

How to Keep Your Sanity During a Summer Vacation

Vacation is supposed to be a time when we get to unplug, relax and clear our minds. But unfortunately getting away can often add extra stress to our lives, which is a detriment not only to our much-needed time off, but can compound into other health issues. Here are a few tips to take the stress out of summer travel.

1. Unrealistic expectations. The glossy brochures or pictures on the Internet are often not the reality. Make sure you read the fine print and reviews from other people in your stage of life. Also be aware of events like “Spring Break,” “Bike Week” and other red flags that might have been fun in your 20s but now, if you have little children or are in the quiet stage of life, are not quite as exciting. It will save you a lot of stress to do your research ahead of time.

Realistically assess your limitations. It looks great to see people climbing two hours to the top of an active volcano, but if you’re more of the kind of couple that likes to drink coffee and play scrabble, you may want a different venue. If you are overweight, or have limited energy or mobility; be honest with yourself. You will only be frustrated by trying to kayak or biking long distances. “Maybe we just need a vacation.” The fact is, if as a couple you’re not getting along in Podunk, Kentucky, you won’t get along in Paradise. A vacation with unlimited time together in close quarters with someone you’re not getting along with is not a recipe for healing and growth. You take your problems with you, so be wise about your reason for heading out of town.

2. Erroneous information. It happens to everyone at least once. You do all due diligence, but end up with a “lemon.” The folks in charge of the cruise, the motel, the spa, the trip

just flat out misrepresent themselves. What do you do in these cases? What recourse do you really have? And how can you salvage the time you have away?

- Report any bad business practices to the Better Business Bureau of the state you are in.
- Try reasoning with the management. Explain the situation from your point of view and appeal to management with a rational argument. Avoid emotional confrontations and threats as they rarely work in these situations.
- Don't pay fully in advance. Pay the least amount possible for your accommodations, tours, etc., waiting to see what they are like before you pay in full.
- If your trip falls apart when you get there, all is not lost. Some of the most memorable experiences happened spontaneously in your life, and this can be one of those times. It's all about your attitude. If you are stressed out and angry, complaining and miserable, your whole family will follow suit. If you look around and find something fun to do, you can salvage the experience. By doing this you will teach your children to make the very best of every circumstance, and you can't put a price tag on that.

3. Failure to adequately prepare. This one is not the fault of someone else. It's all on you. If you haven't planned for the best but prepared for the worst, then you may encounter stress on your vacation.

Plan for rainy days. It rains everywhere—even in Paradise. Even in the middle of the ocean! Make plans for fun things to do if it rains. By the way, naps are not fun for kids; only adults like naps. Make some real plans. Tuck a board game and a deck of cards into your suitcase just in case. Plan for sickness. Germs don't take a vacation just because you did.

Make sure to pack over-the-counter remedies for headaches, diarrhea, cuts, scrapes, sore throats and the like. Make sure

you have plenty of your prescription meds in case you get delayed on your return. Keep them with you in your carry-on in case your checked luggage gets lost. Plan for delays, because they are inevitable. Pack snacks in your carry-on bag in case your flight gets delayed. Single servings of almond butter, nuts, crackers, cheese, etc. are good choices. Make sure each member of your party has snacks in his/her bag in case you get separated. Keep an emergency kit in your car in case of a breakdown in the middle of nowhere. Be sure to have plenty of clean water and nonperishable food items. The Department of Motor Vehicles also suggests packing the following:

- Roadside flares
- A first-aid kit
- Work gloves or latex gloves
- Two quarts of oil
- Jumper cables
- One gallon of antifreeze
- Brake fluid
- Extra fuses
- A blanket
- A flashlight with fresh batteries
- A Phillips head screwdriver
- A flathead screwdriver
- Vise grips
- An adjustable wrench
- A pair of pliers
- A tire inflator
- A tire pressure gauge
- Some rags and a funnel
- A roll of duct tape
- A roll of paper towels
- A spray bottle with washer fluid
- An ice scraper
- A roadside emergency card
- Triangle reflectors
- A pocketknife

4. Traveling with children. If you traveled a lot before you had children, you will have to adjust your expectations—especially in regards to the time it takes to do anything.

Children like to explore, they have to go to the bathroom a lot and eat a lot, so trying to hurry them only makes the situation worse. Here are some tips from the expert at *Rough Guides* on traveling with children:

- Take your time
- Book ahead—don't try to be spontaneous when kids are involved.
- Expect regression (potty accidents, temper tantrums, sibling arguments, etc.)
- Give them a disposable camera to capture the trip from their level.
- Invest in a child locator to ease your mind and avoid losing an active child.
- For older children, pack a homemade or purchased travel journal and encourage them to record their experiences.
- When traveling through busy airports, write your mobile number on the inside of your child's arm with a Sharpie.
- Even if you don't have a baby any longer, take some baby wipes along wherever you go to use for face cleanup, table wipe down, toilet seat sanitizer, shoe shiner and a million other uses.
- If you're not a kid person, take an Au Pair or your favorite teenager to keep the kids entertained. Older nieces and nephews may be willing to babysit for the price of the trip.
- Even if you are a kid person, be realistic and age appropriate with activities.
- Know the signs of "hangry" (so hungry they're angry). Keep protein bars and healthy snacks (not sugary) at the ready in your bag during the entire trip.
- Avoid over-stimulation. Kids don't have the ability to

decompress themselves. You have to build in quiet time and rest time for them to do this.

- Keep the tablet at home. Resist the temptation to let junior “zone out” with your phone or tablet. Studies show that children under the age of 12 who use electronic devices for even one hour per day show cognitive delays, a tendency towards attention deficit disorder and mental illness, aggression and decreased memory and concentration due to the brain pruning neuronal tracks to the frontal lobe which controls all executive function.

5. You now need a vacation from your vacation. You know the drill. The last couple of days of your vacation find you looking forward to getting back to work—to the structure, simplicity, and quiet of your normal routine. Sometimes you need a vacation from your vacation! This was supposed to be a time to relieve stress, but instead, you find it has you more stressed out than normal. To combat this, consider:

Structured versus Unstructured

- Some relaxing time is fun, and some unstructured time is beneficial; but too much free time can be stressful because family members used to school and work schedules suddenly find themselves with no scheduled meals, sleep or chores.
- Make sure you have something scheduled for each day—even if it is “explore the other side of the campground,” or “teach kids how to make a fire without matches.” Something for everyone to look forward to and feel accomplished about completing.

Relaxing versus Exploring

- Don’t assume that your mate wants the same things out of the vacation that you do. You may want to lie around and catch up on naps and reading that you never get a chance

to do, while your mate has been stuck in the house or an office cubicle and may want to hike, roam, explore and discover.

- Be clear with each other about what your expectations are, then make a plan so everyone gets what they want. This will decrease tension and stress.

Time With Kids versus Time With Adults

- Decide how much time you want to spend doing kid friendly stuff, and how much time you want doing adult stuff.
- If you work outside the home, you may be looking forward to spending quality time reconnecting with your kids. If your mate spends a lot of time every day with the kids, he/she may want some time to dress up and go out for GT (grownup time).
- Most resorts have bonded, licensed babysitters or nannies that can come in for a few hours if you want to have some time out at night. One night out alone may sustain you for the rest of the vacation!

Take a Day to Reboot

- Consider taking an extra day off of work at the end of your vacation to reboot.
- You will need to do laundry, put away the luggage, pick up your mail, pets, etc. So leave an extra day to unwind.
- You will be more productive at work if you have your home life back in order.
- By reconnecting with every member of the family back at home, you can carry the sweet memories and funny stories of your vacation together into the normal, daily walk of life.
- Have a meal together at home and go around the table asking each one to share his/her favorite memory of the trip.

- Have your kids begin to plan your next adventure based on what they liked or didn't like about this adventure.
- Debrief with your mate about what went right, what went wrong, and how to make the next trip even better than this one! Anticipation is half the fun.

*America's leading stress expert, **Dr. Pete Sulack** is a highly sought-after teacher, lecturer, and author. His studies on the effects of stress, coupled with over one-million patient visits and attention from medical communities led him to create Unhealthy Anonymous—an organization helping individuals, corporations and non-profits mitigate the immense effects of stress on health and human behavior. The Unhealthy Anonymous book will be available June 16 through Destiny Image.*