

SUMMER VACATIONS AND FAMILIES: WHAT TO DO WITH ALL THAT TOGETHERNESS?

Summer vacations with the family can be the best of times or the worst of times. Interminable plane trips, boring hotel rooms, exhausting hours together in the car, funky cabins on muddy lakes and six straight days of rain — family vacations can be difficult enough for adults, but for children they can be down right awful! On the other hand, exploring new places together, sharing time and goofing-off for days at a stretch, meeting new people or reuniting with loving relatives — family vacations can be the best thing since summer was invented.

How to have more of the best of times and less of the worst?

First of all, watch out for great expectations. Your own and the kids'. Enjoy the surprise of the vacation as it unfolds. This doesn't mean don't make plans. By all means, do make plans. And include everyone in the planning. Maps, brochures, photographs, letters, share them all. Make check-lists, too, with responsibilities for everyone. Allow plenty of time, don't jam-pack days or crowd too much into the trip. If you're traveling with young children or toddlers, take short jumps instead of long leaps. If you're driving, stop often, get out and stretch, move around. Consider picnics instead of restaurant meals.

Keep it simple. Don't schedule so many activities that there's no time for just hanging out. Build in rest-time, too. Tempers have a tendency to flare when everyone's packed together day and night for long stretches of time. Create alone time, for you and the children. Everyone needs recharging. Remember, both boredom and over-stimulation can result in acting out. Strive for balance.

Be sure and allow a day or two for re-entry before you go back to work and the children return to their summer routine. Coming home can be as stressful as leaving. Make homecoming part of the vacation, too.



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