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Traveling with grandkids builds family bonds

By Cathy Dausman



At the Alameda Naval Air Museum. Photo provided

Summertime, and the living is easy - even when traveling with grandchildren. That's the message audience members received during Lamorinda Village's recent third and final travel series presentation. Speakers discussed trips ranging from local jaunts to Oakland, to interstate trips to national parks to overseas trips with grandparents, parents and grandchildren. Some grandparents relied on organized tours to do the planning; others built the trip itinerary themselves.

Speakers and most audience members agreed that traveling with grandchildren is a wonderful bonding experience, and the best age to bring them along is 11. Additionally, Orinda Travel specialist Karen Kelly says it's always good to carry a notarized letter from the child's parents authorizing their travel and, if necessary, any needed medical treatment. Kelly was not at the presentation but responded to an email inquiry from Lamorinda Weekly.

Carole and Andy Amstutz chaperoned their grandchildren and other students ages 13 to 18 from their son's science class to Madras, Oregon to view the solar eclipse in August. The group tent-camped on high school grounds in Sisters, Oregon. The trip was memorable both for the professional science lectures they received ahead of time and the pinhole cameras students made to track the eclipse itself, as well as for the six hours they sat in traffic on the 45-mile return to Sisters. The only downside for Amstutz was where they slept - this, he said, would be "the last time we're gonna sleep on the ground."

On a grander scale, three generations of Amstutz family, some 14 members, flew to Austria to learn about family heritage, and planned the trip in its entirety themselves. The extended family lodged in a 14-bed chalet, prepped and cooked group meals, and thanks to the expertise of Amstutz' son, donned harnesses and helmets to mountain climb on local cliffs.

Fred and Jean Tuemmler took four grandchildren on special individual trips when each child turned 11. They took one grandchild to Alaska, another to Canada, the third to Yellowstone National Park, the fourth to Hawaii. The Tuemmlers relied on a travel agency to make arrangements and plan activities at the site. Fred Tuemmler said each grandchild made friends during the trip and the agency organized everything.

Sarah Gross agrees 11 is the perfect age to travel with a grandchild, because while by then they've become fairly responsible, "they're not old enough to care about the other sex." Gross recounts the grandson she took to Hungary and Romania on a castle tour who was determined to buy a sword, despite the difficulty of flying home with it. She took her granddaughter to Paris. Gross also developed a hand signal to use whenever her travel companion needed to stop doing something.

Other grandparent/grandchild trips included an Alaskan cruise with cameras, a trip to New York City, and a visit to Branson, Missouri. One child declined a trip but was taken to a local opera instead.

Lamorinda Village founder Ruth McCahan concentrated on day trips one Saturday a month with her "Little Boys Club . and Rachel," the latter her only granddaughter. "There's so much to do in this area," McCahan said, citing trips she took to the Old Sacramento Railroad Museum and the Oakland Aviation Museum. McCahan says her last trip - a Colorado River whitewater rafting birthday trip with five of her six grandchildren was the best.

"Fred and I enjoyed putting the presentation together," Amstutz said afterwards. "We know that traveling with grandkids helps us see wonders of nature through their eyes."

"Young children give you a different perspective on things," added Lamorinda Village director Don Jenkins.

Jenkins final advice to the group? "Don't take your (trip) slides and put `em away; make a book!"



A visit to Children's Fairyland in Oakland.

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[back](#)

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