



Shared Experiences Lure Families to Tours and Vacation Packages

Family and intergenerational travel has been on the rise, reports the U.S. Tour Operators Association. In fact more than 60% of the association's 150 members report offering family-friendly tours and packages.

USTOA interviews with travelers revealed that the opportunity to share experiences across generations is a key reason families select tours and packages.

Below are excerpts from three interviews.

Kids learn about nature

Erica Weldon, mid-40's, New York City, and her family took a sailing expedition to Baja California, where nearly one-third of the 45 passengers were kids ranging from 5 to 16 years.

While much time was spent together, when it was appropriate the different generations went their separate ways. "The adults would go on a longer hike inland and the kids would go on a shorter one, closer to shore, with other activities included," Weldon reports. "While the kids (aged 8 and 11 at the time) were doing that, they were also learning about nature and finding out about the wildlife on the islands. They made their own friendships. They will remember this big adventure forever."

"The most incredible thing we did was go swimming with sea lions. I would never have seen these things without this adventure," she adds.

Gisela Spallek, eaerly 40's, of New Castle, Pennsylvania, also booked a Galapagos cruise tour for her family, which included daughters aged 5 and 8 at the time. On this cruise the youngest passenger was 4, and the oldest was 91.

"My kids are shy. I was surprised by how they changed on the trip. The first day, the little one didn't leave us. The second day, she was three people in front of us. After that, she always stayed with the naturalist. We have never had an experience like this. The children love animals and we wanted to give them an understanding of how important it is to protect those animals as well. If you have any appreciation for nature, this is an incredible experience."

Giving and family bonds

David and Shirley Gerber, 70's from Findlay, Ohio, took their first tour for their 25th wedding anniversary. When their granddaughter graduated high school five years ago, the Gerbers took her to Spain, Portugal and Morocco for a graduation present. Today, Shirley Gerber says that family travel means going with extended family members. For their next trip the extended family -- Shirley's brother, sister-in-law and cousins -- is embarking on a tour to Spain, Portugal and Morocco.

Shirley, who has taken two Alaska cruise tours says, "There is so much to see in this country. Her advice to families: "Travel and share it with your family."

Discovering a New Way to Travel

"Whether adults or parents with kids, people are finding tours an excellent platform for learning and sharing experiences, without the hassles of having to plan and arrange everything. Some tours offer separate kids' activities, so that families spend time together, but also enjoy age-appropriate activities," says Bob Whitley, USTOA president. According to Whitley, "Once a family books a tour they keep coming back because the overall experience is so positive."

To find a list of USTOA member companies offering family travel visit www.ustoa.com or www.ustoa.travel. USTOA members have met the travel industry's highest standards, including participating in the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, which among other things, requires each member to post \$1 million security to protect consumer payments in case the company goes out of business.