

It's time for that family vacation.....

Maybe you think of this with rapture and maybe dread. Here are some ideas for keeping this time from being too terribly dreadful and maybe fun and relaxing for you.

When making plans, consider enlisting some ideas from your children or teens. You might be surprised what ideas they might have (within reason!) or what some of their interests might be. Perhaps go somewhere new so it seems more of an adventure to your child. As children get older, spending time with parents is less interesting to them. Consider (if you feel brave enough) offering the invitation of bringing a friend along. Certainly you can exercise veto power as needed in terms of their choice of friend. Talk to the friend's parents about what activities you are planning and costs that may be involved. You should not be expected to pay their way unless you are feeling generous and are able to afford to do so without hardship to you.

Consider asking yourself these questions to help you decide on your vacation destination:

- How long should the trip be? How well do they travel?
- Will travel or vacationing conflict with the child's schedule (especially for younger children)? What arrangements can be made to accommodate this?
- What kind of foods do they like? Do they do well in a restaurant?
- What is affordable in our budget without undue hardship on us?
- How much spending money should each child have? Consider the older child or teen that is earning allowance or is working to save their money for spending rather than you providing extra to them.
- Try to keep your expectations low in terms of this being the utopia you might need due to the stress at home, work, etc. All families get on each other's nerves- it doesn't matter where you are. See if the adults can get out for a night too.

Probably my more stressful family vacations were when my children were younger, were on schedules and could not be left alone. I found that when they became teenagers, a friend along was a blessing and I was not the sole source of providing entertaining ideas for the "I'm bored" routine.

Younger children, of course, are more demanding of your time, are less patient, and are picky eaters. Children also demand to see every restroom on the planet when they travel, so be prepared. Neat things happen too—like the first time your child sees the ocean or plays in the sand on the beach. My pre-school daughter said on her first airplane ride as soon as we took off, "We're going to Disney," as if Mickey Mouse lived somewhere in the air. The passengers loved her.

Such events make for great memories.

There are a number of Web sites with good information, car games, paper and pencil games, and overall travel advice. Try www.familyeducation.com, www.geoparent.com, www.travelwithkids.about.com, and www.aarp.org for those times that grandparents might be coming along. Have a great summer!