

Daily Union Article

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Title: Summer Vacation on a Budget

Some of my fondest memories from childhood are of our summer family vacations. We would load up our old station wagon (which had an odd resemblance of the one in Family Vacation with Chevy Chase) with suitcases, cooler, 4 kids, 2 parents, and our family dog. Being the youngest two, my brother and I always had to sit in the back with the dog while my two older sisters got the passenger bench seat to themselves.

Those vacations were filled with an abundance of adventure and excitement, with a mingling of chaos and whining that comes with a packed station wagon, long stretches of highway and a sister who got car sick.

As adults, we all reminisce the many places we got to go and the historical sites that were along the way. We also recognize the expense that mom and dad went to for our family road trips. Here are some tips I use to budget for our summer family vacation:

Keep It Local – Perhaps you can't take an extended vacation. You may want to consider places to go within a 3 – 4 hour drive. My family and I have been on several 2-day trips that include outside adventure and indoor fun! We like going to the suburbs of North Kansas City. It allows us to stay away from the rush hour craziness, while enjoying some downtown KC favorites: World War I Museum, Union Station, Crown Center (and the Crayola Store or Legoland), and the Kansas City Zoo.

We also like a more rural feel. A trip west through Lindsborg then on to Cheyenne Bottoms with a wide swing north to Monument Rocks was a great escape we enjoyed last year. We are looking forward to Hutchinson for the Salt Mines and Cosmosphere later this year, as well!

For my husband and I's 25th Anniversary, we took a trip to the southeast to Fort Scott! I shopped around for a place to stay and we ended up at a wonderful and budget-friendly bed and breakfast – the Lyons Twin Mansions. If you are a history junkie like we are, I strongly suggest a stay in Fort Scott, no matter what you choose for lodging.

Let's not forget the great resource we have here in Geary County. Milford Lake is a great place to get away from it all, enjoy the largest lake in Kansas, and enjoy many of the comforts of home. You can take a tent, a camper, or choose from a wide variety of lodging options offered there. You can't beat the sunrise and sunset on this beautiful Kansas lake!

Fly Local: If flying to a destination, look at a regional airport like Manhattan. The flights to Dallas or Chicago take no more than an hour or two and the airline tickets are very reasonable – especially since you don't have to pay for parking and the distance to the airport is cost-saving in gas and time! Renting a car can be fairly economical once

you arrive. This will allow you to enjoy the city's points of interest or venture away from the big-city lights to explore the surrounding areas. I especially like to fly south because I can determine where I am at due to my familiarity of Kansas and the communities, lakes, and landmarks we fly over along the way.

House Rentals vs. Hotels: It's hard to find an economical hotel for a family of five – especially if we want everyone to have a bed. Our family has successfully used a couple different websites to scout out a home that would give us the space and comfort we like to enjoy as a family. We've stayed in several houses and even an apartment (but it was a large one, at that.) I like using this alternative on our longer trips. We pack enough clothes for only half of our trip and then use the in-house washer and dryer to help us with having clean clothes for the return trip. When we make these kind of trips, I pack a large cooler from our freezer so that I can make meals for our family rather than always eating at a restaurant. With three growing boys and a husband, ordering of the menu can be very expensive. Since I love to cook, this makes my vacation even more fun! You need to read the amenities list closely to make sure the property meets your needs. My family needs Wi-Fi, a washer and dryer, a well-stocked kitchen, at least 2 recliners and 4 beds. Additionally, with 3 loud and rowdy boys, we like to have some outdoor space, if possible!

Road Trip Tricks: We are always fresher on our first day, so it makes sense to make that day our longest drive. Plan out your road map with these things in mind:

- ✓ Use the American Automobile Association's online TripTik tool to map out your trip in advance.
- ✓ Make regular stops to stretch your legs and answer nature calls.
- ✓ Stop for fuel where the gas is cheapest. Go to gasbuddy.com to find the cheapest gas at every stop along the way.
- ✓ Pack your lunch and find a park or point of interest to enjoy your meal.
- ✓ Pack a cooler with ice, water and other preferred drinks for when you arrive at your destination.

I hope these ideas give you some options on how to plan your family vacation without breaking the bank. These family vacation memories are priceless. Think about the interests and abilities of your family and cater to those as you consider your vacation plans. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!