

How to create a memorable family vacation

Pam J. Hecht, WNC Parent contributor Published 12:00 a.m. ET May 31, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy of Lorena Wade)

Lorena Wade, a mom of two in South Asheville, will never forget the family trips she took as a child, visiting nearly every state in the country in an iconic "silver bullet" Airstream RV trailer.

"I wanted to offer my kids that same magical way of learning," Wade says.

So, last summer, she packed up the kids in her own shiny Airstream trailer and hit the road out West. The family went old-school, nixing the use of electronics, other than books on tape and old cellphones the kids used as cameras.

When they got to Durango, Colorado, her husband, Bob, flew in for a week to join Wade and her kids, Robbie, 10, and Madeline, 8. They visited national parks (participating in the Junior Ranger programs) and pueblos, and had many other adventures. And they departed on Madeline's birthday, which made the trip even more special.



Lorena, Robbie and Madeline Wade stop at the Four Corners, where Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona come together. (Photo: Courtesy of Lorena Wade)

"On the way home last year, just after Knoxville, my son announced 'I'm bored,'" she says. "I loved it (because) it took him 5,280 miles to get bored — what a ringing endorsement of a great trip."

Whether traveling with the family cross-country or just a few miles away, it's the time spent together that's the most important thing. Here are a few tips to create lasting vacation memories, whatever you do.

Give the kids a say

"Let the kids help plan — they will be much more cooperative and will lead you in unexpected directions that are guaranteed to be memorable," says Eileen Ogintz, a national family travel expert, author of the "Kid's Guide" travel book series and the website [www. \(http://www.takingthekids.com\)takingthekids.com \(http://takingthekids.com\)](http://www.takingthekids.com).

Document the trip

"Their (the kids') pictures were amazing," says Wade. "Their photojournalism was from a different vantage point — everything looks bigger since they're looking up, and what they thought was photo-worthy might not be what I

would have chosen, so I loved their choices."

But don't hide behind the camera

Rather than constantly snapping photos (and posting them online), take just a few photos at a time and remember to focus instead on being in the moment.

Collect memories along the way, picking up souvenirs like postcards, ticket stubs and napkins and put into a scrapbook after the trip. Pick up a good, old-fashioned map and highlight your route as you go — use the map later as a background for a few good family snapshots to frame.

Or, bring along glue sticks, scissors and notebooks to make scrapbooks along the way, either while traveling or as an evening activity.

"Have a souvenir strategy and conversation with the kids," Ogintz suggests. "Suggest they start a collection (patches or pins, for example)" and decide on a souvenir budget and whether they want one big souvenir or many small ones.

Mail or email postcards home to the family's pets saying the one most fun thing they did that day with a photo — that will become a memorable souvenir," Ogintz adds.

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Have a sense of humor

In fact, problems on the trip could end up being that funny story told around the dinner table countless times for many years to come.

"Traveling with kids is like raising them — aggravating, frustrating, expensive and the most wonderful experience," says Ogintz. "Whatever happens, take a deep breath and enjoy the moment."

Allow for spontaneity

Encourage trying new things and challenging yourselves. Kids will always remember the feeling of achieving a goal together and being supported. Plus, it helps the family bond.

Slow it down

"Cut the itinerary in half and allow for time to play cards together, build a sandcastle on the beach" or play at a local playground, where meeting a new friend could be one of the highlights of the trip, says Ogintz.

Stay somewhere with a kitchen, if possible, she adds. Let the kids help plan the vacation menus and if they are old enough, cook — they may be more in the mood to cook while vacationing and they'll remember the pride they felt at helping to prepare a good meal.

Make the most of travel time. Play different variations of the same fun game while in the car or write entries in a vacation journal.

Other memory-makers: take the family to where your ancestors are from or orchestrate a surprise vacation.



Bob Wade met his wife, Lorena, and kids in Colorado after they had driven cross-country. (Photo: Courtesy of Lorena Wade)

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