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USTOA Offers 10 Tips for Family Travel

Designing an experience that appeals to everyone is the biggest challenge confronting tour operators who plan family trips, according to an informal member survey conducted by the U.S. Tour Operators Association. With quality time together cited as one of the most important aspects of family travel, tour operators are increasingly developing special itineraries suited to both kids and parents.

To help maximize quality time together, and to ensure a successful trip, the experts at USTOA offer their top ten tips:

Before the trip

-Make sure your expectations are realistic.

-Select the destination wisely and try to interest children in the destination before leaving on vacation, advises Tauck World Discovery. That way, the destination is of greater interest once you arrive. This can be done with interesting books, fun movies, stories researched and related by parents, etc.

-Keep kids involved in the decision process, getting everyone in the family to participate in selecting the destination and vacation activities. When children (whether young kids or especially teens) have a voice and a choice, they feel more invested in the trip and stay more positive even when involved in an activity they might not have chosen on their own, advises Abercrombie & Kent, Inc.

-Know if the type of travel is suited to your family's needs. Collette Vacations suggests parents be aware that escorted tours are typically for adults, and Uniworld cautions that parents should know whether their children will respond well to the makeup of travel such as a river cruise.

-Pack light, recommends IsramWorld.

During the trip

-Understand children's limitations and be flexible, especially with time schedules when traveling. Don't feel compelled to do everything offered on an itinerary if your kids need more leisure time than others. Depending on the child's personality, parents need to make sure there is down time for their kids to either rest and recharge or expend pent-up energy. Goway Travel

suggests ensuring that there is scheduled time to just laze on the beach or go off by yourselves' and visit a park or zoo.

-Keep children occupied. Take a DVD player with the kids' favorite movies - great for plane rides or simply to relax after a day out. Give them an allowance each day so that they know what they can spend, and provide them with a journal and a camera so that they can record the vacation. Keep snacks and games on hand for motor coach rides and for travel in foreign countries.

-Don't leave children unattended, cautions Signet Tours.

-Let children know that behavior counts. When traveling with other people, be sure children are polite and respectful.

-If traveling significant distances, pre-nights are always recommended – especially for families with younger kids, to acclimate them to their new time zone and get them back into a more normal routine.

When it comes to family travel, quality time together is the single most important motivator, according to an informal member poll conducted by the U.S. Tour Operators Association. Responding members were unanimous in citing quality time together, echoed by a USTOA-commissioned consumer survey where time together was only second to affordability in terms of selecting a vacation.

More information

For a listing of USTOA members with family-friendly tours and travel arrangements, visit www.ustoa.com or www.ustoa.travel. USTOA members have met the travel industry's highest standards, including participation in the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, which, among other things requires each member company to set aside \$1 million security to protect consumers' payments in case the company goes out of business.

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