

No holiday cash? Hide at home

12:01AM BST 05 Aug 2003

Up to three million Italians are taking elaborate measures to pretend they are going on a holiday this year, which they are having to forgo for economic reasons, it emerged yesterday.

According to an Italian group of psychologists, such people - identified as "mole holidaymakers" - tell friends and relatives that they are jetting off to exotic places.

But in reality, they barricade themselves at home with adequate stores, switching off the phone and spend their time watching television and videos.

The Help Me association of psychologists described how meticulous the preparations can be to cover the sense of shame in a country where the summer, and especially August, holiday is revered as an institution.

The association, cited by Rome's *Il Messaggero*, said that to spin their tale convincingly, the mole holidaymakers took their plants to neighbours to water and hid their car in a garage.

A quarter bought sunlamps or self-tanning creams and 13 per cent went as far as to purchase on the internet souvenirs from their pretend holiday spots. Some managed to have postcards sent from the places where they had never been.

Massimo Cicogna, a psychologist who carried out the association's study, blamed Italy's economic crisis for the boom in pseudo-holidays.

But Massimo Lattanzi, also a psychologist, said solitude was probably even more of a reason. "People are unable to find a friend with whom they can go on holiday. So in the end they remain at home, as if paralysed by the huge void inside them."