

Planning a 'Staycation'

Most people feel that leaving town is the only way to resist the urge to pick up their to-do lists. However, current economic times are causing many people to cancel vacation plans.

Do not let finances keep you from relaxing and getting more focused. Try a "staycation": stay at home, take day trips and explore local attractions.

Because even weekend getaways to nearby resort areas or tourist attractions can add up with tolls, gas, hotels, restaurants and the carefree shopping that often happens on vacation, many families are considering alternatives to the traditional vacation.

No matter the size or makeup of your family, taking a new, creative approach to vacations can offer many of the benefits without the financial downside. A "staycation" cuts costs and provides people the opportunity to learn more about local attractions and entertainment options.

A vacation should be a change from the usual routine. Spoiling yourself a bit can go a long way toward reducing your stress level and energizing you. Try these destinations and activities to leave you and your family feeling refreshed and satisfied without running you into debt:

Visit Local Attractions

Go to museums, zoos, festivals, art fairs, concerts and theatre in your neighborhood and nearby areas. (Always check local libraries and newspapers for coupons. Inquire about reduced admission prices for residents.) Utilize community swimming pools and recreation centers. Try a new restaurant, bowling alley or movie.

Catch Cultural Opportunities

Local colleges, continuing-education centers and historical societies offer many interesting activities. Attend a local theater or musical performance; the experience is not only inexpensive, but also supports the artistic pursuits of the community.

Enjoy Parks and Nature Preserves

Find state parks, camping sites and nature preserves in your area or locations within easy driving distance. Informative tours, walks and hikes are often



available for little or no cost and can be planned with little notice. Check your state or regional tourism bureau's Web site for information.

Have Fun at Home

Relax with each other and watch movies, play games, share stories or complete a fun craft.

Pack a Picnic

Whether you drive across state or walk to the park down the street, consider packing a picnic lunch. Everybody has a few favorite picnic foods and most supermarket delis provide an array of prepared foods that are perfect for picnics. These items are still cheaper and healthier than fast-food restaurants.

Bike or Hike

Most cities have recreation areas with designated paths that are smooth, safe and free from motorized traffic. If you do not have a bicycle of your own, investigate bicycle rentals in your area. Exercise is a great way to feel healthy, relieve stress, explore your surroundings and work up your picnic appetite.

Create a Home Spa

Few activities reduce stress more than no activity at all. Keep nagging concerns about productivity at bay and schedule time for nothing to make sure you really do relax. Take a hot bath, pamper yourself or treat your spouse to an invigorating massage. Look for spa food recipes on the Internet and your local library to help make your home-spa weekend even more satisfying.

Volunteer

Help out at a local soup kitchen, shelter or senior center. Gaining insight on others can always help people get a new perspective on their own daily life and stresses.

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