

Three Generations, Three Ways

The top options for intergenerational, group and reunion travel make way for an unforgettable experience.

By Traci L. Suppa



Pleasing a family of four when planning a vacation can be challenging. Getting it right when the group also includes Grandma, Uncle George and George Jr. is a bit trickier. But intergenerational travel, also known as “togetherness,” is a growing trend, and many destinations cater to the specific needs of family groups.

Whether families are planning a long weekend for just the kids and parents or a large annual family reunion, the main considerations should be: Will there be a variety of activities to please everyone? Are there opportunities for everyone to spend time all together? Will someone on staff be there to help iron out details?

Here are three different options that meet these requirements, with the convenience of unpacking only once. Plus, these are trips the generations can take any time of year.

Orlando Theme Park Resorts

When it's important to find a destination that will please everyone, Orlando is an easily accessible city with world-class theme park resorts that offer an experience few can fault. Family-friendly entertainment is the name of the game at Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando, with enough attractions, rides, shows, shopping and dining opportunities to last a week.

Both Disney and Universal welcome family groups and reunions. Working with a dedicated representative, guests receive package pricing including accommodations and theme park tickets.

Groups of eight or more can take advantage of Disney's Magical Gatherings packages. A planning specialist helps coordinate accommodations at any of the resort's 17 properties and makes reservations for dining, recreation and special experiences.

Renee Alborelli of Sound Beach, N.Y., planned a Magical Gathering reunion for more than 30 members of her extended family.

“We picked Disney because it would appeal to the majority of our group— 18 kids younger than the age of 10,” she said. “We knew we could expect quality when it came to hotels, food and the parks themselves.”

Universal Orlando offers special programs and pricing for groups of 15 or more. Packages include theme park tickets and accommodations at one of the resort's three hotels. All are within walking distance of the two theme parks, Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure, eliminating the need for group ground transportation. The 30-acre City Walk entertainment complex features restaurants such as Margaritaville Orlando and the Hard Rock Cafe, which have enough space for group functions.

Best for: Active families with kids of all ages who need an easy-to-reach destination

Consideration: Once inside the parks, families can pick a meeting spot and disperse so all get to experience the rides and attractions of their choice.

Cruises

A cruise is one of the easiest trips to plan for an extended family. One person can book travel for the entire group through a travel agent, directly with the cruise line or by arranging a group account so all parties can make their own travel arrangements.

According to the Cruise Lines International Association, families consistently cite affordability as the reason to take a cruise. The appeal is instantly apparent with staterooms in a range of price points, which include the cost of meals and onboard entertainment.

Little planning is really necessary, but families should take the time to find out which activities and entertainment are offered because those things will vary even among ships within the same cruise line. The larger ships offer greater choices. For adults, there are typically spas, casinos, shows and classes, which can be enjoyed alone while the children participate in supervised, age-appropriate programs including crafts, games, talent shows, scavenger hunts, themed parties and sports competitions.

Regina Holmes of Stratford, Conn., has cruised with 35 people from her husband's family three times.

Their 90-year-old matriarch paid for everyone's trip in an effort to bring together four generations. During the day, everyone did his or her own thing or took excursions in small groups. They all had dinner together at the same seating area each night.

"We enjoyed the ports we visited and spending time with family in a very relaxed atmosphere," Holmes said. "As long as you know the expectation of what time will be spent together, there's no pressure. I would do it again and again."

On Princess Cruises, families of 10 or more qualify for group rates, and travel agents can customize packages with a variety of extras. Groups can work with the onboard services department to arrange a special party, celebration meal or activities specific to their interests.

Best for: Families who want to focus on relaxation and have the convenience of all travel costs paid up front

Consideration: Dining options vary by cruise line. It's easier for groups to dine together with scheduled seating times versus "freestyle" dining.

Family Resorts

Families just beginning a tradition of intergenerational travel may want to book a three- to five-day stay at a nearby resort offering activities for all age groups. This option saves time and money, especially if it's located within driving distance. Complimentary entertainment and activities, day and night, are usually included in the price.

For relatives lodging together, it's worth seeking out condo buildings that can be reserved exclusively for the family. At the Smugglers' Notch Resort in Jeffersonville, Vt., condo configurations include everything from studios to five bedrooms, providing a variety of options. A full kitchen is an additional money-saver, allowing guests to cook their own meals. An all-inclusive option is available at the Woodloch Resort in Hawley, Pa., which includes three meals daily. The Family Reunion package at Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort in Truckee, Calif., offers a picnic lunch and barbecue dinner along with lodging, activities and entertainment.



Woodloch Lodge & Spa

Resorts that specifically cater to family groups will often assign a dedicated staffer to help organize private group meals, on-site activities and excursions. At Smugglers' Notch, Senior Group Planner John Kuprianchik facilitates about 25 family reunions every summer. He said multigenerational groups are drawn to "Smuggs" primarily because of the breadth of activities offered, particularly for children. A full-day camp and seasonal sports and activities are tailored for kids age 3 to 14, and the new child care center welcomes infants from 6 weeks old, allowing the adults some downtime. At night, socials, magic shows, bingo games and bonfire sing-alongs are appropriate for all ages.

"What grandparents seem to enjoy most is seeing their grandkids participating and having fun," Kuprianchik said. "They enjoy watching and hearing about their activities and the friends they have made."

However, the older generations have their share of programs, too, including chocolate-tasting seminars, painting lessons and aromatherapy workshops.

Best for: Families with a lot of people who want to enjoy individualized activities

Consideration: Families can search online for a resort within driving distance of the majority of their group.

Planning Your Trip

For assistance planning a getaway for families of any size, contact a local AAA Travel agent or visit AAA.com/travel. Another extremely helpful tool in planning multigenerational travel is Destination Discovery at AAA.com. This tool enables families to enter specific travel interests, after which Destination Discovery will suggest specific travel destinations that best fit those interests.

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