

**COMO
ORÇAMENTAR PARA
UM
FÉRIAS FAMÍLIA**

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INTRODUÇÃO

As férias em família foram retratadas de várias maneiras. Das “Férias” da National Lampoon mostrando as provações e tribulações da família Griswold tentando chegar ao “Wally World” e ao “The Outdoors” com John Candy e sua família alugando uma cabana na floresta apenas para encontrar um urso intrometido. As férias em família na mídia parecem dar errado uma após a outra.

Mas na vida real, as férias em família são um momento para se unirem como uma unidade familiar e aproveitar novos tempos de proximidade enquanto exploram novas aventuras e locais. As lembranças que você pode fazer nessas férias permanecerão com você por anos e proporcionarão aos seus filhos momentos especiais que eles valorizarão para sempre.

Você pode optar por dirigir pelo país e ver as atrações peculiares na estrada, como o maior novelo de lã ou o museu do milho. Alguns não vêem isso como férias verdadeiras. Afinal, ficar preso em um carro durante a maior parte da viagem pode gerar alguns conflitos familiares reais!

Você também pode reservar um cruzeiro em família ou voar para o México para passar um tempo em um resort, mas isso pode ficar caro, e com todas as atividades que eles têm para crianças, alguns pais temem que o vínculo pelo qual estavam ansiosos não aconteça.

Para a família em um orçamento, a noção de férias memoráveis e divertidas pode parecer fora de alcance. Isso simplesmente não é verdade, no entanto. Existem muitas, muitas maneiras pelas quais você pode tirar férias maravilhosas em família com um orçamento limitado. Você não precisa sacrificar a diversão por falta de dinheiro. Existem todos os tipos de férias em quase todos os orçamentos.

Embora viajar seja bom para a economia e para a sua alma, pode ser difícil para a sua carteira. De fato, a AAA estima que uma família de quatro pessoas deva orçar pelo menos US \$ 244 por dia para refeições, hospedagem e custos de viagem de automóvel. E esse número não inclui o grampo das férias em família - entretenimento. Como sempre, a melhor maneira de manter os custos baixos é planejar com antecedência e tomar decisões informadas.

Mas como você começa? Você começa com informações da família, uma pesquisa de seus recursos e um plano bem elaborado. Não apenas mostraremos como fazer isso facilmente, mas também forneceremos todo tipo de idéias para férias em família e maneiras de torná-las acessíveis e divertidas!

Sempre sonhou em ir para a Disney World? Você pode! Acha que o Caribe está fora de alcance? Não é! Reunimos os conselhos e sugestões de muitos especialistas em férias e adicionamos algumas de nossas próprias experiências para oferecer a você este guia abrangente para tirar férias com a família em um orçamento!

Mostraremos diferentes maneiras de economizar dinheiro em passagens aéreas, hotéis, transporte e alimentação. Também forneceremos algumas ótimas idéias específicas para férias em família que não serão prejudiciais, além de algumas sugestões para ajudá-lo a economizar dinheiro e tempo em geral durante as férias em família.

Seja uma viagem de verão, um passeio de primavera ou um inverno nos trópicos, você poderá planejar as férias dos seus sonhos sem gastar muito. Você terá o máximo de diversão sem sacrificar cada centavo do seu dinheiro arduamente ganho - e poderá até voltar com um pouco mais para economizar nas próximas férias!

O que você está esperando? Leia!

SALVAR PARA AS SUAS FÉRIAS

Existem muitas maneiras eficazes de economizar nas férias em família. Quando você passa 40 horas por semana servindo no seu trabalho, merece um tempo para se afastar da corrida dos ratos, relaxar e curtir a família.

A menos que você seja rico de forma independente, precisará de um plano para economizar o dinheiro que precisa. Embora isso possa parecer uma proposição simples, algumas pessoas acham difícil reservar algum dinheiro a cada período de pagamento. A chave aqui é disciplina.

Abra uma conta poupança separada especificamente destinada ao seu dinheiro de férias. Se o seu empregador oferecer depósito direto, você poderá especificar uma certa quantia de dinheiro nessa conta. Alguns bancos agendam uma transferência direta automática para sua conta poupança se você não tiver depósito direto ou se não puder depositar dinheiro em duas contas separadas.

Examine a quantidade de dinheiro que sua família gasta semanal ou mensalmente em entretenimento familiar e restaurantes de fast food. Em seguida, reduza esse valor, armazenando o restante da sua viagem. Para que as férias pendentes não se tornem motivo de alegria, compre brindes e opções de entretenimento de baixo custo durante os meses anteriores à sua partida.

Outra boa maneira de economizar dinheiro é salvar suas alterações. Ao usar dinheiro, resolva usar apenas papel-moeda. Então pegue a mudança que você recebe e deixe de lado no final de cada dia. Você ficará surpreso com a rapidez com que ele pode se acumular.

Uma família relatou que mantinha um "pote de férias" em um local conveniente e cada membro da família depositava trocos e uma nota de dólar ocasional. Quando esvaziaram a jarra e a contaram, conseguiram economizar US \$ 5.000 - o suficiente para desfrutar de um refúgio tropical em Grand Cayman Island!

Embora você não tenha muito em seu jarro de mudança, esvaziá-lo no período de férias pode significar gastar dinheiro extra ou esse pequeno incentivo necessário para as férias dos seus sonhos.

Certifique-se de envolver seus filhos no empreendimento de poupança. Este é um ótimo momento para ensinar lições valiosas de economia e orçamento.

Procure outras maneiras de adicionar dinheiro extra ao cofre de férias. Uma família que conhecemos economizaria latas de alumínio e as levaria à usina de reciclagem periodicamente por dinheiro. Ao longo de um ano, eles conseguiram acumular US \$ 1.000 a mais por suas férias.

Você também pode fazer uma venda de remédios para ganhar dinheiro extra nas férias. Existem muitas oportunidades por aí para adicionar à sua economia de férias. Você só precisa pensar fora da caixa e resolver que qualquer dinheiro extra que você receber irá para as férias em família.

Você precisa fazer um orçamento de forma realista. Férias não precisam ser caras. Orçar um valor e cumpri-lo. Se você estiver dirigindo, defina um valor fixo para gastos (US \$ 150 por dia, por exemplo). Inclua todas as suas despesas, gás, refeições, admissões, atividades especiais, etc.

Envolva seus filhos no processo. Compartilhe com eles que economizar dinheiro em um dia lhes permite ir a um parque aquático em outro dia. Seja criativo.

Para economizar dinheiro, você pode comer apenas uma refeição em um restaurante por dia. Para os outros dois, prepare sua própria comida e coma no quarto do hotel ou faça um piquenique. Revezem-se, deixando as crianças escolherem o tipo de comida - e, se você for realmente aventureiro, o restaurante - todos os dias. Dessa forma, as crianças se sentem importantes e minimizam os argumentos.

Um bom ponto a ser lembrado ao determinar quanto você pode gastar em férias é ter certeza de considerar outras despesas periódicas que podem estar esperando quando você voltar, como custos de volta às aulas, férias despesas e impostos do próximo ano.

É por isso que recomendamos uma conta separada para a sua poupança de férias. Dessa forma, você separa o dinheiro das férias do dinheiro cotidiano e não precisa se preocupar em "roubar Peter para pagar a Paul" quando chegar em casa da sua viagem!

A próxima chave para uma fuga bem-sucedida de um orçamento é planejar.

COMEÇANDO SEU PLANO DE FÉRIAS

A primeira coisa que você deve fazer é planejar com antecedência. A espontaneidade funciona bem para passeios de um dia, mas não é tão eficaz para passeios mais longos. Ao planejar com antecedência, você encontrará tarifas mais baratas e mais acomodações disponíveis.

Você também pode ter a oportunidade de economizar todos os fundos adicionais necessários, talvez incluir convites prolongados para outros membros da família e reunir toda a documentação necessária para viajar para o exterior.

Ao planejar, é uma boa idéia manter-se flexível em seus desejos. Flexibilidade é igual ao prazer máximo para todos. Isto é especialmente verdade se você tiver necessidades especiais devido a uma deficiência ou estiver acompanhando adolescentes e crianças que desejam fazer coisas diferentes.

Envolva seus filhos também. Isso não apenas os deixará muito mais entusiasmados com a viagem, como também fornecerá sua opinião sobre os tipos de atividades que eles querem fazer e que tipos de atividades gostariam de fazer em família. Eles ficarão muito mais empolgados quando estiverem totalmente envolvidos na decisão de onde a família estará de férias, por isso não deixe de ter suas opiniões também.

Você provavelmente já tem algum tipo de idéia sobre o que poderá pagar ao tirar férias. Se você tem um número específico em mente, isso facilita muito a escolha de um destino. Você pode pesquisar o que está disponível na sua faixa de preço e escolher a viagem que melhor se adequa à sua família.

Se você não tem um número específico em mente, faça uma lista das férias dos seus sonhos. Inclua os lugares que você sempre quis ir, bem como os lugares que você acha que se encaixariam nas personalidades de sua família. Veja quanto custará esse tipo de férias e escolha o que você acha que pode economizar ou se dar ao luxo de tirar imediatamente.

A Internet é uma ferramenta indispensável para fazer isso. Existem muitos sites de viagens que oferecem pacotes de férias para destinos específicos. Aqui estão algumas sugestões dos especialistas:

www.expedia.com
www.orbitz.com
www.cheaptickets.com
www.travelocity.com

Quando você usa esses sites, eles podem oferecer os melhores preços para vários destinos, mas também podem fornecer sugestões valiosas para onde você pode ir, além de atividades disponíveis e classificações de outros viajantes que fizeram as mesmas férias.

Você também pode usar:

www.priceline.com A

linha de preço geralmente permite que você indique um preço que está disposto a pagar por voos, hotéis etc., mas precisa aceitar o que eles oferecem se aceitarem seu preço. Por exemplo, você pode estar disposto a pagar US \$ 100,00 por um voo de US \$ 200,00, mas eles só aceitarão seu preço se você estiver disposto a pegar o olho vermelho no meio da noite. Se isso é algo com o qual você pode conviver, por todos os meios, reserve! Apenas seja flexível.

Você detecta um tema aqui na fase de planejamento?
Flexibilidade é a chave!

Você precisará decidir se estará voando para o seu destino ou dirigindo. Existem muitas companhias aéreas que têm preços reduzidos quando você voa durante determinados horários. Novamente, você precisará ser flexível nas datas e horários de partida.

Você também precisará decidir sobre um prazo para suas férias. Novamente, se você é flexível nas datas de partida, é mais provável que obtenha um acordo melhor. Percebemos, no entanto, que restrições de trabalho podem não permitir que você altere as datas de suas férias, mas, se possível, é melhor ter apenas uma idéia geral em vez de uma data sólida.

Tente viajar em dias que não sejam sexta, sábado ou domingo, que são os dias de viagem mais movimentados da semana. Você pode firmar planos mais tarde, se necessário.

Depois de ter em mente o seu destino, será necessário considerar algumas outras coisas antes de reservar sua viagem.

COMO CHEGAR

Há muitas maneiras de chegar ao seu destino de férias. Era uma vez, a única maneira de uma família poder pagar férias era carregar o carro e sair na estrada. Quantos de vocês se lembram dessas longas viagens? Eu certamente faço! Mas você não precisa mais necessariamente dirigir de férias! Hoje existem todos os tipos de opções acessíveis e muito mais agradáveis!

Dirigir

Se você estiver dirigindo, os preços do gás serão uma grande consideração. No momento da redação deste livro, o gás no Centro-Oeste estava com pouco menos de US \$ 3,00 por galão. Se você estiver dirigindo mais de 300 milhas, dependendo da quilometragem do seu veículo, provavelmente será mais barato voar. Sugerimos que você dirija apenas se estiver indo para um local que não esteja muito longe de sua casa.

Pode haver enormes vantagens, no entanto, para dirigir. Você não precisará se preocupar tanto com datas e horários. Você pode simplesmente arrumar as malas e partir. Há algo a ser dito para ver o país pelas janelas de um carro.

Pode ser uma experiência de aprendizado para seus filhos, pois eles podem ver a bela nação em que vivem. Este é um bom momento para promover conversas com sua família também. Quando não houver muito o que fazer ao longo do caminho, conte histórias, compartilhe seus pensamentos e memórias com eles. Todos vocês aprenderão muito se aprenderem!

A próxima seção explora maneiras específicas de tornar as viagens de carro em férias não apenas suportáveis, mas agradáveis!

Voar

Com as companhias aéreas competindo pelos negócios hoje em dia, as viagens aéreas são mais acessíveis do que eram antes. A reserva antecipada de passagens aéreas economizará muito dinheiro. A reserva antecipada é importante para obter uma taxa justa.

As viagens em família se concentram nas férias escolares, ganhando espaço com um prêmio. Quanto mais

longe você reservar, maiores serão suas chances de conseguir o que deseja. É uma questão de oferta e demanda. Quando a demanda é alta, os preços são altos. Sugere-se que você tente planejar viagens com dez meses a um ano de antecedência, para conseguir o que deseja e não sentir que precisa se contentar com o que pode conseguir.

Você provavelmente encontrará as melhores ofertas on-line em um dos sites mencionados acima. Eles são facilmente navegáveis e você pode obter relatórios de disponibilidade instantâneos, além de rotas alternativas sugeridas.

Ao reservar passagens aéreas on-line, não esqueça as companhias aéreas com desconto e as companhias aéreas internacionais - algumas não estão listadas nos sites dos grandes portais de viagens, embora possam ter uma tarifa mais baixa para o seu destino. Certifique-se também de comparar as tarifas para aeroportos alternativos a uma distância razoável de viagem.

Você pode morar meia hora em um aeroporto principal, mas o aeroporto menor a algumas horas de distância pode ter tarifas substancialmente mais baixas. Verifique também aeroportos alternativos perto do seu destino.

Seja flexível sobre o seu datas de chegada e partida; todos os principais portais de viagem têm opções para pesquisar os voos mais baratos em um período de datas. Qualquer uma dessas alternativas pode economizar centenas de dólares.

Muitas empresas de cartão de crédito oferecem milhas de passageiro frequente quando você usa seus cartões para

compras. Essa é uma ótima maneira de economizar em viagens aéreas, aproveitando esse serviço. Use seu cartão de crédito para quase todas as compras realizadas e, em seguida, receba o dinheiro no período de férias. Isso pode significar passagem aérea gratuita para você e sua família!

Claro, isso também pode significar grandes contas de cartão de crédito e saldos não pagos, portanto, gaste com sabedoria. Use o cartão apenas para itens que você compraria normalmente - não em itens extravagantes apenas para obter a quilometragem.

Não jogue fora seu lixo eletrônico! Às vezes, dentro desses pacotes de cupom, haverá descontos para viagens aéreas. Uma pessoa quase jogou fora seu envelope Val-Pak, mas decidiu examiná-lo para o caso de haver algo que ela pudesse usar. Eis que havia um certificado de US \$ 100 em viagens com uma companhia aérea com desconto. O cupom era bom para até 4 bilhetes, então cada membro de sua família voou para a Flórida por apenas US \$ 54 a cada ida e volta!

Por fim, você pode ir a um agente de viagens para reservar seu voo. Eles têm muito conhecimento sobre os negócios das companhias aéreas e muitas vezes podem economizar muito dinheiro se você souber que essa é sua maior prioridade. Eles também fornecerão cotações de tarifas gratuitas. Assim, quando você ligar, poderá ver se um voo se encaixará no seu plano orçamentado.

Aqui estão algumas dicas valiosas para ajudar você a economizar nas passagens aéreas ao fazer sua reserva: As

- companhias aéreas geralmente recarregam seus computadores à meia-noite, para que, logo após isso, seja um bom momento para fazer compras on-line de assentos de baixo custo que as pessoas possam ter reservado, mas não pagas. .

- Quando uma companhia aérea anuncia uma venda para um destino específico, é provável que as outras sigam o exemplo em breve, então fique de olho e ligue ou clique em volta.
- Use a internet para pesquisar tarifas de última hora para pechinchas de fim de semana. Os sites da maioria das companhias aéreas têm um local em que tarifas drasticamente reduzidas de fim de semana estão disponíveis. Comece a verificar na quarta-feira o fim de semana que se aproxima.

Trens

Muitas músicas foram escritas sobre o amor do país pelos trens e pelo sistema ferroviário. A maioria deles, no entanto, é sobre pegar um trem de carga com destino à Geórgia ou alguma outra maneira imprópria de viajar. Viajar de trem não é mais assim.

Os trens de hoje são veículos de luxo que rivalizam com muitos aviões. Eles oferecem assentos espaçosos, vagões-restaurantes, vagões-clubes e até berços para viagens realmente longas. A melhor parte é que essas conveniências nem sempre têm um preço premium.

O Amtrak, o principal serviço de trens do país, oferece muitos, muitos planos de descontos para viajantes com orçamento limitado. Como são férias em família, assumimos que você provavelmente terá filhos. Se esses passageiros tiverem 15 anos ou menos, eles poderão viajar pela metade do preço.

Você também pode encontrar cupons para economizar dinheiro em correspondências e online. Tudo o que você precisa fazer é olhar em volta. E não se esqueça de pedir

descontos! Se você não perguntar, eles provavelmente não serão oferecidos a você, mesmo que estejam disponíveis; reserve um momento para fazer a reserva e diga: "Você consegue essa taxa mais baixa?"

Viagens longas de carro são longas e marcadas na história das férias em família. As histórias são numerosas e crescem cada vez mais, à medida que cada membro da família narra a história horrenda da viagem de 18 horas até o Grand Canyon. Existe alguma maneira de facilitar a viagem de férias? Pode apostar!

JÁ ESTAMOS LÁ?

Quando a temporada de férias se aproxima, muitas famílias planejam seguir a estrada para escapar do estresse da rotina diária. Uma viagem em família mal planejada pode ser uma fonte maior de frustração do que muitas famílias imaginam.

Infelizmente, essas famílias tendem a encontrar essa frustração no meio do caminho das férias, numa época em que pouco pode ser feito para remediá-la. O nível de estresse durante a viagem é proporcional à qualidade do planejamento feito antes de sair da garagem.

Pode ser tão decepcionante fazer planos de viagem para promover a "união" da família apenas para chegar ao destino com pais e filhos na garganta um do outro. Mas quando os pais descobrem como o planejamento simples pode tornar a viagem divertida e memorável, a diferença na qualidade das férias reais é mensurável. Ter as ferramentas certas na estrada pode fazer toda a diferença entre o sucesso e o fracasso das férias reais.

Primeiro, reserve um tempo para planejar uma viagem que inclua paradas de descanso pré-planejadas, um refrescante refresco (para evitar paradas de alto preço e preços de fast food), músicas e livros em fita e muitas atividades para as crianças nas de volta.

Mantenha todos ocupados com Ghost, 20 Questions, Punch Buggy e License Plate Bingo, depois tente uma caça ao tesouro, um concurso de escultura em papel alumínio e Penny Ante.

Tente sair para sua viagem em um horário diferente da manhã ou do meio da tarde. Você pode até querer sair no início ou no final da noite. Há algo a ser dito sobre a calma da estrada para colocar as crianças brigando para dormir. Apenas certifique-se de que o motorista possa ficar acordado!

Pega uma idéia das companhias aéreas: mostre um filme. Alugue (ou compre) uma TV / VCR feita para reproduzir em seu veículo, pressione "play" e pronto. Atualmente, os DVD players portáteis são mais acessíveis e podem ser um salva-vidas em uma longa viagem!

Faça sacolas de brindes para seus filhos para mantê-los ocupados na longa viagem. Para a própria bolsa, use uma mochila ou mochila velha, uma lancheira, uma sacola de compras, uma mala pequena ou uma bolsa pequena. A duração da viagem pode acabar determinando o tamanho apropriado da mochila de viagem. Se você estiver viajando de avião, tente usar algo que feche bem para evitar derramamentos.

Certifique-se de ter uma sacola separada para cada criança, para evitar discussões. Convém rotular itens com o nome da criança para garantir mais segurança. Encha as sacolas com os mesmos itens se os seus filhos tiverem idade próxima ou tiverem interesses semelhantes.

Algumas sugestões de itens a incluir são: caderno espiral, lápis de cor, marcadores laváveis, livros de histórias, livros de atividades, jogos magnéticos, jogos de cartas, jogos de tabuleiro em tamanho de viagem, kazoo, jogos eletrônicos portáteis, livros de adesivos, giz de cera, livros para colorir, Mad-Libs, lupa, bonecas de papel, ardósias mágicas, livros invisíveis de tinta, carros pequenos, fantoches de dedo, bonecas / bonecos de ação, livros de feltro com adesivos, tesouras sem corte, cartões de costura, quebra-cabeças, limpadores de cachimbo, papel de origami furtivo, livros em fita e um toca-fitas ou CD player e fones de ouvido.

Deixe seu filho ajudá-lo a arrumar a mala e incentive-o a pensar sobre o que ele / ela quer levar na viagem. Permita que seus filhos escolham seus brinquedos favoritos para colocar na mochila. Não esqueça de levar itens de segurança de seu filho, como cobertor ou bicho de pelúcia. Isso certamente poderia significar um desastre.

Você pode incluir lanches para deixar seus filhos entre as refeições. Escolha lanches com cuidado para evitar bagunças e dores de estômago. Evite frutas e bebidas pegajosas que você não pode fechar novamente e leve lanches em sacos com zíper para facilitar a limpeza. Alguns lanches seguros para viagens são: pãezinhos, bolachas para animais, passas, água engarrafada, maçãs fatiadas, palitos de cenoura, bananas e pequenos sacos de cereais.

Depois de descobrir como chegar ao seu destino, você precisará de um lugar para ficar.

ALOJAMENTO

Há todo tipo de perguntas a serem feitas quando você procura um alojamento adequado nas suas férias. Em que tipo de hotel você quer ficar? Tem que ter uma piscina? E as

vans de cortesia? Tem que ser um hotel? Existem muitas opções para manter seu orçamento de férias alinhado e ainda ter um lugar para você pensar!

A maioria dos viajantes com orçamento limitado recomenda um hotel que oferece cozinha ou cozinha compacta. Isso pode economizar uma quantia enorme de dinheiro nas refeições. Ter uma cozinha quando você está de férias com crianças pode ser inestimável. Frequentemente, o custo por pessoa pode valer o tempo necessário para preparar algumas de suas próprias refeições.

As famílias devem considerar acomodações em estilo condomínio, pois geralmente têm preço comparável a um bom hotel (e até menos que o custo de dois quartos) e oferecem o luxo de um apartamento espaçoso com cozinha completa e comodidades como máquinas de lavar roupa - um recurso interessante quando você tem filhos pequenos. Outros alojamentos "não tradicionais" incluem apartamentos mobiliados, trocas de casas ou o aluguel de uma vila.

Se você preferir conviver com os habitantes locais do que com outros turistas, procure férias em casa. Um casal passou a lua de mel de oito semanas em turnê pela Europa sem nunca ficar em um hotel; em vez disso, ficaram em casas particulares, enquanto seus anfitriões europeus ficavam em seu apartamento em Nova York.

Parece arriscado? Talvez - mas dezenas de milhares de pessoas trocaram de casa desde os anos 50. Por uma taxa anual de associação (geralmente em torno de US \$ 50), os clubes de troca de casas ajudam os membros a organizar trocas, além de oferecer dicas para que a troca ocorra sem problemas.

Segundo o ExchangeHomes.com, uma troca de casas pode reduzir os custos de viagem pela metade. Mais

importante, porém, as férias de troca de casas possibilitam que você viva como os locais, e talvez faça alguns amigos ao longo da vida.

Em uma ligeira reviravolta na idéia de troca de casas, entre em um clube de hospitalidade que o envolverá com pessoas dispostas a recebê-lo em suas próximas férias. O maior clube de hospitalidade tem mais de 23.000 membros em 148 países.

A associação geralmente é gratuita, embora seja solicitado que os membros ofereçam hospitalidade a outras pessoas (voluntariamente) em troca em algum momento no futuro. Além de economizar dinheiro, ficar com outras pessoas é uma ótima maneira de conhecer pessoas locais que podem dar uma perspectiva privilegiada de seu destino.

Agora, essa próxima sugestão pode parecer um pouco estranha, mas se economizar dinheiro é seu objetivo final, pode ser algo que você desejará considerar. Fique em um mosteiro ou convento.

Mosteiros e conventos têm uma longa tradição de oferecer hospitalidade aos viajantes. Além de ser muito mais interessante (e acessível) do que o Holiday Inn local, um mosteiro pode ser um ótimo lugar para explorar sua paisagem espiritual.

Muitos mosteiros e conventos pedem uma doação de US \$ 40 a US \$ 80 por noite; outros apenas pedem uma oferta de livre-arbítrio. Além de acomodações simples, os mosteiros e os conventos costumam oferecer aos seus hóspedes refeições simples, além de oportunidades para participar da oração e do trabalho diários. As reservas podem ser solicitadas com antecedência.

Você pode pesquisar essa ideia de férias consultando mosteiros ou conventos individuais online. Ou obtenha um guia como "Pousadas da Europa em Mosteiro e Convento: Guia de Viagem de um Peregrino" ou "Santuários: Os Estados Unidos Completos: Um Guia de Hospedagem em Mosteiros, Abadias e Retiros".

Você deve reservar um hotel fora da parte principal da cidade, mas ainda perto dos pontos turísticos que deseja ver. Ao ficar longe dos hotéis mais populares no meio da ação, você terá uma chance melhor de não apenas economizar dinheiro, mas também de obter acomodações no horário que deseja.

Saiba o que você está comprando, no entanto. Às vezes, você pode economizar dinheiro gastando um pouco mais. Por exemplo, se a hospedagem incluir café da manhã ou tiver uma piscina interna ou uma localização melhor, reduzirá o tempo e as despesas de viajar para as atrações de seu interesse; a despesa extra pode valer a pena.

Esteja ciente das comodidades que podem ter preços extras ocultos no preço do quarto. Por exemplo, o hotel pode fornecer um serviço de abertura de cama por US \$ x.xx e dizer que está incluído na tarifa do quarto. Se você não quiser recusar o serviço, peça para que ele seja removido da tarifa do quarto. Nem todos os hotéis fazem isso, mas nunca é demais perguntar!

Muitas pessoas procuram um lugar perto das atrações que desejam visitar, para que andar de bicicleta ou a pé possa ser o meio de transporte. Pode ser bom não depender de um veículo para levá-lo de um lugar para outro.

Além disso, pergunte se há descontos disponíveis. Alguns hotéis têm políticas gratuitas para crianças ou oferecem 50% de desconto em um segundo quarto para

menores de 17 anos. Se você é membro de uma organização, pergunte se eles oferecem descontos. Pertencer a um clube de motor como AAA também pode economizar dinheiro. Eles costumam trabalhar com hotéis para dar valor a seus membros por suas dívidas.

Embora abordaremos maneiras de economizar em suas refeições em um capítulo posterior, convém encontrar um hotel que ofereça um café da manhã continental de cortesia.

Nós recentemente ficamos em um hotel que disse café da manhã continental gratuito e esperava os bagels habituais, torradas e cereais frios. Ficamos surpresos ao descobrir que sua idéia de café da manhã continental incluía ovos cozidos da maneira que você quisesse, bacon, lingüiça, panquecas, biscoitos e calda, tudo em um ambiente de estilo buffet.

Este escritor ficou encantado e deixou o bufê cheio - com certeza! Nós não tivemos que comprar o almoço porque ainda estávamos cheios do café da manhã, então isso nos salvou algum dinheiro! Nós apenas pensamos "Woo Hoo!"

TODAS AS INCLUSIVAS Abordamos

cada um dos aspectos mais importantes até agora no seu plano de férias em família, mas precisamos endereçar uma enorme economia de dinheiro para você agora - especialmente se você estiver cuidando de crianças. Quase todos os resorts oferecem um pacote com tudo incluído, o que pode significar muito dinheiro no departamento de economia!

Esses pacotes podem ser apenas enquanto você estiver no hotel ou podem incluir passagens aéreas e transferências. Você terá que fazer sua pesquisa e descobrir o que é melhor para você.

Um pacote com tudo incluído em um resort significa que todas as suas refeições, bebidas e gratificações estão incluídas no preço do seu quarto. Então você terá um lugar para ficar, um lugar para comer e um lugar para festejar, se assim o desejar - tudo por um preço! Não precisa se preocupar com o orçamento para o jantar ou uma noite fora! Está tudo incluído!

Com esses tipos de planos, no entanto, você precisará chegar ao seu destino às suas próprias custas, para o qual encaminhamos você para a seção acima, intitulada "Como chegar".

No entanto, existem outros planos com tudo incluído que incluem passagem aérea, transporte de e para o aeroporto e para o hotel e, em seguida, eles oferecem refeições, bebidas etc. com o preço. Acreditamos que este seria o melhor tipo de livro com tudo incluído, porque você não precisa se preocupar com o orçamento de nada, exceto excursões, taxas de admissão e lembranças.

Tudo incluído é uma ótima maneira de economizar dinheiro em férias. Com um sistema tudo incluído, você sabe antecipadamente o que está pagando e não há surpresas. Quando você vai para outro lugar, tudo se soma.

No entanto, pode haver desvantagens. Uma delas é que eles só podem oferecer um voo para fora de Miami e você mora em Albany, Nova York. Você terá que chegar a Miami para pegar seu voo, mas provavelmente ainda conseguirá grandes economias a longo prazo.

TRANSPORTE

Se o seu plano é ir além do seu local de hospedagem - o que provavelmente será - você precisará considerar o transporte externo. É uma questão de gosto e o que é mais importante para você na área de conveniência e preço. Você pode gostar de ter seu próprio carro para poder ir aonde quiser quando quiser, mas isso pode ser caro. Existem outras opções.

Aluguel de carros

Se você deseja alugar um carro, lembre-se de algumas coisas. Ao adquirir um carro alugado, compre o menor em que sua família se encaixa confortavelmente. Não é necessário gastar dinheiro extra em luxo quando um carro econômico ainda o leva aonde você precisa ir.

Você terá que decidir se deseja ou não comprar o seguro de aluguel oferecido pela empresa. Não vamos contar de uma maneira ou de outra, porque existem vantagens e desvantagens de qualquer maneira.

Se você estiver confortável o suficiente com a direção e sentir que pode ter cuidado o suficiente para evitar acidentes, então renuncie ao seguro. Convém verificar seu próprio plano de seguro de automóvel antes de sair para ver se você está coberto por essa apólice enquanto opera um carro alugado.

No entanto, lembre-se de que os acidentes podem acontecer e acontecem apesar dos nossos melhores esforços. Qualquer um de vocês que assistiu ao filme "Meet The Fockers" sabe do que estou falando!

Se você quiser se arriscar e renunciar a esse seguro, lembre-se de que qualquer dano ao carro alugado sairá do

seu próprio bolso. Muitas vezes, o custo desse seguro é relativamente mínimo, portanto pode valer a pena ficar tranquilo - no mínimo, para avançar e inicializar essa linha.

As agências de aluguel de carros variam muito em preço e oferecem uma grande oportunidade para negociar. Você pode economizar centenas de dólares verificando os vários locais em uma cidade. Muitas vezes, é muito mais barato pegar um carro longe do aeroporto.

Se você trabalha para uma empresa que possui uma conta corporativa em determinadas agências, elas geralmente respeitam as taxas de desconto quando você viaja a lazer. Verifique todos os descontos oferecidos para AAA, AARP, aluguel de final de semana, etc. Eles têm muito espaço para negociar, portanto, continue perguntando para quais descontos você pode se qualificar.

Use descontos oferecidos no livro Entretenimento. Quando você pega o veículo, muitas empresas o atualizam para um carro muito melhor pela mesma taxa, se você aprender a perguntar com um sorriso agradável. Confira as pessoas atrás do balcão e aguarde uma que pareça mais amigável e fácil de trabalhar.

Hotel Courtesy Vans

Many hotels do provide courtesy vans for their guests to use for transportation when staying at their hotel. This is a great amenity and one that should be used if it is available. Each hotel is different about their policies regarding use of their vans, however, so you should check with the front desk upon check-in to see what theirs is.

Often, you just need to inform the front desk that you'll need a van to go to, say, a local restaurant, and they will be waiting outside the lobby for you to take you to your destination. At that time, you can probably let the driver

know what time you want to be picked up and they will return to bring you back to the hotel.

However, hotel courtesy vans ARE NOT taxi cabs. They are a service provided by the hotel for the convenience of their guests, so they should be used wisely lest you make a concierge angry by inviting 15 people you met at a bar to come along for the ride and then asking the van to drop them off in 15 different places!

Other hotels have set times for departure from the hotel and set drop-off points that are pre-determined around the location where you are staying. In this capacity, they almost operate like a bus service. Be there on time and you get a ride – if you're late, call a cab!

The best part about these courtesy vans is that they are free to use as long as you are a guest at the hotel. This certainly is a great way to save money on vacation!

Local Buses

Well, this section is going to be short! You can also utilize the local bus service of the city you are staying in. What's the advantage? It's cheap! What's the disadvantage? It can take quite awhile for you to get to your destination.

When we were in Las Vegas, we utilized the city bus system and had a very good experience. We weren't on a strict timetable and if we saw a place we wanted to get off the bus and visit, we could. We purchased a 5 day pass for unlimited bus rides for \$10 and got to board and de-board as many times as we wanted.

Sure, we didn't get downtown right when the light show started, but we were darn close to the beginning and a taxi ride would have cost us way over the \$10 we initially spent for our bus passes.

Taxicabs

We'll just come right out and say it - taxicabs are expensive – bottom line. Yet sometimes, they are a necessarily “evil” when you are traveling. If you do have a schedule you are trying to stick to, they can be a lifesaver getting you to the show you have tickets for on time or the restaurant who frowns on people late for their reservations.

The key to taking taxicabs is to tell the driver up front where you are going and ask what the estimated fare will be. If it's within your budget, hop in! If it's not, you'll need to figure out another way to get to your destination. That's the plain and simple truth!

And cabs are probably most expensive in tropical or luxury locations. We know of one couple on a Hawaiian cruise who got off at one of the islands and caught a taxicab to go parasailing. It ended up costing them a small fortune for a one-way ride only to find out it was too windy to parasail that day and they had to eat the same exorbitant fare on the way back to the ship.

Find out in advance and have a backup plan, just in case.

Other Transportation

If you're on an island or in a resort town, you may want to consider bicycles or scooters for your transportation needs. They can often be rented for a small amount of money and you get the satisfaction of getting some exercise along with the local flavor!

And, of course, you can always “hoof it”. However, we recommend this only if your destination is close enough to

walk to. In the aforementioned Las Vegas trip, we thought it would be fun to walk The Strip and get a real taste for Vegas. What we didn't know was that The Strip was well over 5 miles long. By the time we reached the end, we were all so exhausted; we called a cab and paid the \$25 it took to get us back to our hotel.

Alright, you know your destination and have booked your flight. You know which hotel works best for you and have mapped out the different ways to visit the places you want to see. What else needs to be addressed in the budget? Food!

EATING WELL ON A TRAVEL BUDGET

When you're traveling it can be difficult to find good food at reasonable prices especially if you happen to be staying in a big city that has an established food and restaurant culture. When you're faced with a budget, you want to try and maximize your enjoyment per buck. If you want to eat well and sample the local cuisine for a budget price, you'll need to do a little research to find that perfect restaurant that offers a balance between quality and price.

Obviously, if you're staying at an all-inclusive, you won't need to worry about this part, but many, many people need to consider where they're going to feed their family and not break the bank.

First, check with your hotel or hostel and inquire whether breakfast is included in your stay. In Europe many hotels provide breakfast. If your hotel does provide breakfast, don't skip it in favor of paying for food

elsewhere. Remember the continental breakfast we had? Never pass up an amenity that's included in your room rate. Hotel and hostel breakfasts are also a great way to get to know other guests.

Another option for budget eating is to eat at a chain restaurant that you are familiar with, such as McDonald's, Burger King or Kentucky Fried Chicken. You can find a McDonald's about anywhere world-wide. While this isn't recommended for every day, it is a good way to save a little money when you're low for the day. After all, you can eat at McDonald's at home! If you want to become familiar with the culture of the country you are visiting, eating at a fast food restaurant is not a good option.

You can also buy groceries and make your own food. If you have a kitchen or kitchenette, this is excellent for breakfasts and lunches. It's much cheaper to pour a bowl of cereal for your little ones in your room instead of going down to the dining room where the cereal will be overpriced anyway. Pick up some cold cuts and bread and pack a lunch instead of buying the over-priced hot food at the theme park!

Eating one or two meals a day from a street vendor or take-out restaurant may also be a good way to still eat great, but save some money. Not only will you get a taste of local flavor and culture, but you will find the food is very good and reasonably priced!

Being friendly with other guests in the hotel, the concierge and the locals, is another great way to discover good food that won't break the budget. Ask a local if they know any good restaurants that aren't too expensive. They should be able to come up with a few good options for you. Make sure you indicate that you want to sample some local cooking.

If you're going to splurge at an expensive restaurant, lunch is a good time to do so. You can often get the same famous food at a significantly lower cost. Since most health experts agree that eating the largest meal of the day in the afternoon is a good idea, you'll be doing more than your pocketbook a favor.

Almost every town has a local "Mom and Pop" diner that provides better than excellent home cooking for not a lot of money. We found one in Florida that offered up an all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet for \$4.00 per person and it had everything on it you could ever wish for at breakfast time!

Another good way to find inexpensive restaurants is to always be looking for a good place to eat. If you're out visiting a tourist site, stop by a few restaurants and read their menus which are usually posted in the window. Even if you are not hungry, you may decide to come back later. You may have better luck with this technique when you are in an area of the city that is not your standard tourist destination.

Eating in a sit-down full service restaurant is the most expensive dining option, so if you are really on a budget, you may want to limit the number of full service meals you eat. But don't forget to spoil yourself.

When I was in Boston, I wanted a full-service lobster dinner with all the trimmings. I wanted to be pampered and enjoy a meal I wouldn't get to have at home.

I went to the restaurant best known for their delicious lobster which was also well-known for their high prices. That lobster ate up a large portion of my food budget, but as I ate that tasty lobster, I found it was more than worth the price I paid.

If you're on a budget, you can still eat great during your travels; you just need to be aware of all your food options. Ask around with locals for recommendations. Make

sure you know the price before you eat. Most important of all, you should try new things. Stretch your boundaries and try something that you would never eat at home. After all isn't the reason you travel is to discover something different.

If your hotel offers a "kids eat free" plan or discounted meals for your stay, take advantage of this as much as you can, but remember, you're on vacation to experience your travel destination. The point is to get outside your hotel and live!

Before we get into specific vacation suggestions, we wanted to offer up some general tips and advice to get the maximum enjoyment value out of your family trip. It's not a vacation unless it's providing enjoyment – for everyone!

GENERAL INFORMATION

We can't possibly tell you everything you need to know about taking a family vacation on a budget. After all, this is only a 60 page book! Granted, it's a 60 page book packed with all sorts of valuable information, but even if we give you every single money-saving tip we can find, there are still some aspects of the family vacation that should be addressed so that everyone is having fun!

1. Write down your budget, make it detailed, and stick to it! If you've budgeted \$1,000 for food, be sure you're going to be able to feed everyone the entire time for \$1,000. It'll save you a lot of stress and aggravation and you can make adjustments elsewhere if you find you're close to going over budget.

2. No matter what, ALWAYS ask for discounts. You won't ever get them unless you ask for them. If they're available, you should take advantage – for you and your vacation budget!
3. Remember to be flexible! Be able to change your plans if need be and “go with the flow”.
4. Buy your children journals – cheap notebooks – and give them fun pens so they can record their thoughts and experiences as you go through your travels. They'll appreciate it later plus it keeps them busy!
5. Once you've selected a destination, share copies of your travel brochures with your family. Then watch the excitement skyrocket.
6. Make lists. Planning a family trip often sparks more questions than answers. Thanks to lists, however, you'll have the answers at your fingertips. Some "Last-Minute List," which to use before departing can include: "Don't Forget," "To Do," and "Pack Now." It's a great time-saver, and ensures non-replaceable essentials like medications and such aren't left behind.
7. When traveling in the US, contact local tourism departments for free brochures and maps, and any money-saving coupons. Also contact the local Chambers of Commerce where you will be vacationing to see if they have any resident packets that might include valuable money-saving coupons and tips on where to visit.
8. Cruise the Internet for reduced prices on everything from lodging to airfare to car rentals to entertainment - and everything in between. Wherever your dream destination, you can point and click your way into an affordable, enjoyable vacation without ever leaving home.
9. Maintain a routine while on vacation. It's tempting to set aside bed times and other daily routines while traveling. But sticking as closely as possible to normal

routines—like meal times, and bed times—will help your family to enjoy each day's activities and return home less stressed.

10. Schedule some down time. Because family travel can be so expensive, parents often attempt to book as much activity in a day as humanly possible. Unfortunately, that whirlwind approach can be more tiresome than fun—for parents and children. One option: schedule a mid-day "rest stop" to unwind, or finish activities by 7 pm
11. Be prepared. Being on vacation doesn't exempt you from emergencies. Thus, be prepared to respond to emergencies while away.
 - Pack needed medications and related equipment for family member who require them. Carry more than enough for your planned trip. Save on over-the-counter medication by bringing it with you, rather than buying them "on the other side."
 - Carry a copy of your medical and dental insurance cards, physicians' contact information, and a list of illnesses, prescription drug and food allergies of which any family member suffers.

While this may come naturally at home, in an emergency situation you could easily forget pertinent information while under pressure. Also bring along at least one emergency contact number for a family or friend who can be reached should emergency personnel need to contact them for you. Thinking about such eventualities aren't pleasant, but it's better to be prepared should they arise.

- Leave a copy of your complete itinerary, including your airline and hotel reservations and daily activities, if known, with at least one extended family member. It will come in handy should

someone need to contact you concerning an emergency back home.

12. When vacation is over, take time to regroup and reconnect. Coming home can be anti-climatic after spending days living out of suitcases and participating in new, exciting activities. After each trip, carve out a portion of the first day or two to unwind. Doing so will help everyone to gently return to your family's routine.
13. You may want to take a credit card along for safety and convenience. However, it is important to remember that credit should not be used as an extension of your income. No matter how much fun you had on a vacation, it's never fun to still be paying it off years later. In fact, if you put at \$2,000 vacation on your 18% interest credit card and make only the minimum monthly payments, it would take you more than 18 years to pay it off.
14. Decide on the ground rules. How many times have you been on a family vacation and seen parents and their children arguing? Vacations are supposed to be fun, not a battleground.

Parents should establish the rules in advance so that arguments don't take away joy from the day. For example, take children's spending. To them, nothing in a souvenir shop is too tacky or overpriced. How do you solve this dilemma? It's simple.

They can buy what they want with their own money but they can't ask for more. A few months prior to vacation, begin reminding them that they should be saving their funds. Some do, some don't.

On the eve of departure, you can give them each \$20 to supplement their savings. After that, they're on their own. If they spend it the first day, they're out of luck. Knowing in advance the ground rules on spending, fast food restaurants, and sharing the Game

Boy saves countless arguments and embarrassing moments.

15. Publish it. Regardless of what you've done or where you've gone, it's always fun to remember it. Take a large scrapbook with you. As you are driving, dictate what happened that day and leave space to paste in photographs, postcards, admission tickets, etc.

When you read about vacations past, you can relive the memories. Some entries are exciting—such as when we saw a bear. Others are funny ("You know you're in trouble when the highlight of the day was when your pediatrician phoned in an anti-diarrhea prescription"). No event is too small to document. It all looks humorous in hindsight.

16. Alternate pricey attractions with those that are free--a hike in the woods, the best playground in the area, a tour of the local potato-chip factory.
17. Set the souvenir budget before you leave home and stick to it. Suggest the kids start collections along the way--postcards, pins, patches, for example.
18. Always ask when you call for reservations if there are any other discount deals available--kids eat free, a room upgrade, a second room at half price, etc.
19. Get out a map and talk about where you want to go and what you want to do. Even the four-year-old will have an opinion. Make sure everyone gets at least some of their picks on the itinerary. If the kids are old enough, suggest each one plan a day's activities.
20. Consider inviting a friend for an only child or for a sole preteen or teen in the family. He or she will be much happier.

Alright, now we've gotten the general tips out of the way. What you really want to know is, how can we take a fabulous family vacation on a budget and where? We've shown you how. Now let's explore where!

We want you to know before you read further that these destinations have been picked based on the recommendations of many different experts and are not endorsed in any way by us specifically. However, we think these experts are dead straight on in their suggestions. So, let's look at destination number 1 – Disney World!

DISNEY WORLD

Disney World is unarguably the largest family vacation destination in the United States. Super Bowl winners want to go there, kids want to go there, adults want to go there – heck, MY GRANDMA wants to go there! Can the everyday family afford to go to Disney World on a limited budget? YOU BET!

There are many options for you to consider on a Disney vacation. We'll present as many of them to you as possible.

The obvious first choice is to stay on the property for maximum convenience and fun. At the time of this writing, the theme park is currently offering the following packages for a six night, seven day stay for a family of four:

- \$1,500 for a stay at a value category resort
- \$1,900 for a stay at a moderate category resort
- \$2,500 for a stay at a deluxe category resort

The value category resorts include All-Star Sports and All-Star Music hotels with the entire resort centering around those themes. They are fun for the kids and have themed

pools and food courts. The rooms are standard, but comfortable and accommodate four people easily.

When we visited Disney World with our two children, we stayed at the All-Star Music resort and were very satisfied with everything they had to offer us. We were, after all, there to visit the parks, so our room was just a place to lay our heads. However, when the kids wanted to swim, we were happy to sip a tropical drink at the poolside bar while the kids splashed and played just a few feet away.

The moderate category resorts offer more amenities than the value priced ones. These resorts include the Caribbean Beach resort, Coronado Springs resort, and Port Orleans.

These resorts offer themed pools, full service dining areas, whirlpools, and watercraft rentals since most of these resorts are on the various lakes the property has.

I was on a company sponsored award trip and stayed at Coronado Springs. The rooms are more luxurious and roomy than the value ones, but we didn't spend a lot of time in them preferring instead to visit the parks – obviously!

The food offered at this resort was more gourmet, and the pools were more elaborate than the All Star Music, but they were still fun at both places. It was nice to take a walk down the Boardwalk at sunset and enjoy the nightly fireworks from our balcony.

While I have never stayed at a Deluxe resort, it obviously follows that these are the nicest that Disney has to offer. These hotels include Animal Kingdom Lodge, Beach Club Resort, Boardwalk Inn, and the Grand Floridian.

These resorts have elaborately themed pools, world class restaurants, room service, valet parking, whirlpools, concierge service, and a fitness center. They go out of their

way to insure your comfort and satisfaction which can be very important for some people.

There are other options you have on the park grounds as well that you can consider for your Disney vacation. Disney also offers Vacation Club resorts that are basically condos that include the general amenities that Disney offers to all their guests.

These units have multiple rooms, a kitchen or kitchenette, spacious rooms, and valet parking service. This would be a great option for larger families.

Finally, those who like to "rough it" might want to consider the camping facilities on the park grounds. Fort Wilderness offers guests the opportunity to stay in air-conditioned cabins or secluded campsites for tents and RVs.

There is a concierge desk and laundry facilities. They also have miles of hiking trails, horseback riding, and nature trails ready for exploration.

We had friends who rented an RV and drove down to Orlando and stayed at Fort Wilderness. They got to enjoy not only the fun parks at Disney, but it was combined with their other love of camping.

There were 10 of them in total, so they saved money by staying in the RV instead of a hotel and they brought a lot of their own food to cook over their campfire so they saved quite a bit on dining as well.

When you stay at one of the Disney resorts, you get added value as well. The complex has one of the most elaborate transportation systems around. You can hop aboard a luxury bus and arrive at whatever park you want to visit with no worries. The buses run at all hours and as a guest, you can ride them as many times as you want.

You will also get transportation from the airport to your hotel including baggage service. This is a great perk since you won't have to worry about traversing the many roads that lead to the various resorts. They'll take you directly from the airport to your hotel for easy check-in!

The parks open early and stay open later for resort guests. This is an especially great aspect of staying on the grounds because the lines are shorter after hours and you don't have to wait as long to ride your favorite rides.

Of course, these prices don't include getting to Orlando. You'll have to book your own flight or make arrangements to drive or take a train to get there. Because of the airport shuttle service, we highly recommend the airline option instead of driving.

One thing we found when staying at a Disney resort is to purchase a souvenir travel mug first thing after checking in. This mug allows unlimited drink refills during your stay at any theme park and at your resort. This saved us a ton of money on coffee and soda. Unfortunately, the refills didn't include those tropical drinks we had, but it was well worth it anyway!

You can also choose to stay off the property in a close-by town like Kissimmee or in Orlando proper. The advantage to this is you can book an air/hotel package that will probably be less than what you would pay utilizing Disney's resort advantages.

By staying off the property, you can also take in the other sights Orlando has to offer such as Universal Studios and Sea World.

The disadvantage is that you will possibly have to arrange your own transportation to the parks, although some hotels have an agreement with Disney to use their

shuttle buses from their hotels. Check with your hotel regarding shuttle service.

You may also have to purchase your theme park tickets separately. Disney, however, does have many different packages that make it affordable and you can pick and choose the parks you visit. If you're not especially interested in seeing the Animal Kingdom, you don't have to purchase that entrance ticket.

We do have some general money-saving tips when taking a Disney vacation.

Most of the parks will allow you to bring in small coolers. Bring in your own bottled water or soft drinks or pack a light lunch to avoid the high prices at the restaurants. You can also bring a backpack with you which is a good way to bring in your own snacks to keep the little ones from screaming for French fries or cotton candy which come at a premium price.

We do, however, highly recommend having one meal at a sit-down restaurant inside the park. The prices might be a bit steep, but the portions are generous and you'll get a much needed rest while you enjoy good food. Eat at off-peak times to avoid long waits and enjoy great service.

We had one meal at a drive-in style restaurant inside MGM Studios. I ordered a chicken Caesar salad and couldn't even come close to finishing it. My daughter had chicken fingers and fries which she snacked on for the rest of the day. Plus it was great fun having our meal inside a car while watching an old movie on the huge movie screen.

If you have little ones who love the Disney characters, schedule a character meal to thrill them. Do this first, though, because space is limited and they fill up fast. Don't balk at the price – the look on your little one's face will be well worth the money spent.

You will, of course, want to have souvenirs to remember your time at Disney. In the park, these can be quite pricey. A great money-saving tip is to look for outlet stores in Orlando. They sell official Disney merchandise at huge discounts.

Above all, HAVE FUN! You're on vacation in the happiest place on Earth. Enjoy yourself and your family along with everything that Disney has to offer!

Now let's look at another vacation option for families – cruises!

CRUISE THE OPEN SEAS

Cruise ships are a family vacation planner's best friends. Picture a floating, mega-resort with tons to do for everyone in a confined space where you know your kids are supervised and safe.

Many cruise lines offer voyages designed specifically for families, with expanded activity programs and shore excursions for all age groups and waterslides, ice rinks and climbing walls that keep kids and parents happy for days.

Some cruises have even developed onboard programs that not only feature family together time, but also arrange crucial alone time for parents. Together, parents and kids can participate in mock game shows, story hours, treasure hunts and other activities. Later, adults can schedule a massage or spend time on the sun deck knowing their kids are enjoying a host of supervised games and activities.

Cruises are much like an all-inclusive vacation with the added benefit of being able to explore new and various

places. They are especially good bets if the grandparents are coming.

There are morning-till-night activities for children as young as three on most major cruise ships and plenty to keep adults busy, no matter what their ages. And, because of increased competition in the industry, cruising has never been more affordable.

Even Disney has jumped into the cruise market which can be an especially fun time with your kids!

As for cruises, experts say to "never, ever" go the cruise lines or "general" travel agencies. If you're going with a travel agent, you want to book with a cruise expert, one that specializes in discounting cruises.

These companies get special discounts and upgrades for selling such a large volume of cruises that other sources simply don't get. But even then shop around before you book, as prices will vary from agency to agency.

If you're going it on your own, use the Internet as your most valuable tool. Many cruise ships offer kids free programs with the purchase of an adult ticket. You'll need to look around and above all – ask for discounts!

The two most popular family cruise ships we've found are Disney and Carnival. Kids will love Disney's private island – Castaway Cay – and the waterslides aboard Carnival ships will be a big hit!

Both ships offer plenty to do for adults as well including spa services, adult nightclubs, and entertainment for adults. Disney, of course, gears a lot of its activities toward children and teens with special shows, on board discovery activities and special teen nightclubs – no alcohol allowed!

It will depend on when you book your cruise as to what type of savings you can realize.

Disney will publish "Magical Rates" on its "Specials" page on their website. With these special rates, you may be able to find a 3 day Bahamas cruise for \$469 or a 7 night Caribbean cruise for \$859. Children 3-12 get special rates in a room with two parents and kids under 3 are free!

When you will be putting out most of your vacation budget buying entry onto the ship, you'll want to know how to save money once on board as well as during the visits to the ports of call.

First and foremost, purchase a soda package for the kids. This allows them unlimited soda refills anywhere on the ship – a huge money saver!

When on shore, you'll want to see as much as you can. Instead of booking excursions through the cruise line, rent your own vehicle and explore on your own. Maps of the ports of call are readily available and this allows you maximum flexibility with what you want to see and do.

A note of caution here, be sure to take note of the departure time of your ship and don't be late! If you're on your own and don't make it back to the ship when it pulls out of port, meeting back up with them at the next port of call will be at your own expense.

On board, they'll be taking lots and lots of pictures of you and your family. You'll be tempted to buy these right away, but don't. Those pictures will still be in the photo shop at the end of the cruise and they will often be discounted then, so buy right before you dock on the last day.

The same goes for souvenirs and such. Often, the gift shops will discount souvenir merchandise the last day of the cruise. The same T-shirt that sold for \$25 at the beginning

of the cruise might be \$10 at the end, so bide your time and realize savings.

Check your account balance daily to be sure there are no charges on there that you didn't make. Also, don't pre-pay your tips. Many cruise lines have this built into the package price, but ask to have it removed then take care of tipping yourself.

Cruising with your family can be a very satisfying experience. However, there are many other family vacation options to look at as well.

LET'S GO TO VEGAS!

Las Vegas isn't just for grown-ups anymore! The city is becoming increasingly family friendly and you can take advantage of the typically low-priced rates for a great family Vegas vacation.

It's no longer considered "Sin City" when you see the various kid-friendly attractions like the roller coaster atop New York, New York, or the theme park inside Circus Circus. There are arcades just about everywhere and special shows geared toward the family audience.

The best part is that many of the attractions that kids love are free! You can see the Pirate show outside Treasure Island, view the amazing light show on Fremont Street, or watch the volcano "explode" outside the Mirage at sundown.

Meals are cheap everywhere in Vegas. We once had a complete prime rib dinner including potato, vegetable, and salad bar for a mere \$2.99 at a small casino across from the Stardust. It was delicious and filling. The various buffets

have anything and everything you could ever want to satisfy a picky eater – all at a low price anyone can afford.

Vegas is designed to be inexpensive in the hopes that tourists will spend most of their money in the casinos. This is where you can splurge a little and hold back when you're getting a little short on funds. After all, you're in Vegas – you have to pull at least one slot machine's arm.

Depending on when you book, you can get an air/hotel package for as little as \$200 per person round trip! In many places, kids get a discounted room rate, and if you want your older children to have their own room, many hotels will let you have that at half price.

Once in Vegas, consider renting a car and going on an exploration of the area. You can take in The Hoover Dam, check out the Grand Canyon or take in the Richard Petty ride-along racing experience. There's so much to do in and around Vegas, you'll never be bored!

How about some less-traditional vacation spots?

HISTORY TOUR

While your kids might roll their eyes at the suggestion of a family trip based on history, they might be surprised once you get there. They're probably thinking they'll be tested at the end of the vacation, but we're betting that what they learn will stay with them for a very long time!

Most of the initial settlements for our country are on the East Coast. Head east and learn more about America than you ever knew you could!

Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown are absorbing year-round, as historic interpreters dressed in

period costumes help thoroughly modern families appreciate what life was like without TVs, computers, or indoor plumbing. In eighteenth-century Williamsburg, you'll find the largest outdoor living history museum.

The kids can help weed the garden in spring, make bricks in summer, or attend a slave couple's wedding in winter. Visit in summer and you can also go to Busch Gardens Williamsburg and Water Country USA.

A trip to Washington, DC, will give you The Smithsonian Institute which is interesting for all ages. Plus, you can see the White House, Congress, and so much more!

One of our favorite historical places to visit is Boston, Massachusetts. This beautiful city is absolutely filled with historical significance. When you take the blue trolley tour, you learn so much about the city and everything that occurred there in the history of America.

You can see the grave of Mother Goose and stand in front of the North church where Paul Revere saw the lanterns signaling the coming of the British. John F. Kennedy's first apartment is along the tour as is the "Cheers" bar that spawned the award-winning TV series.

Boston Common offers tourists the opportunity to ride the lake in their famous swan boats, and Faneuil Hall Market Place is a spectacular place offering not only great food and shopping, but entertaining street performers and musicians.

One of our most respected presidents was Abraham Lincoln. Springfield, Illinois, offers the most comprehensive and interesting museum based on his life and historical significance.

Visitors can tour his home, visit his tomb, and learn everything you never knew about this amazing man.

Just 30 miles down the road near Petersburg, Illinois, is New Salem – an early settlement where Lincoln lived and worked. There is one cabin that has been there since the 1800's and has been carefully preserved to give visitors a taste of what life was like in the early years of America.

These are only a few places where you can go to find interesting, historic exhibits that your whole family can enjoy.

SOUTH DAKOTA

This amazing state has so much to offer in the way of family vacations. On a visit to the Badlands of South Dakota, the kids can count all of the different license plates in the parking lot of Mount Rushmore, which just celebrated its 60th anniversary.

You can explore caves, pick up rocks blasted from the mountain where the colossal statue of Chief Crazy Horse is a work in progress, join a "dig" at the Mammoth Site where more than 50 giant mammoths were trapped more than 26,000 years ago, and take a Jeep tour through a buffalo herd.

You can stay at Custer State Park, where besides seeing the buffalo, you can rent an old-fashioned cabin on a lake starting at under \$100 a night, go gold-panning, or make animal tracks with the kids at hands-on junior naturalist programs.

DUDE RANCHES

This type of family vacation is perfect for city dwellers to get out and experience real country life. Fully operational dude ranches are everywhere throughout the United States and can offer up a very memorable family vacation.

Imagine yourself taking the best vacation of your life at a dude ranch. The cool, fresh mountain air, the open spaces, the feel of a steady horse beneath you as you top the next rise... the flash of color from the dark pool as the monster trout rises to your offering...luxuriating in the warmth of the setting sun as you wait for the dinner bell's call ... shared time with family and friends.

Most of these ranches are located in the Western United States, but a little homework can find them almost everywhere.

Riding horses is the main focus of a dude ranch vacation, but accommodations can range from simple to luxurious. You can perform the job of a cowboy at a working dude ranch or choose a resort style ranch to take advantage of other activities like tennis and swimming.

Eat authentic cowboy style meals and sing cowboy songs around the campfire. In some places, you can even spend a night sleeping under the stars!

Most of these dude ranch vacations are all-inclusive meaning meals and activities are in the price of reservation. A family of four can usually have this type of vacation for under \$1,000 although prices will vary according to the location.

Do your research online and choose a spot that your family will love!

CAMPING

Thousands of people know and embrace the amazing relaxation and fun you can have on a camping vacation. This is probably the most affordable type of family vacation – especially if you take advantage of the country's various state parks and campgrounds.

It costs around \$12-\$25 to spend a night at these campgrounds, which is much less than the cost of a motel room these days. The parks are typically run by park rangers, who also provide security at the campgrounds.

Each campsite will likely have a fire-pit, charcoal grill, and a picnic table. There will be an area to set up your tent and a place to pull your car off the road. These parks usually have buildings that enclose bathrooms and showers. You'll also find drinking water available, places to do your dishes, and trash containers.

You can choose to camp the old-fashioned way with tents, or you can rent an RV for added convenience. A typical RV motor home will rent for \$90-\$200 per day.

Some people feel that camping with an RV isn't truly camping, but we think the point of a vacation is to spend time together doing things as a family. Whether you sleep under the stars or in a bed inside an RV makes little difference. A camping vacation is all about what you make it!

Most public parks have hiking trails, and many parks have lakes for fishing, boating, and swimming. Imagine the sight of your kids seeing a deer cross the path or a raccoon snooping through the campsite at night. There may also be a playground with swings, basketball courts, and other amenities.

Also remember to bring along bikes, balls and gloves, board games, Frisbees, or any other favorite game or toy. There will be plenty of opportunities for the family to play together.

Many state parks and other public parks offer nature programs for the kids, and some even show outside movies on weekends. Since most of these parks are located in remote areas away from city lights, they make great places to watch sunsets and to gaze at the stars at night.

If you don't have any experience camping and are without camping gear, that's alright! You can generally get everything you need for tent camping for under \$600. What will you need?

- For a family of 4, you should have a tent that sleeps 6. You'll appreciate the extra room that a 6-person tent provides.
- Next you'll need sleeping bags. Since you're probably not camping in cold weather, consider a 3-season bag. These are still rated for 30 to 40 degree weather, and if they get too warm at night just unzip the zipper. Mom and Dad might like the coziness of sleeping bags that zip together.
- For added comfort and insulation from the cold ground, you might consider putting a pad under your sleeping bag.
- Your campsite will likely have a charcoal grill, which is great for some cooking, but dishes that require a pot or skillet won't get all black if you have a propane camp stove. You can find a 2-burner propane stove for around \$35-\$80. The propane cylinders are \$2-\$3 dollars and will probably last a week.
- To keep drinks cold and food from perishing, you'll need a cooler. Pick a cooler large enough to accommodate your needs

Other items to take camping can be found at home or bought at the grocery store: pots and pans, cups and glasses, silverware, pillows, flashlights, extra batteries, and food.

You may want to buy a cheap tarp for around \$10 to place under your tent. This will help protect your tent floor against tears and to prevent water from seeping into the tent in case of rain.

Don't bother with a lantern, because they get hot and attract bugs. Instead, buy a 9-volt battery lamp for around \$10 and use it sparingly so that you can enjoy the night sky.

Here's a little shopping tip: rather than shop online for your gear, save even more money by going to a local Wal-Mart or Target store. They have everything you need at the lowest prices.

Figure \$600 for a one-time cost to buy new gear, \$200 or less for campground fees for a week, and \$200 for food, gas, and ice, and you've got a great vacation for a family of four.

Once you've acquired your gear, each subsequent camping trip will be even cheaper. You'll add to your gear from time to time, and some items need replenishing. For economical and adventurous vacations, take your family camping.

We've found a couple of places online that just keep popping up when talking about affordable family vacations. While we don't necessarily endorse them ourselves, they seem to be top picks when it comes to enjoyable family travel.

THREE WELL-KEPT SECRETS

Many of the award winning family resorts are beyond the means of those on a budget, but Woodloch Pines Resort in Hawley, Pennsylvania offers the amenities of a luxury resort for under \$350 per night.

Located on a private lake in the Northern Pocono Mountains of Northeastern Pennsylvania, this family owned resort was voted Favorite Family Vacation Spot by the readers of Better Homes and Gardens. Open year-round, the resort offers an amazing feast of activities from waterskiing, sail boating, and bumper boats in summer to snow tubing, ice skating and snowmobiling in the winter.

Kids of all ages love the go carts, batting cages, pool water slide and hayrides. Parents enjoy the Jacuzzis, massages for themselves and the all-inclusive rates that are difficult to find at US resorts. Prices vary depending on room selection, time of year and number of people, but a family of four can purchase a four-night package that includes room and 12 meals for under \$350 per night.

The family-friendly, all-inclusive pricing draws hundreds of families south of the border to Mexico each year. But families don't have to leave the country to find all-inclusive deals. Tyler Place Family Resort on Lake Champlain in Vermont also offers this pricing that includes meals, snacks, lodging, and most activities.

Tyler Place's eight different kid's programs offer structured nature and outdoor programs for children of all ages. Family water activities include sailing, canoeing, kayaking, waterskiing, paddleboats, bumper tube rides, banana boats, and lots more.

Other entertainment includes tennis, mountain biking, indoor and outdoor pools, and group sports. Newborn and

infant care is provided for parents who want to take art, yoga and aerobics classes, or visit vineyards in Quebec.

Discount, off-peak rates for a family of four are just under \$300 per night and include lodging with separate children's rooms, all meals and access to services and activities.

Some of America's original family resorts focused on simple accommodations that provided easy access to the great outdoors. Nitschke's Northern Resort, in Minocqua, Wisconsin has carried on the fine example of the original resort, with its tidy accommodations, coupled with the pristine setting on the edge of a lake, surrounded by forest.

Activities include fishing, hiking, boating, jet skiing, or simply relaxing on the porch of your cabin. The beach and playground provide additional play opportunities for children. Ice fishing and snowmobiling trails provide winter entertainment options. Despite the secluded, natural setting of this family resort, the town is within boating, walking, and driving distance when you need groceries or a change of scenery.

Cabins accommodate up to eight people easily and rates start at an amazingly affordable \$180 per night.

MEXICAN BEACHES

All-inclusive resorts abound in Mexico and if your family is looking for a beautiful setting to experience a new culture, Mexico could be for you!

All-inclusive resorts are always a hit because everyone can do what they want, when they want, and there are

plenty of organized activities for the kids as well as other children for yours to pal around with.

Usually you can get bargain rates throughout the Caribbean until mid-December and then again from just after Easter all the way to Thanksgiving and beyond. A trip to Mexico can really be a bargain and will give the kids a chance to practice their Spanish!

There is just so much to do on a Mexican vacation. Not only can you tour the Mayan ruins in Cancun, you can take advantage of the beautiful beaches, go snorkeling or scuba diving, or just relax by the pool.

At many of these resorts, kids age 4-12 stay free with their parents. Your hotel may also offer free passes to some of the local attractions as a perk for staying at their resort. Several places have "kid's clubs" with activities and entertainment geared to the younger visitors. These are great places for kids to have fun while Mom and Dad relax.

These all-inclusive vary in rate according to when you travel. They can often be found for as little as \$600 per person including airfare. Just shop around and find the best deal you can!

Vacation doesn't have to be tropical or exotic to be fun. Go out west and explore!

ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Many parents are familiar with the family-oriented mission of the YMCA programs. Located in urban areas internationally, this kid friendly organization offers many educational, sports, and social opportunities. The YMCA of

the Rockies, Colorado also operates two budget vacation resorts that help families get out and enjoy the legendary beauty of the Rocky Mountains.

Snow Mountain Ranch and Estes Park Center are nondenominational programs open to any guest. However, members receive a slight rate discount and have their reservations processed first.

In addition to opportunities to enjoy the mountains, summer children's programs operate daily for ages three through 16. Age appropriate activities include hiking, hayrides, roller skating arts and crafts, campfire cooking, orienteering and archery.

In winter, families can spend the day cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on 125 miles of groomed trails, and return to the resort to warm up in the indoor pool. Estes Park and other prominent winter activity destinations are nearby.

Lodging options include cabins and lodge rooms. Cabins range from two to five bedrooms and include a fireplace and fully equipped kitchen. Rates begin at \$138/night. Lodge rooms have two queen beds and a set of bunk beds. Rates begin at \$64 during off-peak times. Accommodations are not luxurious but then you are on a budget, right?

The YMCA also offers many opportunities for family camps if you want to recreate the magic of scout camp with your loved ones. Many of these camps offer the traditional horseback riding and canoeing, but today, they're adding modern activities as well. It's not unusual to find rock walls for climbing and rappelling excursions.

You can stay in modest cabins or platform tents at a bargain rate – as low as \$50 per night!

Have you always wanted to go to Europe but thought it was out of the realm of possibility when it came to your pocketbook? That's not necessarily true!

EUROPE ON A SHOESTRING

In Europe, London is a top pick for affordable vacation destinations, for these exact reasons. Not only do you have more flights to choose from, they are cheaper than if you flew to a more remote location.

On average, staying in London may be a bit more expensive than other European destinations, but the seemingly endless choices in hotels, restaurants, transportation, tours, and other travel essentials gives travelers opportunities to mold their vacation to fit their budgets. And you can use London as your home base to set out on day trips to other more exotic locations or buy a Eurorail pass and see those more remote countries without the expense of flying there.

A note about Eurorail passes needs to be made here. You cannot buy a Euroail pass in Europe. These types of passes must be purchased outside of Europe. Also you must purchase it before your trip, and have it validated at a train station in Europe before boarding a train in your selected European destination.

You can purchase different types of Eurorail passes depending on how and where you'll be using it. Prices vary according to the type of pass you buy. These can seem expensive at first glance, but they can be well worth the money when you consider the places you can go armed with this small card.

The greatest part about a European vacation is that the American dollar has massive spending power abroad. With the exchange rate, you can expect to get more bang for your buck when spending overseas.

For lodging, you should look at staying in hostels which are abundant in Europe. It's best to make reservations so you don't have to worry where you'll be sleeping for any given night.

In general, hostels are quite inexpensive – in many places, you can expect to stay for under \$20 a night. In a hostel you will have a bed, shared bathroom, and sometimes breakfast. Remember that you are going to Europe for the sites and people, not the hotel rooms.

Traveling abroad is, of course, going to be more expensive than a trip to Disney World, but the experience will be well worth the money spent. If you've budgeted enough money, you can have an amazing time with memories that will last forever!

These are only a few of the possible places that you can take your family for vacation. There are endless options for you if you think creatively and plan accordingly. What else should you know about taking a family vacation on a budget? Plenty!

GENERAL TIPS

No matter where you go on your vacation, there are tons of other money saving tips that you must know. And we're here to tell you about them!

First, go to www.entertainment.com and buy The Entertainment Book. They are discounted at this website

only. This valuable book can offer you significant savings on hotels, meals, admission to attractions, and travel.

These books usually retail for \$25 to \$45 per book, and can deliver as much as \$10,000 in vacation savings. Books are available for over 150 major metropolitan areas. They are even great to use in your hometown area if one is available.

Be sure to join travel clubs like AAA and online travel clubs. They can be huge sources of savings not only when talking about vacation, but also year-round. Make sure you're using these memberships to their fullest potential. You're paying for the privilege of being a member, take advantage of all they have to offer.

Stay alert to the little things that siphon off money. It really adds up. If you have to pay for parking, look for parking a few blocks away and get some extra exercise.

If you are tempted to buy souvenirs, just stay out of the shops! If that seems too severe, give yourself a small budget and stick with it.

Take food into parks and attractions so you aren't tempted to spend the exorbitant rates charged at concession stands. If you are a more mature person, always ask if senior discounts are available.

Keep a journal of expenses on each trip. This gives you an idea how much to budget for future vacations. Keep a record of the money you save as well. You'll discover that it will inspire you to find more ways to save. Create a special fund to deposit the extra savings and use it toward something you've been wishing for – this will provide you with additional incentive.

Set your itinerary. Agreeing on an itinerary is important because adults and children have different ideas of "fun." Adults may want to do things that they can't do at home like drive through the mountains, visit historical sights, go horseback riding, etc.

Children basically want to do what they can do at home: watch TV, visit a man-made attraction like Six Flags, or swim in the hotel pool. You've got to compromise. If they agree to give you a day in the mountains, reciprocate with them by taking them to the run-of-the-mill theme park that seems like a waste of time to you, but heaven to them! After all, vacations are for the whole family.

As we've said time and time again, be flexible. Not every one of your days has to be planned. This can be risky, but sometimes the memories are worth it. You may happen upon a music festival that wasn't in the brochures and be able to share your love of 80's music with your children even if they are rolling their eyes the whole time!

If you are driving to your vacation destination, it's a great idea to stay in one place for a majority of the time.

Admittedly, this is from Dad's perspective because he is the one who packs the trunk.

For at least part of your vacation, pick a place (like a family camp or the beach) where you are not packing and unpacking the car every day. Having five kids and your spouse packing and pointing toward a scheduled departure time begins to take on aspects of a cattle drive. Staying in one place allows you to relax for awhile.

Since prices usually are 30 to 50 percent less in off-peak times, you may need to take school-age children out of school to realize your vacation dreams. This isn't as big of a

deal as it used to be, so save the guilt and focus on the rewards.

As soon as you have your trip tentatively scheduled, inform the teacher. Ask for the work ahead of time and suggestions of how your children can share the experience with their classmates. Perhaps they can give an oral report when they return or present a photo journal. This is a great way to keep your child interested in the trip and let them get the maximum value out of what you've planned so hard to make a reality.

Set aside "homework time" every day so they don't fall behind, and bring some goodies back to share with the class from the region you're visiting. The teacher will appreciate it and the kids will be excited to have one of their classmates share the experiences they got to have first-hand!

Because you want to save as much money as you can without sacrificing fun or memorable experiences, you need to do research and shop around. What's the best way to do this? Online, of course!

THE INTERNET IS YOUR BEST FRIEND

In this electronic age, the worldwide web is an invaluable tool for you to use in saving money over all types of arenas. When planning your vacation, it can be your best friend!

You can do much more than just book an airline flight or find a cheap hotel. You can check into sights to see at your destination, find alternative vacation spots, and garner

the experiences of people who've been there and done that when it comes to traveling.

There are plenty of Websites that cater specifically to family travel and offer advice, tips, and articles on destinations. Many include chats and comments from travelers, many whom are looking for the same things you are and can offer valuable recommendations.

Of course, you also have to consider the auction websites as a perk of the Internet as well. Price Line is one of them, but you can find vacation deals on e-bay as well. However, if you buy off of e-bay, make sure you are buying from a reputable seller who offers guarantees on their products.

Check out some of the following websites for stellar tips, amazing deals, and guidance towards the best vacations ever!

www.familytravelnetwork.com

www.familytravelforum.com

www.familytraveltimes.com

www.family.com

www.budgettravelonline.com

All of these sites provide testimonials and suggestions from members as well as places where you can go to find the best deals on family vacation travel.

Many offer membership into their travel clubs that allow you to share in savings other members have found that they want to share. Membership is free and well worth the time and possible spam e-mail that might come from joining.

Be wary, however, of those pop-up sites that offer you the world for simply providing them with your e-mail address. If you didn't type the address in your search bar, don't click on their offer!

CONCLUSION

Taking a family vacation on a budget isn't out of reach for the savvy person who wants to do their research and find the best deals out there.

At the heart of every good vacation is knowing that you're getting what you've paid for. Somehow sipping a piña colada on a lounge chair while your kids frolic in the pool feels that much more relaxing--and sweeter--knowing you've gotten a deal.

Whether you want to admit it or not, money is a big part of your vacation experience. Feeling like you're being nickel and dimed to death puts a dent in your wallet and your fun. There's nothing worse than waking up in an expensive resort room feeling like you'd rather be home.

Simple planning and forethought are all that's needed for a good experience. A great family vacation depends on the family and what their needs are. But most families will agree that a perfect vacation needs to be relaxing and fun with something for everyone.

There is a seemingly endless list of resorts in the United States that fit this description. But for many parents, there is one more essential aspect of the perfect family vacation. It needs to be affordable.

Again, the term affordable is a relative concept, but for many families, a resort that costs more than \$350 per night takes the fun out of the vacation. Parents on a budget are too busy worrying about how they will fund the trip and are unable to relax and enjoy themselves.

On the other end, limited funds means that a more expensive resort results in less money to spend on tours, attractions, and food. Many families end up staying in cheap hotels with no kid-friendly amenities rather than spend all their vacation money on lodging.

By searching for discount resorts or obtaining the services of a knowledgeable travel consolidator, it is possible to find many affordable family resorts across the US that won't blow your budget.

The goal is simple – make everyone happy with an unforgettable trip to the perfect destination. Achieving that goal can be daunting, especially when all the travel planning falls on you. But it is obtainable, as long as you know what your family enjoys and what travel options you have at your disposal. In the end, seeing your children's faces light up makes it all worth the effort.

In these uncertain economic times, being savvy about how you spend your vacation dollars is more important than ever. Though price is certainly important in planning your family trip, don't forget the most important factor: fun!

You want to go somewhere that everyone will delight in. And if you're dealing with young children, you need to be sure there's enough "downtime" as well. Because, in the end, all the money in the world can't make your kids happy. And if they aren't enjoying themselves, you won't either.

Family vacations can become more about tradition than where you go, so keep this in the forefront of your mind. If your kids know that every June you are going to go somewhere as a family, they are going to enjoy the experiences even more.

Don't get overly caught up in worrying about money. Set your budget, stick to it, and have fun. Everyone can have a memorable family vacation no matter how much money you have to spend. It takes research, planning, and the desire to make more family memories than you already have!

HAPPY TRAVELS!