



They Did It

People affected by AD/HD



So You Don't Have To

provide advice from their less-than-perfect vacations

Compiled and introduced by Bryan Goodman, MA

VACATIONS ARE MEANT TO BE A TIME TO RELAX AND JUST GET AWAY FROM IT ALL. But for people affected by AD/HD, it's not always so easy to escape. As summer approaches, we figured our readers would be looking for some tips for the coming vacation season. We know CHADD members are not just hoping to survive their vacations, they're also hoping to thrive! Given the dearth of national experts on the topic, we decided to ask some other experts—our members—to share their experiences and offer tips on ways to enjoy a vacation despite any complications from AD/HD. What follows is some of those stories and tips.

Looking for water, dodging pine cones, and searching for the hotel

Before I was diagnosed with AD/HD, I had some disastrous experiences on vacations. I remember one vacation when I booked a hotel in Big Sur, California, without researching it. The hotel was billed on its website as being a real gem with a view of the water. Well, let's just say it may have been a gem in the 1940s, but it hadn't been since. There was no view of the water. There wasn't even running water in the room. There was also no television, and the bare light bulb that hung from the ceiling made it look like an interrogation room. On another trip, also planned impulsively, I wanted to take my wife on a drive in my convertible around this large lake. (I must mention that this is not her idea of a good time.) I got us lost, and while we were stopped for some construction work, I heard a crack and looked over to see a HUGE pine cone crashing down on my wife's arm. There we were lost, miles away from civilization, and my wife was injured. She now requires me to show her my plans on paper before we go on a trip.

Here are my tips:

- Use your hyperfocus to research the hotels and flights.
- Use your upcoming vacation as a carrot (the reward) to motivate you to tie up projects at work.
- Have someone else pack for you to make sure you're packing appropriately.

- Have your spouse or travelling companion review your plans to make sure he or she is interested in the itinerary.
- Make lists and be sure to write down all of the flight and hotel information.

—John O'Sullivan, Redwood City, California

The generalist on vacation

I can't narrow my story down to one vacation, but I can talk in general about what usually happened to me. In the past I have procrastinated so long that I was up the night before the trip until midnight—tired, frustrated, and unable to make decisions. I usually used about half of what I packed or I didn't pack enough. I have also left the traveler's checks on my office desk and failed to give my neighbor important phone numbers in case of an emergency.

Now I do most of the following:

- Start planning and packing about a week in advance.
- Use a permanent checklist of everything I need to do before I travel.
- Identify activities, connect them with wardrobe choices.
- Collect all items in one place.
- Have a second complete set of items like the toiletries I use that is packed and ready to go.

—Donna Love, Pleasant Hill, California

Life is a boat ride

Our seven-year-old daughter has severe hyperactivity. We have found that cruises work well for our family vacations. On a cruise there is always something to do—from organized excursions to shows and activities to swimming or just walking the decks. On a cruise we are able to maintain my daughter's sleep and medication schedules easily. We can be flexible with meals since food is always available. And nothing beats the fresh air and sunshine!

Tips:

- Keep sleep patterns consistent.
- Make travel plans to and from your destination during the child's best time of the day.

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- Be outdoors as much as possible—fresh air and sunshine are the best “medicine.”
- Although kids with AD/HD need structure, be willing to be a little more flexible during vacations than you are during the school year.
- Don’t set your expectations too high. Be willing to give and take, and ENJOY!

—Kate Alicea,
Ooltewah, Tennessee

Destination Disney

I remember the first time we took my son, who has AD/HD and Asperger syndrome, to Disney World. We arrived at our hotel late in the evening. My then-seven-year-old son Victor was revved up and eager to hit the ground running. My wife and I were sharing a room with him, and we couldn’t get him to go to sleep. I had to literally get out and drive him around in a car in the middle of the night to get him to calm down and go to sleep. It was bad planning on our part. We should have arrived at the hotel much earlier so Victor would have had time to adjust and expend some energy doing something active, such as swimming. We would often have a problem with him on the plane as well. He would want to get up out of his seat or grab the hair of the people in front of us. I have learned to bring food and gadgets on the plane, so he is always accommodated. His symptoms have gotten better with age. On a recent trip to Hawaii he was no more hyper or fidgety than any other passenger on the plane.

Here are my tips:

- Bring toys, activities and food along with you in the car or on the plane.
- Familiarity helps. Plan ahead and let your child know where you’re going. Also consider repeat visits to the same destination.
- Get to your destination early and do something active, so your child is ready for bed at night.
- Modify your own expectations to accommodate your child and his or her needs.
- Expect the first night to be rough.

—Bradford Bradley,
Frankfort, Illinois



Have someone else pack for you to make sure you’re packing appropriately.

Pack smart, pack light

Taking a vacation with a child who has AD/HD can often be challenging for a parent. I found I could not fully relax on vacation. I was always in a rush to get ready for the trip, packing the night before and forgetting things, even with a packing list. If I didn’t check the suitcase, my son would have twenty shirts packed and no underwear. On the vacation I never knew if my son would be lost in a crowd, take off from the hotel room, or meet up with friends who would offer him alcohol or drugs.

I learned to do the following:

- Start talking about the trip two months in advance, and say what has to be done.
- Use a packing list with easy-to-read categories (shirts, pants, toiletries, etc.) and checklists.
- Bring card games, handheld video games, books, or notebooks for downtime on the trip.
- Be clear on rules to follow for each location.

- Meet the friends and families of any new friends your child makes on the trip.

—Pam Carter,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Relying on a wingman

My spouse and I learned quickly that vacationing with two sons with AD/HD is different from vacationing alone. Our sons’ goals are usually to find interesting activities, whereas we parents just want to find time to rest and relax. We learned to search for something that would help all of us meet our goals on vacation. And we found it during one vacation in Panama City, Florida. During that trip we rode on a treasure ship that had activities with adult leaders planned for the children. While the parents were able to relax, the children were entertained by the activities available to them, including a treasure hunt. We also had a wonderful time at a family retreat week because our children were assigned buddies to accompany them. They had fun activities while we were able to rest or attend small group activities. We also like the descriptions for the

Disney cruises, as activities are planned for the children and the parents don’t have to supervise them the entire time.

Tips:

- Keep children entertained and out of trouble. We bought twin DVD players that can play separately or together. One child prefers movies, while the other prefers games.
- Bag complete sets of clothes individually and give one bag to each child each day. We also pack spare clothes separately for unplanned emergencies. Pop-up laundry baskets can help keep the dirty clothes in one spot.
- Never, ever leave home without copies of prescriptions and doublechecking medications. The medication bag is on the packing list to doublecheck before we leave for a trip.
- Schedule planned breaks during the car trips. If the kids are younger, then think about stopping at restaurants with playgrounds.

- Kids with AD/HD like interesting activities while parents like to relax and rest. It's important to pick places, such as Chuck-E-Cheese, where kids can have a safe and contained place to burn energy while parents relax.

—*Lane and Loretta Buckner, Charlotte, North Carolina*

Treatment can make the difference

My son was diagnosed with AD/HD in first grade. He had just turned seven years old. Two days before we left for a two-week vacation on the Caribbean island of Curacao, he was diagnosed and given a prescription for medication. It was amazing. For the first time, he could multitask, but it didn't stop him from disappearing on the beach about thirty seconds before we were to leave. Looking far down the shoreline, I saw some old boats. It was where I would expect Michael to go. Sure enough, that's where he was. He had seen a pelican with a broken wing. After finding a dead fish, he was able to sit still long enough that the pelican took the fish out of his hand. He is currently thirteen years old,

an eighth grader, and he has made high honor roll for the first time.

Tips:

- Pack brightly colored shirts so the child stands out and can be easily spotted.
- Set limited physical boundaries as soon as you arrive; for example, "Stay in between this large rock and that tree. Do not go outside the 'box'."
- Use walkie-talkies to maintain constant contact.
- Take advantage of the child's interests. My son loves marine life, so we bought him a book on Caribbean fish. He spent hours finding fish he had seen during snorkeling trips.
- Schedule regular "quiet time" each day so the child can refocus and keep from getting overstimulated.

—*Tabitha Stone, Carterville, Illinois*

Managing vacation meltdowns

We have a lot of trouble with our son melting down two to three days into vacation.

He'll say, "I want to go home," or "When are we going home?" He'll have mini emotional breakdowns, usually precipitated by being tired or overwhelmed, where he'll cry and cry for no reason. You feel just awful, but you know you have to tough it out to teach him that he can get through vacation and that vacation is fun.

Tips:

- Let children and teens pack what they want to bring, including their favorite things that make them feel at home.
- Allow them to partake in deciding each day's activity.
- Listen to them when they are tired, and be aware of their body language telling you they've had enough for the day.
- Count down the days with them so they know how many days of vacation are left.
- Reassure them they'll be home soon and back to the familiar surroundings and routines.
- Take them to familiar places while you're away (McDonald's, Target, Wal-Mart).

—*Nancy Merritt, Upper Pittsgrove, NJ* ●