



FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

“A (Very) Little R&R”

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Issue 96

May 2012

Who doesn't look forward to a good vacation, some much needed time off away from the daily grind (no biz emails other than the occasional glance at the iPhone)? What can be better than a little rest and relaxation on a beach somewhere, soaking up rays (with SPF 100), completely lost in a good book on the Kindle or a heated contest of Words with Friends on the iPad? (What was life before technology?) Sleeping late; sipping fruity cocktails with umbrellas by noon; dining well after normal suppertime; not passing on a dessert (or three); painting the town red by night with no curfews or bedtimes. And the best cure for that hangover is to start the next day all over again with a piping hot cup of joe, or better yet, a Bloody Mary or frozen Daiquiri by the pool.

Well, maybe a cool winter (or slightly warmer spring) ski trip to the mountains can compete. Swooshing down a rugged back country (or green) slope or even finding your inner-youth on a board or snowmobile; recovering from the newfound athleticism with a little après-ski at the lodge and a hot toddy or two; fine dining at the elegant lodge restaurant; and bundling up by the fireplace with a nightcap, while mapping out the morning trails to start the next day anew. Then again, a quick jaunt to Vegas always hits the right tone where Paris, Venice, Bellagio, or Monte Carlo is just a short flight away. Befriending strangers at the craps table who are cheering for the same “hard eight;” rooting for that three-team parlay to hit in the sports book; enjoying an hour (or five) of luxurious pampering at the spa; catching the latest in world-class entertainment (is Wayne Newton still headlining?); hitting the “gentlemen's” club with the guys where three-foot rules don't apply (oops...wrong distribution list); savoring a fantastic multi-course meal, while counting up the winnings for the day. And remember, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas!

DON'T FORGET THE KIDDOS...

Once small kids enter the equation, the whole vacation dynamic completely changes. (I'm not sure the term “vacation” applies any longer.) Even the most efficient of packers notice their bags grow exponentially as diapers, wipes, pull-ups, tushy cream, children Tylenol (still recalled?), and countless outfits (to give cute options throughout) begin to add up. Not to mention, who can leave home without Texas Lion, Heart Doggie, Baby, Bunny, Alvin (Simon AND Theodore), Good Night Moon, Moo Baa La La La, Morris the Moose, a life supply of stickers, activity books, numerous balls, and various snacks (some that may be confiscated at security)? While luggage with wheels makes strolls through the airport far easier, it hardly matters when two strollers, a carseat, and a booster (with a back) get added to the normal baggage load. (Once we checked the carseat, and it never made it to our destination so now everything gets gate-checked.)

As if security is a ton of fun to start with, it becomes more of an adventure when kids are too scared to walk through the body scanner or freak out because Pooh has to be screened with the other carry-ons. A portable DVD player (or iPad) can provide hours of in-flight (in-car) babysitting, but try explaining why SpongeBob cannot be turned on until the plane is mid-air or why she can't find out if Plankton finally steals the Krusty Krab formula because we are landing. That “kids-under-two-fly-fee” is a wonderful cost-savings, though toddlers rarely enjoy sitting on laps for three plus hours and begin to yell “walkie” before the plane takes off. By the way, flight attendants do not look kindly to kids running up and down aisles (with adults chasing behind).

While other passengers generally (fake) smile at cute children, more than a few become panic-stricken when they end up behind them in line for security or find that they are seated within 10 rows of our family. (I remember being on the other side of those grimaces.) The words “sorry about this” hardly seem adequate and simply pretending that everything is fine and we have the

situation well under control often works best. Airport gift shops offer a vast array of appealing (overpriced) items that they simply must have. (What kid can live without that comfy plane pillow?) After another challenging schlep to the baggage claim, the rental car provides more entertainment as carseats must be inserted in record time, while other travelers “patiently” wait behind in the drive-out line. While most people experience some form of jet lag (or other post-flight traumas), kids are no exception. After all, meal and nap schedules get interrupted and their ears get clogged too with no logical way to clear them. Car trips definitely have advantages, though repeated bathroom stops along the way can turn a normal two hour drive into more like five (and the “are we there yet?” seem to come more frequently).

SO LET THE “FUN” BEGIN

The hotel offers more opportunities for wild exploration as spacious lobbies, long hallways to the rooms, ice machines, and simple elevator rides translate into time to unwind (with “harmless” rowdiness) that often bring new scowls from annoyed guests. The sleeping arrangements make for some interesting dilemmas. Our five year old likes to sleep with us which means I get kicked more often than usual and get even less use of the covers (not that I’m complaining, honey). The baby (19 months) still sleeps in a hotel-provided crib that looks about as comfortable as a bed of nails and so she wakes up (sometimes screaming, sometimes just howling) throughout the night, much to the chagrin of the neighbors on either side of us. She has yet to notice that her sister gets the better sleeping deal, but seems thrilled to have my undivided attention early in the a.m. when we hit the hallway running (literally) to let mom and sis sleep (and without any considerations for vacationers and their useless “Do Not Disturb” signs). Frankly anyone who is still in bed at 6:30 a.m. is wasting the day away...except for you, sweetie). By the way, hotels can learn a thing or two about baby-proofing (as our prior calls to 911 can illustrate).

Kid-friendly activities often provide the highlights of these vacations. Amusement parks and zoos can be a blast until the heat, long lines, and dirty restrooms bring back the tantrums (though the kids are usually OK). Children museums seem more fun in their website descriptions and, of course, they are never located in close proximity to the hotel. Ski school provides a nice long (very costly) activity, though schlepping multiple skis, poles, boots, helmets, and gloves (and backpacks with cute outfit options) in ice or slush can be trying, and the wrong ski instructor means a long day of tears. Meanwhile, day care is rarely fun for the baby which means tons of worrying on the mountain (as if my getting down the basic green is not worry enough). By and large, swimming at the hotel is the best activity and a good slide can turn a good pool into a great pool (or so I’ve been told). Of course, we are years away from the point where we can lounge in chairs with a good book (or iPad), while our “expert” swimmers fend for themselves.

TOTALLY WORTH IT

Once eating and nap schedules get messed up from the travel day, they never get back on track. And while hotels are generally good about having milk available at all hours, expect to pay about the same price as one would for a glass of fine wine or 18-year old scotch. When babysitters are needed (weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, we are at wit’s end, etc.), beware that those crocodile tears are sure to follow due to the presence of a stranger in a strange place without the normal comforts of home (but I am usually OK after an hour or so). Still the unbridled childlike enthusiasm, the pure joy and laughter captured at various times during the trip, the countless Facebook “likes” from the newly posted vacation album make all the initial stress and aggravation worthwhile. My oldest generally cries during the car ride back to the airport (or once we hit the freeway home) and we usually take that as a sign of a good time that she wished was not ending (and she’s always happy to get home to Fuzzy, Angry Bird and her other “friends” left behind). The baby just goes with the flow, happy to be back home with plenty of room for “walkie.” As for us, we really (or is it rarely?) are ready to hit the daily grind again (but could sure use a “vacation from our vacation”).

***FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH** is a publication of Brounes & Associates focusing on not much of anything other than personal anecdotes, musings, and mindless thoughts about life. Please call Ron at 713-962-9986 (ron@ronbrounes.com) for questions and/or comments, and check out www.ronbrounes.com for earlier issues and for financially-oriented pieces. Apologies in advance if we see any of you on an airplane. Just remember, we have everything under control.*