

How to Survive (and Actually Enjoy) a Family Vacation With Your In-Laws



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Let's face it — even if you have the best relationship with your in-laws, seeing them for a Sunday BBQ and spending a week's vacation with them are totally different experiences. Here's how to make it work.

Schedule a date night.

One of the best perks of traveling with relatives is the built-in babysitter factor, and that can go a long way on a family vacation. “Grab the opportunity to have a date night while the in-laws take your children to a movie,” says Michele Moore, a licensed professional counselor and founder of [Southwest Human Capital](#).

Everyone wins: grandma and grandpa get to spend precious time with the grandkids and my husband and I get that rare time alone. Also, since we're not paying them, we're not constantly looking at the clock to see if we need to rush home to relieve the sitter, or to decide if we can actually order dessert. Plus, it makes me feel good that the kids are spending time with someone who genuinely loves and cherishes them—and not just babysitting them for the money.

Outline expectations for the

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kids.

“Don’t expect others to understand what you need,” says Moore. “If your kids are on a

special diet, make sure you bring what they need.” In our case, our boys love nothing more than sugar. And while we try to keep things in check at home, during vacation, especially with grandma and grandpa, indulgence can go into overdrive. So we talk on the first day of the trip. A banana split for dessert is okay. That, plus a brownie and ice cream, isn’t.

Don’t do everything together.

“Schedule time for your immediate family to do things separately,” says Moore. For us, that meant a special Dr. Seuss breakfast on a Carnival cruise. While we always met up for dinners, we were more lax during the day — that way everyone got a break. “Just because you are on a trip with the in-laws doesn’t mean you have to do everything together as if you were all handcuffed to each other,” says [Julienne Derichs](#), a licensed clinical professional counselor. “In this case ‘absence can make the heart grow fonder’ is true.”

Take yourself out of the equation.

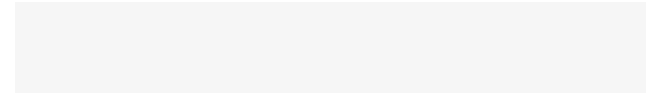
As the mom in the family, organizing daily excursions usually falls to me. When we travel with the in-laws, that’s a lot of pressure to organize everyone’s day, so at least for one afternoon, I do what I want to do and let my husband and his family fend for themselves. At first, it took them awhile to feel okay without me there, but after the first time, it got easier.

Keep your expectations in check.

“This requires that you know what type of people your in-laws are and that your expectations for what they are capable of are reasonable,” says Derichs.

I’m super active — nothing says fun to me like a full day of hiking, biking, whitewater rafting or horseback riding. For my in-laws, sitting at a beach is

ideal. When we travel together, we compromise. One day we do what they want, the next something more active. Or, we do our own thing for the day and meet up at dinner.



**Remember your in-laws are
people, too.**

“They are not there just to annoy you,” says Derichs. “Try to see them from a different, more positive point of view. Overlook or ignore minor annoyances.” If your in-laws love to give unsolicited parenting advice, nod and smile and then change the subject. I often ask my in-laws about their childhoods. My kids love to hear the stories, and so do I. They feel special and heard and they have a captive audience in us.

Get in your happy place.

“Try to relax as much as possible,” says Derichs. “For you, this could mean exercise or meditation.” I’m a morning workout person and nothing puts me a better mood than hitting the gym moments after I wake up. At first, I didn’t do this on vacation because it was supposed to be family time. But I realize that working out-and sticking to some semblance of a routine-puts me in my happy place and benefits everyone.

Create a plan with your spouse.

“Talk with your spouse about possible behaviors from your in laws that may occur and how you both should handle them when/if they do,” says [Dr. Wyatt Fisher](#), a psychologist in private practice. “This will help you develop a unified front and feel supported.” So if your in-laws think it’s okay to keep the kids up late and you like stick to a certain bedtime, you and your hubby should discuss this ahead of time and talk to your in-laws together. I find it’s important to do this when the kids aren’t present. They always want the later bedtime, the extra dessert and more iPad time. So when this comes up on vacation, we go in as a team, no good cop, bad cop.

Don’t pretend to have perfect kids.

“If you are so stressed out about your kids’ behavior, you’ll have more conflict than not,” says Shlomo Slatkin, a licensed clinical counselor. I’ve long since given up on trying to impress people with my parenting skills. Parenting is hard — really hard — and trying to pretend to have the most well-behaved kids is

just not so (at least in my family). When the kids act up, I don't need an audience, so I either have my in-laws take the kids, or I do. But trying to negotiate bad behavior and teach a lesson in front of others is just not happening, so I don't force it.

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