

Better Family Vacations

“There are no seven wonders of the world in the eyes of a child. There are seven million.”—
Walt Streightiff, author

Everyone dreams of a perfect family vacation. There will be a lot of together time with family members enjoying themselves. Everyone will find time to relax and unwind, and everyone will come back refreshed. Yet anyone who has ever taken a family vacation has discovered that they're far from perfect and that you never know what to expect. If you plan carefully, however, you can create better family vacations in which everyone comes home with fond memories.

Try it...

For all parents

- Adjust your expectations for family vacations. Instead of thinking of them as time to relax, think of them as family time where you may need to work a bit to bring the family together. (You can always take time off for yourself to unwind at another time.)
- Get everyone's input on possible family vacations and activities. Your getaways will be more successful if everyone is involved in the planning from early on. Make sure the kids have a good say in what is planned, where you go, and the activities you want to do (and want to avoid). You may even need to plan one favorite activity per person so that everyone gets the chance to do something he or she really wants and the rest of the family can get to know that family member better.
- If you're divorced, be careful not to get your children caught in the cross hairs of competing vacations. Some kids think it's too much to go on two vacations (one with dad's family and another with mom's family) because it keeps them away from their friends too long. Balance your children's needs along with your own.
- Be realistic about budgets. Family vacations can get expensive rather quickly. If your kids want spending money, let them know their budget before you go.
- If you have kids in two different age groups (such as a preschooler and a young adolescent), find activities that both enjoy, such as swimming or water parks. Also let each child choose an activity he or she really wants to do and have the whole family go along and enjoy that activity.
- Consider vacations with different goals. One year have a vacation that's about relaxing and being together. Another time have a vacation that's more adventuresome, where you're exploring a national park or a major city. Another time, consider taking a family service trip during which your family volunteers and helps others.
- Whenever you take a family vacation, remember to expect the unexpected, have a

sense of humor, and be open to surprise and discovery. This will help you keep your balance—and your sanity!

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Plan a vacation that is ideal for young children. Since young children thrive on routine, vacations that disrupt their routines can quickly turn sour. Some families spend their vacation time by staying at home (where young children are in familiar surroundings) and taking one special trip in the morning and one special trip in the afternoon, such as to a zoo, a children's museum, a fancy playground across town, or water park.
- If you leave home, continue to follow your child's routine. Make time for naps, snacks, bedtime routines, and so on.
- If you take a long car trip, consider leaving in the evening. Drive through the night while the kids sleep. This works best if you have two adults so that the adults also can take turns sleeping and monitoring kids. For more ideas on traveling with a preschooler, read [Parenting Preschoolers with a Purpose](#).

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Pack a traveling bag with activities that kids can do while traveling and on vacation. Include blank tablets, washable markers, puzzle and activity books, playing cards, handheld video games, books to read, and so on.
- Consider putting away several new activities (such as a new card game, puzzle, or board game) and wrapping it like a present. When kids get bored, bring out a present for them to open and discover.
- Be intentional about playing together as a family while you're on vacation. The best part of a family vacation is being together and having fun together.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- Encourage your teenager to bring a friend. This often will raise your teenager's enthusiasm level greatly.
- You may need to rethink and redefine a family vacation for this age group. Don't be surprised if your teenager is more enthusiastic about taking a trip to see a favorite music group, go to an amusement park, or visit a first-class water park.
- Consider taking two or three shorter vacations instead of one longer vacation. Sometimes teenagers are more agreeable to short getaways (so they don't miss much time with their friends) than long ones.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Planning a vacation that a teenager wants to take with your family can be downright hard since teenagers often resist traveling with their families (or have packed schedules that make it difficult to get away). For ideas on family vacations that teenagers like, visit http://www.parentingteensonline.com/article/show/title/Family_Vacations_With_Teens.
- Talk about the variety of options for family vacations: visiting a major city, seeing a national park, taking a road trip, doing a family service project, digging up dinosaur bones, exploring historical sites, traveling overseas, or attending your favorite

baseball team's games on the road. Expand your view of possibilities.

- Allow your teenager some flexibility and independence on a family vacation. If your teenager can't imagine a vacation without access to the Internet, stay at a place that has a business center or wireless access. Or let your teenager sleep occasionally while the rest of the family sightsees.