

The Art Becoming A Stay-At-Home Tourist

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Trying to find a vacation destination for you and the little ones while staying on a budget? No worries. There's a place you can go that the kids will love, there's not much drive time, you can't beat the rates, accommodations are spacious, and you'll feel right at home.

No, it's not the newest kid-friendly cruise, Aspen, Europe, or even the Magic Kingdom. The answer is in your own backyard. Literally. This vacation, stay home. Wait, before you knock it, consider the perks.

- No bags to pack
- Gas and accommodations savings
- No question, the bed you sleep in will be comfy
- No need for GPS or maps
- No travel agents, no airfare shopping, no rental car

Last summer, when I found my vacation account all but empty, the price of gas skyrocketing, and American's not always getting the kindest of welcomes overseas, my family tried the home vacation. And, surprisingly, it worked so well, we want to go back next year.

Other than the convenience and financial savings, why vacation at home? Because we all get comfortable in our hometowns. We tell our visitors what spots to hit, but find ourselves driving passed them with the excuse, "Well, I live here. I can go anytime."

But, how often do we? I've lived in my hometown for nearly twenty years, and have put off many of the sites, because they're too easily at my disposal. Yet, it wasn't until my family stayed home for vacation, that we finally enjoyed the local tourist spots.

So, what was the trick? It was so simple. Become tourists. Think about it. When you're a tourist in a new city, you don't waste a minute. You try to do and see everything. You take in the sites, the flavors, the food, the feel. Because, who knows when you will return?

The hardest part of home vacationing is keeping that tourist mentality and not falling back into the same old day-to-day rut. So, to view your home less like a house and more like a resort, follow these four home tourist steps.

Think Like A Tourist

To make this getaway feel like a true vacation, rather than a series of daytrips interrupting your home life, you must first start to think like a tourist, which, of course, is easier said than done, when staying in town.

First, to break free of the hometown monotony, put yourselves in tourists' shoes. Think back to your last out of town family trip. Recall the anticipation leading up to departure. Remember the excitement, and the countdown: "Guys, just four more days and we're in beautiful Bakersfield, California."

This is what you'll need to do even before you hit your first destination. Convince yourselves that this truly is a real vacation. Talk about the trip as a family. Get the excitement levels piqued. Talk it up as if you're actually **going** somewhere. Once you start talking about it, the trip becomes real.

When you've got the family talking about the getaway, like any other trip, set a budget. How much can you afford to spend on this vacation? What have you set aside for a vacation this year? Just because you're staying home, doesn't mean you shouldn't pay attention to your finances.

If you usually pull out cash or purchase Traveler's Cheques, don't change that. Go through the same steps as any other vacation. In doing so, you'll really be able to let yourself "get away" while you're gone.

Finally, no good tourist would travel without having a few destinations in mind. Sit down with the family and make a list of the places you might want to visit and the things you'd want to do. Which brings us to step number two.

What Would A Tourist Do?

Being a stay-at-home tourist has its ups and downs. The ups: you know just where to go in the area during your vacation. The downs: you **think** you know just where to go in the area during your vacation. Let's start with the ups.

We all do it. We live in an area known for an incredible attraction, beautiful museum, or fantastic activity, and we never get around to enjoying it.

When making your “Places to Go” list, start by asking everyone in the family, “If we were coming to town for a very short time, where would we go? What should we do?” Your list might consist of art shows, local concerts, parks, theaters, libraries, and festivals. Consider everyone’s response. We live in an area with a zoo for which we have an annual pass. When we asked our two year old what we should do, she told us we should feed the giraffes. Twenty years in this town and we’d never fed the stinking giraffes. Guess what we did during our vacation.

As for the downs: if you limit yourself to the places you already know, you may be missing incredible sites right under your nose. Make like a real tourist and call the local Chamber of Commerce, check out area websites, pick up brochures at the local visitors’ bureau and find out what else is out there. You may be surprised.

We found a children’s museum an hour north of our home. We’d never heard of it before. It cost five dollars a person and the kids loved it. Wasn’t crowded, tons of hands-on activities. We spent the entire day there. By far, one of the best days of our vacation.

Finally, find out where out-of-towners go when they visit. Think like one of them. If you can’t think like them, find one and ask, “Where will you be visiting while you’re in town?” Then, steal their itinerary.

Tourist Rules 101

Now that you’re thinking like a tourist and have your destination plan, it’s time to put the Internationally Accepted Tourist Rules* into action. Most everyone who goes on vacation follows the Tourist Rules, although many have no idea that the rules even exist. Fortunately, the Tourist Rules seem to come naturally, common sense stuff.

When you’re a stay-at-home tourist, you need to be a bit more conscious about following the Tourist Rules. First and foremost, to make this vacation really work, everyone must resign to break the routine. Staying at home, it would be easy to get up at 9:30, eat a bowl or two of Cap’n Crunch and watch Court TV until noon. But, we never do that on vacation. We get up

and get ready to go. We break the old home routine. So, during this vacation, do the same.

As for the other rules, you decide which work best for you. Here are a few to consider:

- skip the gym this week
- no camp for the kids
- no visitors
- put off listening to phone messages until you “get back home”
- no mowing the lawn
- skip washing the dishes (instead use paper plates and order out)

Remember, the idea is to feel like you’re out of town and that you’re escaping the chores and responsibilities of home that vacations rarely have. So, pass on vacuuming and dusting, and with the money you save on airfare and hotel, hire a cleaning service at the end of the week.

Also, to do this 100% right, don’t forget to have your mail and newspaper service stopped until the end of your vacation, and be sure you set your automatic email response: “Will be out of town. Talk to you next week.”

Become One With Your Inner Tourist

You are now ready, Grasshopper. The biggest mistake many stay-at-home tourists make is falling back into the old routine halfway into the vacation and breaking some of the Tourist Rules: “Oh, let me just make a quick call and check my emails.” Next thing you know, you’re back home and trying to find time to squeeze in a daytrip with the family.

Don’t let this happen to you. Be a tourist every moment of this vacation. What would you do if you were out of town? Then, do it. Let the kids stay up late. Skip a nap for the toddler now and again if you’re out having fun. Take your camera when you travel. Video tape the memories. Buy souvenirs for the family. Send postcards to friends and relatives (So what if they think you’re crazy? It’ll be a blast.) Rent videos, go to restaurants, splurge on the sweets you normally skip at home. Be a tourist.

Done right, this will be a vacation your family will never forget and that your friends will envy. Bon voyage.

*In reality, there are no Tourist Rules. And, if there were, ten to one, they wouldn't be accepted internationally.