

Traveling With Extended Family: A Helpful Glance

by Thomas Cackler, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Ask anyone what the most relaxing thing is and chances are good they'll tell you it's a vacation. Ask anyone what the most stressful thing in the world is and there is a good chance they will tell you it is vacationing with extended family. Planning a vacation when you have to consider the needs of more than just your immediate family (often a job in and of itself) can stress even the most patient and dedicated of trip planners.

Traveling with extended family doesn't have to become a giant tug-of-war match. I know from first hand experience, as recently I traveled to Walt Disney World and sailed on the Disney Cruise Line with not only my wife's parents but her brother and his family as well. As frightening as this might sound to some, we had a fantastic time. It is important to know that no matter how well you get along with the other families, choppy water lies ahead if you don't set the proper course. By familiarizing yourself with the potential pitfalls and devising strategies to avoid them, traveling with another family can be a lot of fun.

Most travel experts will tell you that planning is crucial for any trip, but I tell you that it is even more necessary for traveling with another family. Most people will stop at cooperatively planning dates and locations, leaving the detailed planning to each individual family. This is a recipe for disaster. It is important to ask questions about everyone's expectations regarding how much time you will spend together and what activities you will do on your own. While you may believe this is common sense, it is important for everyone to share in the group planning. By asking these questions, you will have a clearer picture of everyone's expectations and will help everyone buy into those expectations of the trip.

We did this in different ways. First, we used the upcoming trip as an excuse to have each other over for dinner. During the meal, we discussed our plans and decided who would take each planning task. Second, we loaned them planning materials (namely our older copies of PassPorter's Walt Disney World) so they could get a better feel for what was to come. Although some of the information was slightly out of date, their ability to select activities they were interested in gave the Walt Disney World veterans the information we needed to better chart our course.

This planning stage helped us keep realistic goals in mind. Any group

dynamic involves give and take and traveling with another family requires even more. It is unrealistic to expect your family or friends to do everything exactly the way you would want them to in real life, much less on vacation. We found it helpful to remember that if someone took on a planning or touring task, we agreed to rely on his or her judgment. This allowed the planner to venture forward without worrying about backlash from the group.

Vacationers should be prepared to change their preferred way of vacation to accommodate the other travelers. Just like at home, compromise and communication goes a long way in ensuring harmony. However, this does not mean the group should consistently yield to one person. It is important to remember that everyone should enjoy the vacation. However, groups should lean on those who have extensive knowledge of a given area. If you have a particular area of expertise, don't be afraid to assert that knowledge, especially if that knowledge will make the trip more enjoyable.

For example, my brother-in-law is used to not needing dining reservations while vacationing. I cautioned that certain restaurants at Walt Disney World not only require reservations, but also require them months in advance. My sister-in-law enjoys not having a set schedule on vacation, especially when it comes to dining. Again, we compromised by planning meals on certain days while allowing for spontaneity on others. By discussing the trip as a group, we were able to better satisfy everyone's desires.

It is important to remember you don't need to do everything together. Splitting up allows the members of the group to experience more of what they enjoy while not forcing the rest of the group to participate in something they may not. Many times throughout our trip we would break into smaller groups based on what we wanted to do at a given moment. In fact, by having a larger group, we gained flexibility that allowed us to do things we might otherwise have skipped. One evening on our trip, for example, my 17-year-old nephew and I headed to DisneyQuest while the rest of the group remained at the resort. Had our individual families traveled alone, chances are that neither one of us would have had the opportunity to enjoy DisneyQuest.

Certainly traveling with another family, especially relatives, is not for everyone. There is more work involved in this type of trip than a single-family vacation and that can cause unnecessary stress on the key planners. However, if you have friends or relatives you enjoy spending time with; the rewards for such a trip are tremendous. I enjoyed traveling with my wife's family and I would gladly join them again on vacation. With proper planning and realistic expectations, you too can

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create magical memories that span generations.

About The Author: Thomas is a web site coordinator and freelance web designer. A veteran of five trips to Walt Disney World and one Disney Cruise since 2002, Thomas is a member of several online Disney communities including the PassPorter forums where he shares his knowledge and love of the Disney Parks with anyone who will listen. He lives in Iowa with his wife Julie and nephew Joey.

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