

What happens in Vegas...Can be pretty cheap

Written by Marcia Humphrey
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While my husband and I are not into casino gambling --it goes against our laws of penny-pinching-- we do, however, really like to snag a deal wherever it may be found. This time we happened to find one we could not pass up in Vegas. We just returned from our first official family vacation and had a wonderful time. To be honest, it was not our intention to head west, but it turns out that this was the best online deal out there (and not that much more expensive than heading up to Brainerd and other popular Minnesota vacation destinations). So if you are looking for a family-friendly getaway that is relatively easy on the wallet, then Viva Las Vegas!

This was supposed to be a big summer for us. Our original plan was to go to Europe, but when our plans fell through we were scrambling to come up with a vacation-plan B, to console our disappointed kids (and their even more disappointed parents). Not wanting to spend oodles of cash--still planning to do Europe next year--we began looking online at cool places in Minnesota that we could reach by car. We were quite surprised at the cost of many of these Minnesota hot spots, and even more surprised to find a lot of them booked solid! That's when we made the crucial decision to expand our search.

Our vacation search was in full swing and it was a big deal, since our family had never had a real one before this. Our version of a vacation usually included a trip, by car, to someone's wedding, funeral, or graduation. Also, it most always involved less than ideal sleeping arrangements; a relative's mattress that has seen better days or hotel accommodations that don't ideally suit our family of five (*a couple needs their privacy, right?*).

What we were able to uncover on www.expedia.com was a five-night trip package for five, including airfare, a casino-free, two-bedroom condo with fully stocked kitchen, and a vehicle. By purchasing the all-inclusive package, we saved big, paying just over \$2000. We took a day trip to the breathtaking Grand Canyon, visited the famous Hoover Dam, and drove over to LA to splash around in the Pacific Ocean and enjoy the rides and carnival games at Santa Monica Pier.

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What made this trip so memorable was the time we were able to spend together as a family, taking in all of the beauty that the west has to offer. The added bonus is that we *did* see relatives. We dined with Aunt D and Uncle Virgil in Vegas and Aunt Kimberly and Uncle Shane in LA.

When we asked our kids about their favorite parts of the trip, at the top of all of their lists was visiting the relatives. Their second favorite thing varied, shopping (my oldest daughter) riding the roller coaster at New York New York (my youngest daughter) and the plane ride (my son). While Vegas is not a first thought as a family-friendly spot, it can be and it is certainly budget-friendly (as long as the slot machines don't tempt you too much), with cheap flights, cheap hotels, and cheap eats. Most important, of course, is creating fond memories wherever you go! Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at low costs. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.