10 TIPS ON TRAVELING TOGETHER

Whether you’re planning a family reunion on a cruise ship, a girlfriend’s getaway in Vegas or a humanitarian trip to Africa there are several things you can do to prevent a disaster and promote more harmonious group travel.

1. Clear Expectations: Several months before the trip try to survey everyone involved to find out their expectations of the get-away. Be clear about the pricing and who is responsible for what. When it comes to lodging, members must choose who they will room with. Combinations with strangers can be fun, but many people are uncomfortable with that arrangement.

Place the active members together and the sedentary members together. If part of the group wants to tour historical sites, part want to hike and zip line, and part want to relax by the pool most of the time, try to group them together if possible.

Age differences can also become an issue if it is not well thought out. Do small children or elderly grandparents need to have an assigned care-taker for the trip? If it is not clear who is

 in charge of these folks, the rest of the group may get uncomfortable.

1. Safety Procedures: On the first day of a group vacation I recommend gathering together for a fun meeting (maybe with drinks and appetizers). This is the time when the agenda and schedule can be reviewed along with any details about the facility, lodging, meals, etc. Everyone must be briefed on safety and medical procedures. This might be where the local clinic or medical doctor is, the first aid kit, life jackets or grandma’s medicine. In many parts of the world it’s not safe to eat or drink outside of the facility due to contaminates. In other areas, sunscreen and hats must be taken everywhere as well as bug spray. A trip can be ruined if someone gets food poisoning or a severe sun burn.
2. Keep the Peace: Advise people to be patient with each other and address issues as they arise rather than letting them stew and become resentments. I always say it’s better to go straight to the person you are having a problem with, then tell everyone else in the group you are mad, sad, or offended. This just makes it awkward for everyone else. Don’t put other people in the middle or make them choose sides. Most issues can be resolved peaceably.
3. Type of trips: Although some groups choose to rent a large house, do a Costco run, and share all the food prep, it does take more coordination. You may save money, but you will likely waste a lot of food trying to make everyone happy. If the goal is to relax, you might also find yourself chained to the house, cooking, cleaning up and organizing. This can still be a good option for groups with lots of children, with babies or with elderly folk that might need to stop mid-day and take a nap.

In my opinion, cruises and all-inclusive resorts work best for groups. All of the cooking and cleaning is done for you and there is a wide array of activity choices. Mothers feel they are getting a break from all the cooking and clean-up and some resorts even offer kids club camps, teen hang outs and daycare centers for parents. Keep in mind that most trips should be kept to a week or less. Once groups spend more than 7 days together, friction can increase.

1. Planning: More planning is always better. It’s a myth that vacations go well when you just “play it by ear”. You can schedule in “free days” when everyone can be spontaneous and either sleep the day away, explore on their own, read, sunbathe, or return to a place they enjoyed most. However, the majority of the vacation should have some kind of agenda or schedule. This way everyone has an idea of what to expect and there are less disappointments or hurt feelings.
2. When things go wrong: Put a team of 2-3 people on the case of solving the problem if things go wrong. Generally, there are a few people in the group that end up being natural leaders or organizers. There is no need to pull everyone into the problem, it only escalates the drama and causes panic. Surveying the group for ideas can be helpful, but delegating just a couple of people to take the actions steps will alleviate confusion. Release the rest of the group to find something enjoyable to do to keep their minds busy or relax. In the end, everything always works out!
3. Bad idea: A group trip with in-laws and mixed family members right after a divorce, separation or break-up can be a bad idea. It would be wonderful if after a separation both sides of the family could remain friends but realistically that isn’t usually the case. It can become a war between 2 camps and a debate of who was the victim and who was the villain. Humans love to find out the juicy gossip and a vacation is not a place to engage in those types of conversations. Stay out of harms away until the dust settles a bit.
4. Benefits: Group travel is definitely beneficial for your mental and emotional health. We learn, grow and stretch from being with other people. More people allow for more diverse discussions and topics that may challenge us. Engage is conversations that you don’t know much about, and be willing to learn. New friendships can be made and old ones can be strengthened when spending a length of time together in a vacation environment. It’s surprising how much you can learn about a person when you are away from home….even your partner!
5. What NOT to do: Do not go off by yourself without reporting in to someone where you are going and what your plans are. Although everyone needs some “alone time”, group travelers feel a responsibility towards each other and may worry if you disappear too long.
6. It’s a group trip NOT a honeymoon: Don’t think that a group trip is a romantic vacation with your partner or spouse. Although, you will likely get some romance, most of the day and into the evening is spent joining with the others. If a sexy get-away is what you are going for……plan a different trip with just your honey and you!

Gina Guddat – Licensed Mental Health Therapist, Relationship Expert and World Traveler!

www.ginaguddat.com