

TRAVEL

Sometimes the best vacations are just miles away

BY DOUG FUNKE
STAFF WRITER

"Take me someplace," my wife, Arlene, said to me one night a couple of weeks ago as she set aside her book.

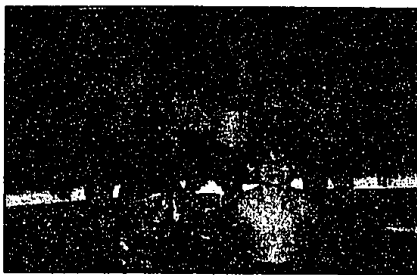
"Time to get on the horn and get the ball rolling for our annual Funko Family winter getaway with siblings, in-laws and kids.

"It's not exactly an exotic or erotic trip.

However, the overnight to a hotel qualifies as a travel experience because it gets us out of our houses and routines, enables us to shop and explore attractions in other parts of town and experience a little bit of summer in February.

Our entourage, usually 11 adults and six kids ranging in age from 13 to 1-1/2, books several rooms together.

Crock pots with chili, stew and meatballs are plugged in at arrival. There's no shortage of munchies - cut vegetables and dip, candy, chips and pretzels. Coolers with pop, juice and adult beverages also are available.



Water bugs: The Funke/Bodner/Senior cousins - Scott, Ben, Alex, Becky and Marcus - spend most of their time around the pool during the annual family getaway.

Our son, Scott, and his younger cousins, Marcus and Alex Bodner, Becky and Ben Senior and Marshall Funke, who

unfortunately, couldn't make it this year, gravitate to the water.

That's the big attraction to them - "That we get to go swim-

ming in the middle of winter," said Marcus, 6.

"Swimmin' ... jumpin' in," added Becky, 3.

The adults sit around the pool keeping an eye on the kids, catching up on the latest gossip, poking fun at each other and reading the National Enquirer, the Star and the Globe to find out what's really going on in the world.

"I like seeing all the cousins having a great time in the pool, smiling, laughing, playing pretend," said sister Judy Bodner. "I also like the idea I don't have to cook. It also gives my husband (Jack) a break from all the hard work he does."

"I like sitting in the whirlpool," said sister Arlene Karoll. "There's no phones, no mail."

"You leave your worries behind," said sister Cheryl Funke.

She and stayed in Livonia and Shopp's and gone to the movies at Laurel Park Place. We've stayed in Monroe and visited Lake Eric and the nearby outlet mall: There's all kinds of attrac-

tions in Ann Arbor, another destination city.

But back to the central base of operations. Some hotels/motels have amenities like miniature golf, ping pong, video games, pinball and exercise rooms. Some offer complimentary continental breakfasts.

Younger children usually tire easily after a full day of go-go-go, even if the going is limited to activities at the hotel. They generally sleep well, too.

An overnight doesn't have to be a budget-buster. Many places have weekend packages, group discounts and specials for members of AAA and the American Association of Retired Persons. Discounts may be geared to holders of certain credit cards. Families generally replace corporate guests on weekends, and many motels/hotels actively compete for the business.

"We are a Holiday facility," said Sherry Sulgenzi, sales manager for the Holiday Inn of Farmington Hills. "We do have a lot of families, a lot of reunions here. They ask for the pool, to

be by the pool. We get a lot of sports teams."

"Each hotel has its own philosophy, a particular program they center around, what they offer," said Paul Holland, marketing/sales director for Somerset Inn in Troy. "We're definitely more into the shopping getaway, definitely upper scale."

While official check-in time usually is after 2 p.m., we've never experienced a problem having one of our rooms ready earlier so we could change into swimming suits and get the food warming.

On Sunday, it's out to breakfast, back for a final swim, then home by noon. An unwritten rule about bringing a lot of food and beverages into a hotel is you shouldn't leave a mess behind.

Bring your camera, especially if you have kids.

You don't have to travel far or for an extended period for the experience to be memorable. A quick battery recharge often works wonders. Just ask the kids about an overnight getaway. We adults like it, too.

GREAT ESCAPES

DINE FIRST

British Airways launched a fine dining experience for Detroit Metro First Class passengers at a recent special press preview.

The new program gives passengers the option of enjoying a gourmet meal before taking off for Europe and then enjoying a long sleep in cocoon-like beds.

British Airways is offering First Class passengers a four-course meal. The press event featured lobster and avocado cocktail, chicken caesar salad and caviar for appetizers; tossed salad with choice of dressing; four entree selections - grilled loin of lamb in traditional gravy or mint sauce, double cut pork chops with glazed apples and cheddar cheese mashed potatoes, marinated pan-fried salmon with citrus balsamic dressing and, for the vegetarians, penne pasta complemented by wild mushrooms and mascarpone cream sauce and grilled zucchini. Dessert was creme brulee.

Upon boarding a non-stop flight to London, First Class passengers may choose to don their own pajamas or those provided by British Airways, hang up their day-time wear and stretch out on the 6-foot-6 flying beds. On arrival in London, passengers can use the British Airways

arrival lounge to shower and enjoy a continental breakfast. The cubicle also features a video monitor, headphones, an overhead light and other amenities for those who can't sleep.

"Market research indicated that our passengers on flights lasting fewer than nine hours wanted to have the maximum sleeping time on board, so the concept was launched to invite them to dine on the ground and go right to sleep," according to George Banks of British Airways, who is responsible for helping create and provide Concorde, First Class and Club World Business Class meal services.

The concept was first tried at New York's JFK International Airport. The dining on the ground concept, where meals are served restaurant style, provides frequent First Class flyers with a monthly change of menus and entrees cooked to order.

Banks leads a team of chefs with food service catering companies from around the world to create the menus.

Banks said the menus emphasize four points: taste, tradition, vision ("It has to look fantastic") and simplicity.

Chef Kirk Freeman of SkyChef airline catering met all those criteria at the press launch.



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BEIJING Round-trip air @ 4 nts. **\$759**

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Package prices shown are per person, based on double occupancy and round-trip coach-class air transportation via nonstop, direct, and nonstop services between Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing and 11 City airports on Northwest Airlines. Subject to the conditions of the fare, changes may be made. However, certain restrictions and an administrative service fee may apply. Prices are not retroactive and are subject to change and availability. Standard World Vacations Terms and Conditions apply; other restrictions may apply.

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