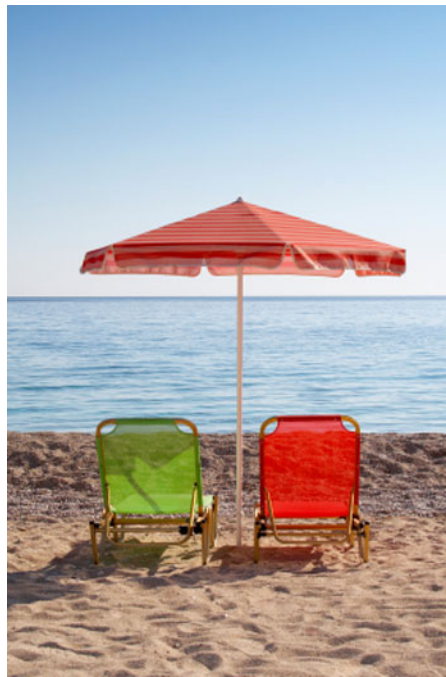


Vacation Planning 101

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by MJ Rosenthal



I remember my childhood vacations, swimming at the beach, hiking in the woods and boating at the lake. I also remember mom yelling at dad because he left the contact numbers at home; dad spending half the day looking for his flip flops; and my brother and I fighting over the one and only beach chair.

If you want your summer vacation memories to be non headache-inducing, you'll definitely need to plan ahead. Here's how:

Smart Vacation Planning

Do the Math Before You Leave

Figure out exactly how much your trip will cost (it may surprise you how far off your guestimations are. To plan your budget, research the costs related with each part of the trip (hotels, gas, food, souvenirs, tips, etc.). Then set a daily spending limit and don't experience financial stress .

Create an Itinerary

Arranging daily vacation activities before you leave home, means less hassle and more fun when you get there.

- Look up directions, locations, possible traffic complications, discounts (like internet coupons or AAA), contact information and other important details about the sites you'd like to visit.
- Designate a notebook or folder in which to keep essential numbers, coupons, and brochures. Take it with you on all of your outings.
- Have a list of alternative activities in case the weather doesn't cooperate or you decide you want to do something else that day.
- If you are driving, make sure you have maps or printed directions. Test the location before on your GPS system to make sure your software can pick it up. Also, familiarize yourself with good locations to pull off the road for rest-stops and restaurants.
- If you have a more laid back schedule in mind, like a week at the beach, consider whether you'll sandwiches for your picnic basket or ice for your cooler.

Put in on your Calendar

It seems obvious, but many people forget to, put all important vacation dates on the calendar. Include not only the dates of your trip but planning deadlines as well.

- Payment due dates
- Emails to house/pet sitters
- Prep dates for packing, laundry, car service, etc.

One Month or More Prior to Departure

Talk to the your kids, especially young ones, about the trip so they are excited and prepared for travel

Two Weeks or More Prior to Departure

- Create a "TO PACK" list; save this list as a check-list for future trips
- Make arrangements getting to the airport, pet sitters, plant sitters, mail delivery, etc.
- Make a copy of everything in your wallet; take one copy with you and keep the other at home



One Week Prior to Departure

- Pull luggage out of storage
- Wash Clothing
- Gather books, magazines and maps
- Give a copy of your itinerary to a friend or family member, including all of your contact information

48-72 Hours Prior to Departure

- Pack Luggage
- Put kids clothing together in outfits, store in zip-lock bags with their names on it (this way they can identify their own outfits and often get themselves dressed -- this is a vacation for you)
- Pay all bills which are coming due
- Make a note of "last minute" to pack items so you won't forget anything

Day/Night Prior to Departure

- Put together last minute items, including toiletries
- Seal all bottles or items which can leak in re-sealable plastic bags
- Back-up your computer
- Unplug appliances, turn heat/air down
- Call airline/hotel to confirm

You are now ready to enjoy your safe, memorable and organized vacation. Just don't forget the sunscreen.

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