words of encouragement.

Witnessing your boss fall face first into muddy water in failed attempt navigate through an obstacle is a) priceless, and b) makes for a good story to share around the office.

However, it's important to highlight that there is a real risk of injury which could put your workers out of action for an extended period. Such was the fate for one of my colleagues who broke her arm - thankfully she's fine now!

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Are employers liable if an employee is injured during an away day?

Employers beware. You can be liable for accidents that occur outside work premises according to Nicholas Hagi-Savva, a personal injury lawyer at Slater and Gordon.

He said: 'Applied to an office away day scenario, the employer would have to make its own health and safety assessments of the activities to ensure that it is keeping its employees safe, especially if it is a core part of the work calendar and more of a requirement – as opposed to opportunity – to attend.

'Liability is more likely to fall on the organisers of events like these as it is more straightforward to prove negligence, for example, if someone injured themselves on a poorly constructed obstacle.

'However, it could also be argued that the employer is responsible and at least jointly liable if they have not gone far enough to protect their staff.'



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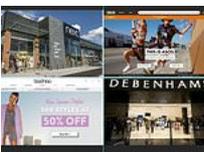
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