

"Grandtripping:" Traveling with the grandkids is a growing trend

- June 20, 2002
by Eileen Beal

According to the Travel Industry Association, last year 20% of all trips involving children were grandparents traveling with their grandchildren. One reason for so much "grandtripping" is that grandparents have the time (especially early retirees) and resources to take vacations with their grandchildren, explains Amy Goyer, coordinator of the AARP Grandparent Information Center in Washington, DC.

But that's not the main reason they are "grandtripping," says Peggy Zone Fisher, president of Zone Travel, Inc. and wife of former Ohio Congressman, Lee Fisher. "Today, so many grandparents and grandchildren don't live in the same city, so for many this is the only way they can see each other and have bonding time together."

Children ages 7-17 get the most out of a vacation with grandma and grandpa. Children ages 7-12 tend to have the best "bonding" experience on short-duration trips and/or at family-friendly campgrounds, hotels, and resorts (or cruise ships) that offer lots of activities for kids. Teens tend to "connect" with grandparents on active vacations, such as cross-country RV trips, camping or adventure expeditions, or theme park or dude ranch vacations.

Having a memorable vacation with the grandkids isn't something that just happens, it's planned with the precision of a military campaign. "Planning a vacation with your grandkids a year in advance isn't starting too early," says Goyer.

Planning involves coordinating many variables including: dealing with reluctant parents; creating a vacation that fits your budget; finding activities and destinations that are a "fit" with the kids' ages, interests, and abilities, yet appeal to grandparents, too; and involving the kids in the planning process. "When they feel a sense of 'ownership' [of the vacation trip], they will take responsibility for its success," explains Jane Outcalt, director of the Intergenerational Resource Center at Fairhill Center in Cleveland.

The best way to get the grandkids involved in an intergenerational trip-and psyched up about spending a week or two getting up close and personal with people they know about but don't know-is to ask them what they want to do. But don't stop there, run their wish-list by mom and dad for a reality check. "[Parents] know what their kids really like, what their interests really are, how quickly they tend to tire out-things like that-because they've traveled with them," explains Outcalt.

"Grandtripping:" Traveling with the grandkids is a growing trend

Compromise plays a big part in planning an intergenerational vacation, stresses Outcalt. Traveling with grandkids means you'll be eating fast-food, because "kids don't care about fine dining." It means ending a day of high-brow sight-seeing splashing around the hotel pool, because "kids need to work off their energy after a day spent being 'good.'" And, most of all, it means doing things at their speed, not yours, "because they may become bored quickly...[or] dawdle, look at things, and ask endless questions."

"That's the reason," Outcalt adds, "that you don't want to over-plan and over-schedule a vacation trip with them-especially the first one, which you want to be a success."

Planning makes perfect

While you and the grandkids can probably map out a good vacation on your own, it's probably easier to do the first one using an organization (see below) or travel agent. Both have trained, experienced staff who know the right questions to ask so that vacationers whose life experiences are a generation apart get what they want out of a week or two of uninterrupted togetherness. And they have the resources at their fingertips-catalogs, brochures, computers for instant price and availability information, package deals, etc.-to plan a memorable trip, too.

The easiest, fastest, and sometimes even least expensive way to get a guaranteed-to-succeed grandparents-grandkids vacation is with an all-inclusive-lodgings, food, kid- and adult-friendly activities-package, some of which include airfare and/or car rental. "Cruises are always the best bet for a first-time trip for grandparents and grandchildren because there is enough to do so that no one is bored...[and] there's never an argument about where to eat," says Zone Fisher.

Another smart way to plan an intergenerational vacation is by using the Internet to check out schedules, prices, and "deals." Just type both "grandparents" and "grandkids" at your favorite search engine and you'll turn up a gold mine of information. Other sites of interest include: amtrak.com; duderanch.org; familyfun.com; consumerreports.org/smarttravel; family.go.com; grandtrvl.com; fodor.com; familytravelforum.com, familytraveltimes.com; and travelwithkids.about.com. All (and their links) put grandparents and grandkids on the right track to memory-making vacations.

Magazines-Vacations, Outside, Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel, Historic Traveler, Travel Holiday, etc.-are good sources for information on intergenerational vacations, too, as is the family travel book section at the library. What books lack in up-to-date information on prices (available with a toll-free call) they make up for with insider tips on great places to eat, stay, or shop; great day-trip itineraries and maps; and must-see and must-do entertainment, sightseeing, and activity lists. Used

"Grandtripping:" Traveling with the grandkids is a growing trend

bookstores are excellent places for research, too, says Zone Fisher. "The books cost-at most-a couple of dollars, and you can make notes in them, too."

Words to the wise

No matter where you and the grandkids go, under-plan each day's activities. "You have to leave time in a trip for exploring, for doing the un-planned," explained Outcalt. "Besides, if you over-schedule things you are all going to be tired and cranky and exhausted to enjoy each other." And adds Zone Fisher, enjoying each other is what an intergenerational vacation is all about. "This is an extremely special time for all parties, but especially for the grandkids. You are making memories that your grandkids are going to be passing on to their children." "This is the way," she adds, "that traditions get started."

Eileen Beal, MA, is a freelance healthcare writer specializing in geriatric issues.

Sidebar: Making memories

The best thing about an intergenerational vacation is that it's a memory maker. To insure that your and your grandkids' special time together doesn't become a blurred and faded memory, take along your video camera (and plenty of film). To get, and keep, the kids interested in what's happening on a day-to-day basis, have them record it, too, with their own or a disposable "vacation" camera. Or supply them with pencils, colored markers, tape and a spiral notebook and have them keep a vacation journal-into which they write comments, draw pictures, and/or paste postcards or the pictures they have taken. Or have them mail home postcards each day that will trigger memories when they get home.

Sidebar: Grandtripping Institutions and Organizations:

Chautauqua Institution www.ciweb.org

Club Med www.clubmed.com

Cruiseline, Inc. www.cruiseline.com

ElderHostel www.elderhostel.org

FamilyHostel www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel

Family Travel Network www.familytravelnetwork.com

Grandtravel www.grandtravel.com

Interhostel www.learn.unh.edu/interhostel

Sierra Club www.sierraclub.org

Sidebar: Grandtripping Books

The following books and guides are excellent resources for planning a grand intergenerational

"Grandtripping:" Traveling with the grandkids is a growing trend

vacation:

Family Travel and Resorts, Pamela Lanier

Fifty Great Family Vacations: Eastern North America, Candyce Staphen

Fifty Great Family Vacations: Western North America, Candyce Staphen

Fodor's Family Adventures, Christine Loomis

Road Trip USA: Cross-country adventures on America's two-lane highways, Moon Publications

Traveling With Your Grandkids, Virginia Smith Spurlock (available through AAA by calling 877-AAA-

BOOK) *USA by Rail*, John Pitt