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Family Frontiers

Traveling with Seniors

By Renee Sklarew

During the days, different groups selected different excursions. For example, while docked in Naples, one group climbed Mount Vesuvius, while the other toured Capri. They had many choices, including a well-run kids program for their grandchild. Warmly recalling this elaborate trip, Kusum Singh, 59, explained why they travel as a family whenever possible. "At home our children are so busy in their world. On vacation, everyone is interacting together, doing fun things. There is very good communication. You come with a free mind and are able to fully concentrate on each other." Singh added, "There is so much pleasure being with your grandchildren. You have more patience with them and not so many responsibilities now, the way you did when you were younger and struggling."



The Singh family makes a point of regularly planning trips together. "I love it!" exclaimed Nirankar Singh. "I am more in the mood to do fun things with youngsters; do what they are doing. It is the biggest joy seeing my grandson, my sons and daughter-in-law enjoying one another."



The Singhs. Courtesy of Navin Singh MD

Singh explained that when she and her husband first came to America, they had no money or time to travel while they grew their business. Now they are making up for it. The Singhs' son, Navin Singh, a doctor and owner of a cosmetic surgery center, agreed.

"By spending time with the younger generation, the family has gotten more adventurous. They have gone parasailing, kayaking and paddle-boating. The grandparents are living vicariously with the grandchild."

Tips and Trends for the Traveling Senior

GrandTravel Paves the Way for Togetherness

Helena Koenig, 77, feels strongly about spending leisure time with her family, and she recognized the learning opportunities for grandparents traveling with their grandchildren. Koenig founded a touring company in 1987, calling it Grandtravel. It was one of the first travel agencies to serve this match.

Koenig, who teaches at Northern Virginia Community College, started the company 20 years ago when she

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became a grandmother. She said that traveling with grandchildren allows grandparents to “transmit their cultural inheritance to their grandchildren.”

“Travel is our best hope for a peaceful world and the chance to learn that we are all different, but the same,” Koenig said.

Grandtravel’s website, www.grandtrvl.com, lists several dream vacations exclusively for grandparents and grandchildren. Grandtravel is based in Washington, D.C. and uniquely offers trips only during school holidays. Like many tour companies, it sponsors international trips to the Galapagos Islands and Africa, but for seniors and children only.

“No parents are allowed. Currently, the most popular trips are to Alaska and Italy, but many choose to go where the family is from, like Ireland,” Koenig said.

For more budget-conscious trips, investigate the non-profit Elderhostel system, which welcomes seniors toting their grandchildren along. Elderhostel lists dozens of imaginative grandparent/grandchild touring opportunities throughout the United States and abroad. On these adventurous mini-vacations, generations explore various topics, such as zoology, religious heritage, geology and Native American culture. After researching Elderhostel programs, lifelong learners may eagerly recruit their grandkids to join them.

Hot Trend in Travel: Intergenerational Trips

One of the hottest trends in the tourism business is the intergenerational excursion. Intergenerational refers to events involving or affecting people of two or more generations. Although Grandtravel markets to the grandparents and children only, most of the travel industry recognizes the value in marketing to families.

The tour business recognizes different generations of families want to travel together, so they are learning to cater to those customers. Cruises designed to please all ages are multiplying. Families on the road, seeking comfortable accommodations, choose hotels such as Marriott’s Residence Inn. These hotels offer a variety of sleeping arrangements and kitchen facilities. Tour companies like Smithsonian Journeys, college alumni groups and Tauck Bridges dedicate divisions to family travel. The Cruise Line Industry research shows currently, only one in four passengers is a retiree.

Generations Touring Co. encourages families to bring travelers of all ages, especially adults traveling with the elderly who are still physically able. Currently, Generations Touring Co. features a “Kintrip” and “Volun-Tour” programs. Young travelers and their chaperones will discover excellent advice from the Kid’s Travel postings at www.GenerationsTouringCompany.com.

Inclusive resorts at dude ranches, Caribbean islands or ski lodges offer optimal situations for families with a variety of interests and needs. While relaxing in one location for several days, tourists enjoy a variety of activities; usually kids clubs, evening entertainment and even fitness or spa programs for boredom-prone teens. Generations gather for meals or sightseeing. Often, there are babysitting services for adult evenings out.

A visit to the Internet uncovers dozens of family vacation ideas. AARP Passport is great resource for travel advice. Environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, design outings in nature’s most beautiful locations. Upscale trips, like Rascals In Paradise feature exotic locales like Fiji and Peru for families who love scuba diving. Ponder the Family Hostel programs, like their 10-day learning tour of Europe. Consider a family fishing expedition in the Chesapeake Bay or Florida. For details, check out www.takemefishing.org. Think of something you love to do, and chances are there are tourist services ready to help you plan it.

Safeguarding Your Vacation

Many experienced travelers subscribe to AAA to receive travel information and discounts. AAA has comprehensive services ranging from planning a vacation for the family to helping with travel insurance. When planning for expensive vacations, it makes sense to pay for travel insurance. Between unexpected illness and surprise scheduling conflicts, travel insurance can save you thousands after you’ve paid up front to reserve your accommodations.

Make it a Magical Gathering

A perennial favorite for grandparents with children (and parents, too) are the Disney Parks. Disney resorts attempt to please discriminating travelers, and they cater to kids better than any locale.

Younger children, who aren’t ready for long hikes or city traffic, will find all the stimulation they need. Disney is mindful of people with disabilities, and the Parks are designed to accommodate strollers. Their website advertises a “Magical Gathering” program for family reunions. To avoid the inevitable crowds, Disney Cruises are another option for multiple generations; you still meet the characters, see the shows and enjoy that Disney hospitality. The cruises are growing in popularity, as they voyage to the Mediterranean, Caribbean and Mexican Riviera. Now Disney has expanded into touring; www.adventuredisney.com has destinations throughout the world.

Close to Home but Worlds Away

For driving distance vacations, luxury resorts such as Nemaacolin Woodlands in Pennsylvania, the Homestead in Virginia, and Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia are geared toward accommodating everyone, from golfers to toddlers. All three resorts furnish families’ time to play together in warm pools, dine in a variety of restaurants and explore new hobbies. These upscale village hotels offer children’s clubs and baby-sitting. They have specialty activities; like Nemaacolin’s cooking classes, horseback riding, rope climbing and seasonal sports. The Homestead boasts “learning made fun” with literary courses and biology studies, or for less intellectual pursuits, bowling and ice skating. The Greenbrier features a “creative curriculum” that includes entertainment like puppet shows and carriage rides.

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Spirited families might enjoy traveling in a recreational vehicle, offering freedom to stop whenever and wherever they want. They always have a place to sleep and cook. RV rentals range in cost and rental time. Another guaranteed hit for families are the local beach towns. Gatherings are simple to organize in the DelMarva Peninsula or the Outer Banks. Just rent a house, or ask for a group rate at a motel, and voila, you have a family getaway full of sun, fun and multiple bathrooms!

Finding a Bargain

The USA Today website publishes the top five bargain destinations like Whistler, Canada or Philadelphia and observes that baby boomers receive less discounting today than in the past.

Many Colorado ski resorts elevated the "70s ski free" policy to 80 years old. The best bargains are off-season travel, and most retirees have that option. School-age children may be unable to accompany them, but younger children and graduates can often join in anytime.

Kevin Geiger, 21, of Reston, enjoyed traveling to Alaska with his parents and grandparents a few years ago. "My twin brother and I were teenagers. It was tremendous fun. I love being with my grandparents, and my grandfather is like a second father to me. Having them around gave me an out. I could ask them anything." Grandparents are known to indulge grandkids.

Wherever you plan to go, make sure you prepare yourself and the children. Research and explain to your family what to expect. Read about your destination or search the Internet. Putting a camera in hand quiets the most active child. Make sure you're carrying the needed items, such as water, snacks, books, and pencil and paper for restaurant waits. Fortunately, grandchildren usually behave better with you than their own parents.

Sharp as a Tack

New Ways to Boost Your Brainpower

By Apryl Chapman Thomas

Do you make up your own words to favorite songs? While others may laugh at your inventions, you are actually helping yourself. According to Philadelphia-based creativity and innovation coach, Jen Groover, this simple technique can boost your brainpower by challenging your brain to think of new words, and thus help you improve your memory.

"Your brain is a muscle, and like other muscles, it is important for it to get exercise," said Groover. "If you do things the same way all the time, your brain will go on autopilot. To stay sharp, you should constantly [challenge] this muscle to expand and grow."

The good news is that it is never too late to sharpen your memory as you age. Nancy D. O'Reilly, clinical psychologist and author of "You Can't Scare Me: Courageous Women Speak About Growing Older in a Youth Oriented Society," offers some activities on how to improve your memory and keep your brain active.

Be Creative

O'Reilly recommended picking up paintbrushes or visiting an art museum. "With art, you can use all of your senses to help increase and improve your memory."

Traveling is also perfect for stimulating your memory. O'Reilly stressed that the key is to expose yourself to new experiences, which in turn, can enhance your memory.

Think Positive

A positive attitude can go a long way, according O'Reilly.

"Make it one of your daily goals to build on and improve your memory. Write it down on your 'to do' list. Learn to focus, attend, remember and repeat. After all, practice makes perfect."

Exercise Your Cranium

In addition to card games, she suggested learning new words and meanings. "Not only will you wow yourself, but you'll wow friends and family with your vocabulary."

Good Nutrition Through the Ages

By Apryl Chapman Thomas

As your body changes, so do your nutritional needs. What you consumed when you were younger might not be appropriate for your diet now. According to Elizabeth Somer, M.A., R.D. and author of several books including "Age-Proof Your Body," after 50, your metabolism slows down, so it is important to back up on calories.

"To live long and healthy, focus on real foods, not processed foods that are high in calories, salt and sugar," she offered. "Keep the foods close to their natural state as possible."

If you haven't been eating as healthy as you should, you can make changes to your diet with the following steps.

Know

Your Fats When it comes to nutrition, not all fats are created equal. While the phrase "good fats" reads like an oxymoron, these fats are healthy for you. You just have to learn the difference.

"Get saturated fats out of your diet," Somer urged. Aim for the healthy fats, such as fish oil and omega-3, which studies have shown can lower the risk of heart disease, lessen the risk of depression and memory loss, and may reduce risk for arthritis.

She recommends eating at least two to three servings of fatty fish, such as salmon, weekly.

"You can also look for products that have DHA, which is a potent omega-3 fat that is found in soy milk. Other omega-3 rich foods include flaxseeds and walnuts," Somer added.

Add Color to Your Plate

Somer tells her clients that they should consume two fruits and vegetables at every meal.

"Think mangoes, kiwis, carrots, broccoli and berries," she said. "The darker the color pigment, the better. Research is starting to show that people who eat more of the darker colored fruits and vegetables have the lowest risk for aging disease. They also maintain a more desirable weight and think more clearly."

Go for Whole Grain

Don't be fooled by 100-percent whole wheat bread, commented Somer. "It's just white bread dressed up. Make sure the bread reads 100-percent whole grain."

Somer said that whole grains have shown to lower risk of weight gain and diabetes. Other good sources of whole grains include oatmeal and instant brown rice.

Be Lean with the Meat

You don't have to give up meat, she said. Instead, make it more of a condiment than the focus of the dish.

"Switch to a bean dish, using black beans or lentils. Beans can help lower risk for heart disease."

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