



HBF Healthy Family Holidays 2017

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Contents

3 GET HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER BY GOING ON HOLIDAY

Introduction

4 HEALTHY UPSIDE TO FAMILY DOWNTIME

Parents believe holidays are key to family health

5 THE HOLIDAY UPSIDE FOR KIDS

The benefits kids get from taking a family vacation

6 THE BENEFITS FOR PARENTS

The grown-ups get a lot of value, too

7 HOLIDAYS ARE GOOD FOR YOU. YES, IT'S TRUE!

Is this the excuse you've been waiting for?

9 'STUFF' IS NICE, BUT EXPERIENCES ARE NICER

Research shows you gain happiness from experience. The experts explain why

11 WHEN HOLIDAYING WITH YOUNG FAMILIES, WHERE DO WE GO?

Favourite destinations for WA families

13 HOT SPOTS FOR YOUR NEXT WA FAMILY HOLIDAY

Top holiday tips from Tourism WA and WA Visitor Centre

15 WHAT STOPS US TRAVELLING?

Common reasons for not holidaying

16 GET MORE BANG FOR YOUR HOLIDAY BUCKS

Easy ways to get more value

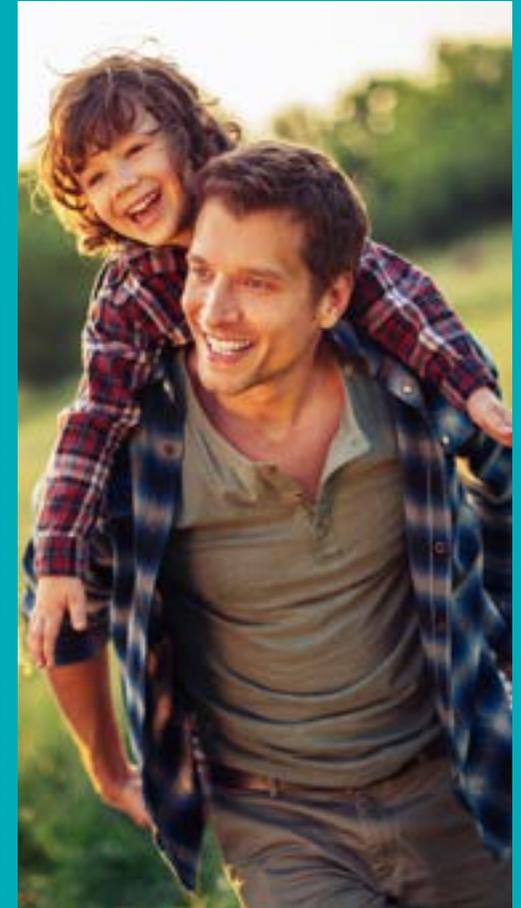
18 MONEY TIPS: EASY WAYS TO BUDGET FOR YOUR NEXT BREAK

Mother, travel writer and marketer

Sharon Gourlay shares her money-saving tips

20 MEDIA CONTACT, CONTRIBUTORS AND SOURCES

For further information



Get healthier and happier by going on holiday

Health and happiness – two very important goals for families everywhere. In order to better understand the factors that contribute to achieving health and happiness we surveyed over 400 Western Australian parents of 0-12 year olds, and enlisted a team of child and family health experts to better understand the impact family holidays actually have on kids, parents and families as a whole.

In this report, you'll find the results and insights from our Healthy Family Holidays Survey. You'll discover how holidays not only give us time to relax and have fun, but how they benefit our physical and emotional health, and how they can cultivate greater feelings of lasting happiness and connection. And to make going on a holiday easier, we've listed the top places to visit and handy hints on how to save for your next family trip.





Healthy upside to family downtime



Nine in 10

WA parents believe regular holidays are important for their family's health. **Five in 10 believe they are very important.**



Parents say having **'quality time with no distractions'** (33%), **'time to de-stress'** (30%) and **'a break from normal routine'** (26%) are the top reasons why regular holidays are good for their family's health.



The majority of parents (86%) believe **parents and children benefit equally from family holidays.**

The holiday upside for kids

A getaway is an exciting time for many families. Ninety-two per cent of parents believe holidays are important for their family's health, with these benefits topping the list:

Holiday health benefits for children



89% Creating happy memories



73% Something to look forward to



84% Learning/experiencing new things



62% Feeling closer to other family members



80% Quality time with family



55% Getting to be physically active

The benefits for parents

WA parents believe family holidays are as important for grown-ups as they are for kids, with parents deriving similar benefits from family holidays as their children.

Holiday health benefits for parents



85% Quality time with family



69% Getting to relax



84% Creating happy memories



62% Learning/experiencing new things



69% Something to look forward to



51% Feeling closer to other family

Holidays are good for you. Yes, it's true!

Holidays, it turns out, are good for your health.

In fact, 92% of HBF Healthy Family Holidays survey participants felt that taking regular family holidays was important to their family's health, while 52% felt it was very important. And the scientific research supports these statistics, with better heart health, mental wellbeing and connected relationships being the positive outcomes from taking a vacation.

CHRONIC AND HEART HEALTH

[Dr Neda Meshgin](#), General Practitioner and Practice Principal, shared, "Chronic health conditions are on the rise and we're finding the age of patients presenting with chronic conditions getting younger and younger, with 25-50 year olds increasingly at risk of diabetes and heart disease."

Dr Meshgin went on to cite a 2000 study, published in [Psychosomatic Medicine](#), and

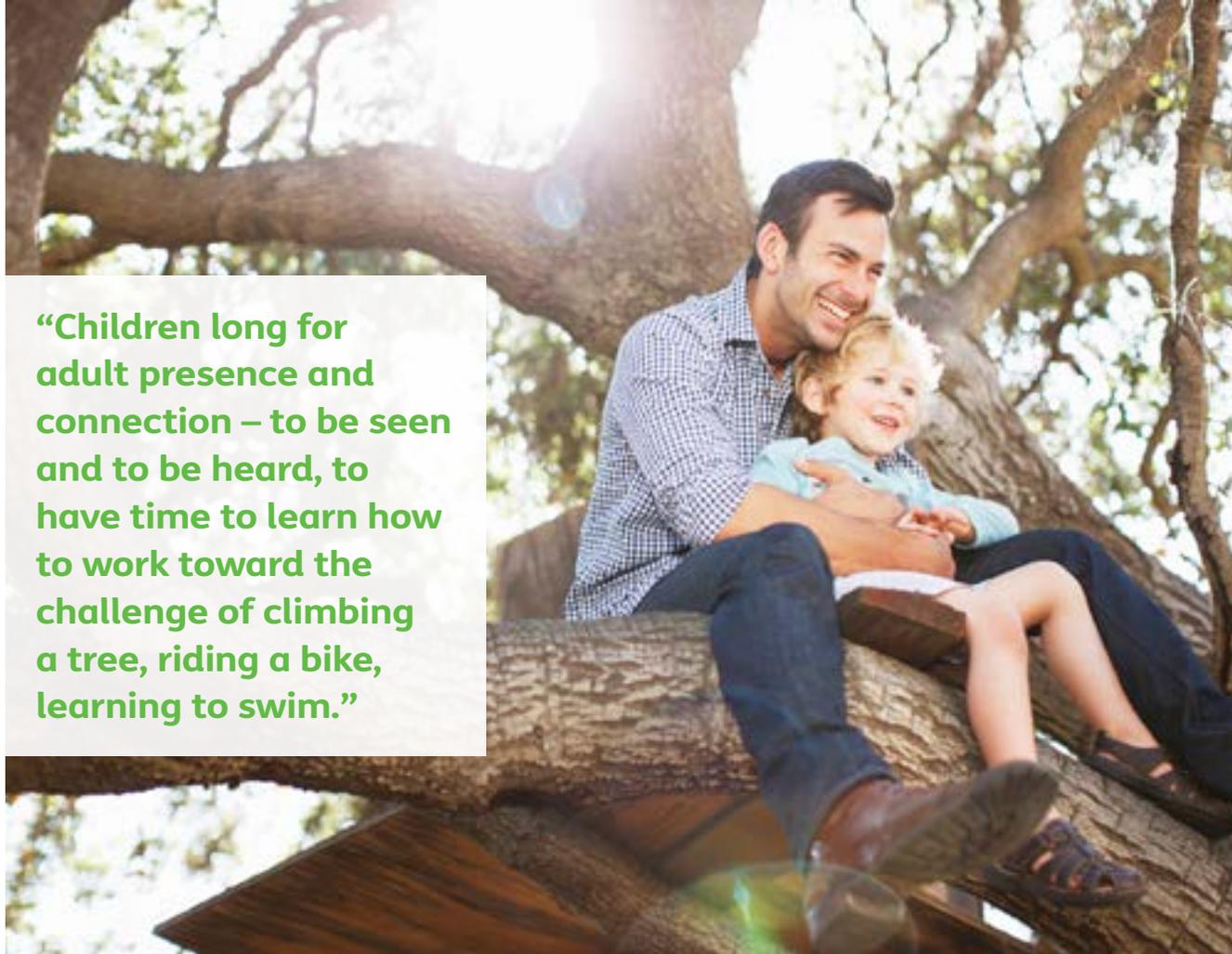
advised, "Men who didn't take an annual vacation had a 20% higher risk of death and about a 30% greater risk of death from heart disease. Women who failed to take holidays also suffered similar negative heart-health implications."

IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH FOR MUM AND DAD

Taking regular holidays left 30% of the HBF Healthy Family Holidays survey participants reporting that they felt more rested, relaxed and de-stressed. [Prof. Jennie Hudson](#), Director of the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University, says, "Some theories suggest holidays contribute to overall life satisfaction. One theory is that holidays allow us to have more control over our daily activities. Perceived control is an important predictor of mental health."

Holidays can also positively impact mental health by opening families up to new experiences, as reported by 12% of survey participants. "Experiencing new things can lead to new learning, and this can increase mastery and resourcefulness," says Prof. Hudson. "Long-term or chronic stress can have a negative impact on an individual's health and wellbeing. Holidays can provide an opportunity to experience a break from chronic work or routine stress too."

According to Dr Meshgin, "Perhaps the most significant health issue impacting 25-50 year olds remains mental health problems, often during what should be their most productive work years, as well as when they are parenting." Positively, Dr Meshgin said, "In my practice experience, it isn't uncommon for families who vacation together to see an improvement in their mental health, which in turn can improve other health parameters as well as increasing motivation to reset lifestyle goals and regain energy." ►



“Children long for adult presence and connection – to be seen and to be heard, to have time to learn how to work toward the challenge of climbing a tree, riding a bike, learning to swim.”

BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

The survey results showed that a third of participants reported a benefit from the bonding time experienced while on holiday. Combined with feeling more relaxed, it is easy to see how holidays can help build better family connections.

Prof. Hudson explains, “If during the holiday the parent is more engaged with their child, listens to them more and talks to them about their new experiences, then this is likely to have positive benefits. Experiencing positive events and emotions together is also likely to lead to a more positive mood and a stronger relationship.”

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CHILDREN

Stress isn’t just an adult affliction. According to [Dr Cathie Harrison](#), Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the Australian Catholic University, “The rapid pace of family life means that children are functioning at higher levels of stress and arousal from earlier ages.”

With the fast pace of modern living and ever-growing reliance on electronic devices, children are also suffering from a lack of rich conversation. Dr Harrison explains, “Children can use the language of direction and instruction, but they don’t have the capacity for rich conversation,

wide vocabulary and expressive language. Australian Early Development Census data also indicates increased vulnerability regarding social and emotional development and lack of resilience in children.”

Quality time on holiday, when we go slower and put the devices down, is also a great opportunity for building a stronger family connection. Dr Harrison explains, “Children long for adult presence and connection – to be seen and to be heard, to have time to learn how to work toward the challenge of climbing a tree, riding a bike, learning to swim. Playing games together, like board games and hide and seek are both simple and profound opportunities for parents and children to learn together – valuable lessons in being more empathic, learning to wait, to share, to delight in another’s success.”

Author, Parenting Educator and Resilience Specialist, [Maggie Dent](#), recommends a digital detox as a way to help foster connection between parents and children. “It has become a bit of an expectation that people will continue to check their emails and be available on their mobiles when on their break. Being able to switch off is important for parents and kids.”

SHORT OR LONG BREAKS?

While the thought of a long break can be tempting, you don’t necessarily need to spend two weeks away to experience the health benefits of a family holiday. Eleven per cent of survey participants said their best family holiday involved no more than three nights away.

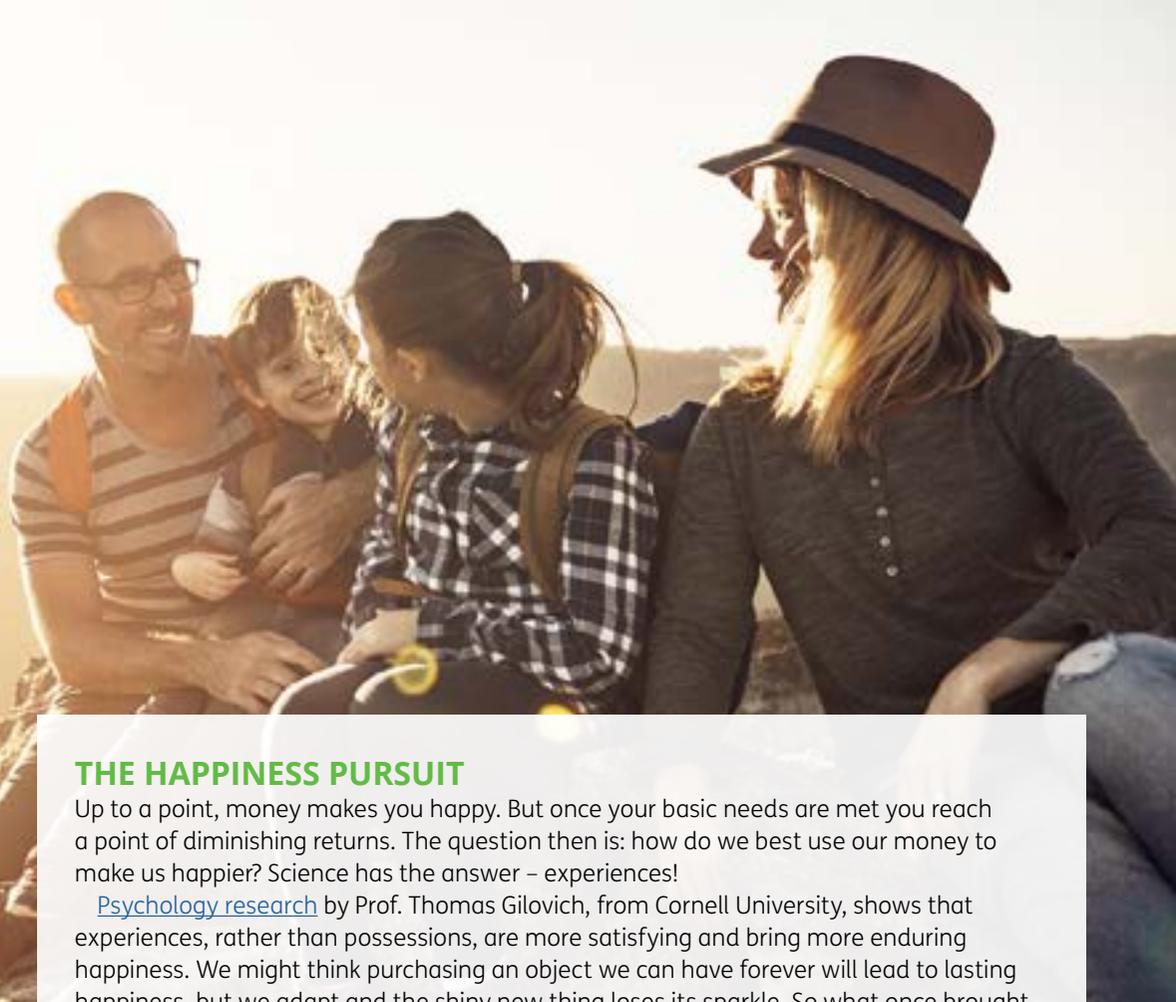
Dent says, “Families are struggling with busyness, and the ever-growing demands of our consumerist, fast-paced society can make it a challenge for people to take time off together and completely switch off from work.”

According to Dent, **“Family holidays can reduce stress and support children to have happy childhoods, but it’s best to ensure they aren’t overly ambitious, as this can also cause enormous stress.”**

If keeping holidays shorter means you can keep the holiday manageable, the takeaway is you should go for it. Depending on your circumstances it might be more beneficial than a longer family getaway. ■

‘Stuff’ is nice, but experiences are nicer

Consumerism would have you believe that the more ‘stuff’ you have, the happier you’ll be. But research shows that this isn’t the case, and in fact you’re more likely to cultivate happiness from experiences than material objects. Just another reason to consider taking that annual leave and going on a getaway with your family.



THE HAPPINESS PURSUIT

Up to a point, money makes you happy. But once your basic needs are met you reach a point of diminishing returns. The question then is: how do we best use our money to make us happier? Science has the answer – experiences!

[Psychology research](#) by Prof. Thomas Gilovich, from Cornell University, shows that experiences, rather than possessions, are more satisfying and bring more enduring happiness. We might think purchasing an object we can have forever will lead to lasting happiness, but we adapt and the shiny new thing loses its sparkle. So what once brought us pleasure to begin with, eventually stops giving us the same shoppers’ high. On the other hand, experiences give us memories, long after the actual event, and this cultivates more enduring levels of happiness.

WHY ARE FAMILY HOLIDAYS SUCH GREAT EXPERIENCES?

Family holidays are the perfect experiential purchase for health and happiness, and the 86% of respondents who believed both parent and child equally benefited from a family holiday can’t be wrong.

According to HBF survey participants, learning new things and creating happy memories were among the top benefits of family holidays (84% and 89% respectively, for children and 62% and 84% for parents).

Shared experiences and positive memories can also help to build resilience within children. [Dr Cathie Harrison](#), Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the Australian Catholic University, explains, “Positive memories give children a stronger ►



“Positive memories give children a stronger sense of who they are in the world, that they are valued and can make a difference.”

sense of who they are in the world, that they are valued and can make a difference. Positive memories can support resilience and help children through the tough times. Memories are a shared bond. They build the strength of the collective so the people within it can withstand and pull together in the tough times.”

Lloyd Fernandez, Clinical and Counselling Psychologist, and Coordinator of Psychological Services at [Ngala](#), explains how the unique benefits of holidays in particular can be a healthy family bonding experience, “On holidays we change the lens of our experiences. We leave behind our usual schedules and routines, and instead, take

with us an openness to adventure, the unknown and new experiences. Holidays especially enable children to soak up more of their parents who drop the ‘traffic manager’ persona and are themselves more relaxed.”

Holidays can also help foster happiness through connection. “Families that go away together are exposed to different cultures, environments and people. This opens up opportunity for communication between children and their parents, which helps to foster greater connection and understanding,” explains Fernandez.

There are also other benefits to shared connection. According to [Prof. Jennie Hudson](#), Director of the

Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University, “Memories and stories shape who we are. Holidays can provide opportunities for children to discover new information about the world and about how they cope with situations. Talking about the family’s positive experiences together also help to build relationships. Not the event itself necessarily, but the talking about it.”

DEVELOPING MEMORIES

Creating memories on holidays can also help memory development in children. Author, Parenting Educator and Resilience Specialist, [Maggie Dent](#) explains, “Our memories are anchored much more deeply when there are strong emotions present. That is why powerful, scary memories anchor so deeply in the brain alongside those memories that were accompanied by exquisite joy. And positive memories are also formed when we repeat significantly positive experiences. That is why so many families return to the same campsite or holiday spot throughout childhood — it’s not just because they can’t think of anywhere else to go, but because memories are made from doing the same fun thing year after year.”

Besides happy memories, holidays can also help mental health. Dent explains, “Being able to recall such moments puts us back into the joy we felt at the time ... that is a wonderful protective factor against depression.”

Holidays also help to enhance social relationships and can play a big part in shaping a person’s identity. According to Fernandez, **“Neuroscience research tells us that brain development is not just a structural thing, but it’s dependant on quality experiences too; and this brain development also helps to shape a person’s identity.”** Fernandez goes on to explain that these social connections aren’t just limited to a child’s parents. “Family holidays can also include grandparents, other relatives and close family friends, which all help to foster a wider support system and deepen the bonds between a child and their other relatives.” ■



When holidaying with young families, where do we go?

WA families with kids aged 0-12 years have spoken, and here's what they revealed about their favourite family holidays.

The research

WHERE DID WE GO?

When asked to recount their favourite family holiday:

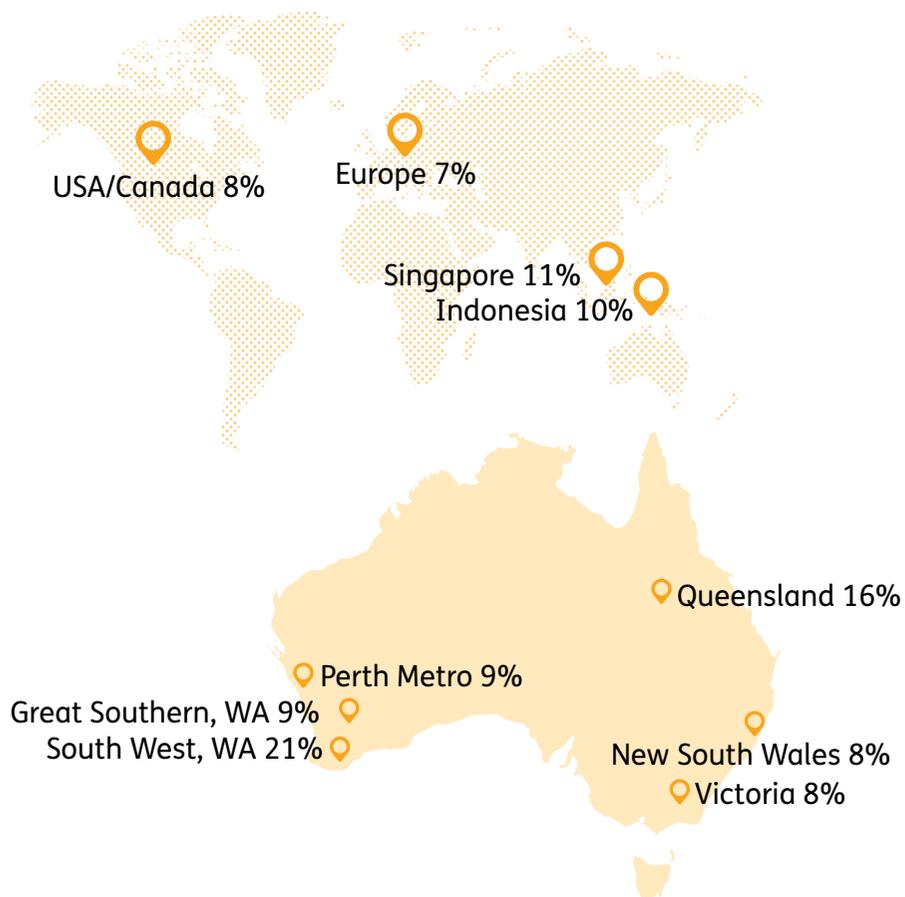
44% of parents said it was overseas,

42% had their best family holiday within WA and

28% enjoyed their best holiday as a family interstate.



WHERE DID WE ENJOY GOING?



WHO DID WE TRAVEL WITH?



78% **With our partner**
(decreased to 45% for those parents not currently married/de facto)



24% **Extended family**
(increased to 33% for families with kids four years and younger and 40% for those not currently married/de facto)



13% **With family friends**

HOW LONG DID WE GO FOR?

74% of families travelled within the last two years, and the medium length of their holiday was 10 nights.

For trips in WA it was five nights, interstate was nine nights and overseas was 14 nights.



WHERE DID WE PREFER TO STAY?



50%

Hotel or resort (increased to 74% when holidaying overseas)



24%

Friend or relative's property



20%

Rented property



15%

Caravan or campervan (increased to 26% when holidaying in WA)



9%

Motel



9%

Camping (increased to 20% when holidaying in WA)

Hot spots for your next WA family holiday

As one of the largest states in the world, Western Australia is a fantastic choice for a family getaway, and it's easy to see why WA was the destination of choice for 42% of survey participants. WA has great weather, an amazing diversity of experiences and landscapes, including an abundance of white sandy beaches. Our friends at [Tourism WA](#) and the [WA Visitor Centre](#) shared with us some tips for young WA families.

OCEAN EXPERIENCES

If your family are fans of all things ocean, WA has many perfect places to swim, surf, snorkel and more:

- Explore the pristine beaches of Rottnest Island.
- Take a boat cruise and see the dolphins of Koombana Bay, Bunbury.
- Enjoy popular swimming spots in the calm and protected waters of Geographe Bay in Dunsborough and Little Beach near Albany.

FOR THE CULTURE BUFFS

If you want your kids to learn about our heritage, Tourism WA suggests experiencing Aboriginal customs and storytelling at The Kodja Place in Kojonup and the Warden Aboriginal Centre in Yallingup.

CALLING NATURE LOVERS

If your family enjoys spending vacations out in the green room, Tourism WA recommends the following escapes:

- Explore the scenic Perth Hills, just 45 minutes inland from Perth, where you'll find beautiful national parks and walking trails.
- Walk among, or climb, the tall timbers and get a bird's eye view of towering tingle trees on the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk between Denmark and Walpole. Suspended 40 metres above the forest floor, the walk is the first of its kind in the world.
- If breathtaking scenery is what you're after, then check out the Mount Frankland Wilderness Lookout, Walpole. ►





CAPITAL CITY FAMILY FUN

If you want to experience Perth:

- Book a self-contained apartment in the port city of Fremantle, where you can spend a weekend exploring Fishing Boat Harbour or the Fremantle Markets. You can also book a tour with Fremantle Trams and be a little bit spooked on an evening ghost tour of the abandoned Fremantle Prison.
- Visit Caversham Wildlife Park, 30 minutes east of Perth where you can meet koalas, wombats, kangaroos and other native animals.
- Explore the wildflowers, playgrounds and picnic areas of Kings Park and Botanic Garden. A 2018 upgrade to Rio Tinto Naturescape at Kings Park will include a rock pool, paddling creek and seven-metre high walkway, and climbing ropes.

ADVENTURE SEEKERS

For the family that's happy to work up a sweat by foot, consider exploring:

- The Bibbulmun Track, which starts in Kalamunda.
- The Leeuwin Naturaliste Ridge which stretches from Busselton to Augusta.
- Castle Rock in the Porongurup Range.

“If your family are fans of all things ocean, WA has many perfect places to swim, surf, snorkel and more.”

WA parents believe the best ways to ensure a healthy family holiday is to:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 20% Relax/don't stress | 9% Don't rush/don't overschedule/do allow flexibility |
| 15% Be physically active | 7% Plan/organise in advance |
| 11% Get outdoors/breathe fresh air | 7% See new sights/experience new things |
| 11% Have fun/enjoy yourself | 6% Keep busy/do lots of activities |
| 10% Do things the whole family enjoys | 6% Eat good food |
| 10% Walk lots/holiday at places where amenities are within walking distance | 5% Have balance between activities and relaxing |
| 9% Spend time together | 4% Have access to swimming/pool |
| 9% Eat healthy food and drink | |

MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES FOR WA FAMILIES WHEN CHOOSING A HOLIDAY DESTINATION:

63%  Family-friendly accommodation

48%  Scenery

55%  Weather

42%  Beaches (54% in WA)

51%  Easy to get around

41%  Restaurants/Cafes/Bars (27% in WA)



What stops us travelling?

The top six barriers to taking more family holidays.



84%
Cost



48%
Getting time off work



43%
Being restricted to school holidays



22%
Finding a pet sitter/holiday destination that is pet-friendly



18%
Finding a house sitter/leaving house unattended



18%
Family commitments on the weekends, such as kids' sport

Get more bang for your holiday bucks

For 84% of survey responders, cost was the biggest barrier to taking more family holidays. But making your holiday dollars stretch further may be easier than you think.

HIGH-VALUE EXPERIENCES

Despite the physical and emotional benefits of family vacations, parents still struggle to take regular family breaks. HBF's survey found seven in 10 WA families had a family holiday at least once per year and four in 10 made multiple trips. Cost and getting time off work were often the biggest hurdles to overcome.

Despite cost ranking as the most common barrier, a family holiday doesn't have to be extravagant to have positive health benefits, as [Prof. Jennie Hudson](#), Director of the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University explains, "A trip that involves parents and children doing activities together is the important thing."

Emphasising the value of holidays and time together, over more 'stuff' is key. [Dr Cathie Harrison](#), Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the Australian Catholic University, reiterates, "Children benefit from less stuff and more family time." She suggests that when buying gifts, parents consider "Giving passes to a museum or the zoo, or a ferry ticket for the family. That way we build experiences and disrupt the consumerism that is having such a negative impact on children's wellbeing. Kids need more shared experiences, especially outdoors. I think some families are trying but we need to talk more about and support this more." ►



CONSIDER KEEPING IT LOCAL

Forty-two per cent of families spent their favourite family holidays in WA – and that's not surprising. Among the many things WA has going for it are some of the best beaches in the world. A beachside getaway is a great holiday for children of all ages. Don't forget to pack sunscreen, hats and beach toys like buckets and spades – it'll save you from having to buy gear once you arrive.

MAKE SMART INTERNATIONAL CHOICES

Before embarking on an international trip, ensure you do your research and plan accordingly:

- Sign up to an airline email mailing list and get advanced notice of discounted flights and holiday packages.
- Learn from the wins (and mistakes) your family and friends have made by asking them for their accommodation and entertainment recommendations.

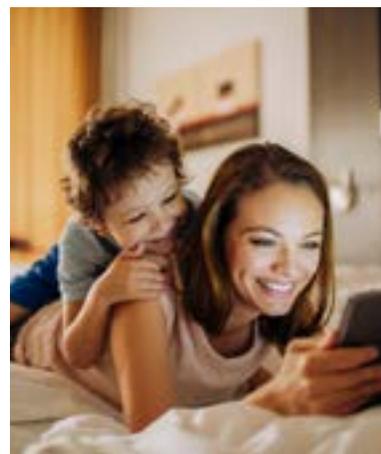


LOOK FOR FREE LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Whether you're staying in WA, heading interstate or venturing overseas, consider making the most of free local attractions. Yes, it's tempting to go to all of the touristy places, but they can be costly. Do your research before you go – swimming pools, playgrounds, walking tours, markets, local bushwalks, galleries, or even a local festival, can all be a fun, free way to spend some holiday time with your family.

PLAN SOME DOWNTIME – FOR YOU AND THE KIDS

A holiday is a great opportunity to (finally) build some breathing space into what is typically a busy, activity-filled life. Schedule fewer activities than you might normally plan if you were travelling alone, and pack a few games for the kids (a deck of cards, paints, or a book perhaps) to keep them entertained on one of the down days.



CHOOSE YOUR ACCOMMODATION WITH FAMILY IN MIND

Renting a house or an apartment can be a great alternative to a hotel room. A house, in particular, can provide plenty of privacy and home-style creature comforts (like a washing machine). Access to kitchen and cooking facilities also helps you stretch your holiday food budget by letting you enjoy more healthy meals at home. Eating out for every meal can quickly add to the holiday budget, and if your kids are picky eaters, it can be less stressful to make their favourite meal at home.

Money tips: Easy ways to budget for your next break

Saving for your holiday and making those dollars stretch further doesn't have to be difficult. We spoke with mother, travel writer and marketer [Sharon Gourlay](#) and she shared her top tips to achieving regular family adventures.



SAVVY HOLIDAY SAVING TIPS

- 1. Cut back** It seems obvious, but we all seem to have weaknesses when it comes to spending money on things we don't really need. To begin, spend a week by writing down everything you spend your money on. Carry a notebook (or use an app on your phone) and make sure to record everything! It's amazing to see what you spend your money on – from the chocolate bar and magazine at the checkouts, through to that daily afternoon coffee. All of these little things can really add up to significant amounts.
- 2. Have a budget and use cash** Drawing a budget will help you set limits and stick to a savings goal. Dropping the plastic and using cash also helps you keep track of what you're really spending. Nowadays, it's all too easy to tap for every purchase and it's not until you check your balance that you know how much you've spent. "Cash helps me keep a better grip on how much I'm spending," explains Sharon.
- 3. Find ways to motivate yourself into sticking with your savings plan** "Something that has worked for me in the past is having a poster up somewhere visible, which I colour in as I save more money until I reach my goal. I loved being able to colour in more squares as I reached every target." Another motivator is to change your screensaver to a photo of your goal destination – that way you're reminded every time you switch on your computer.



STRETCH YOUR HOLIDAY DOLLARS FURTHER

- 1. Check out Airbnb** A big expense of a family holiday is the accommodation cost. Not only are you still likely paying your own rent or mortgage, but now you have to house your family at your destination. Checking out what you can get on Airbnb is often wise. You're likely to find a budget-friendly option – or even if you find something for a similar price of a hotel you'll be able to save money by taking advantage of cooking meals. Breakfast at home for a family of four, over a week, can go a long way to taking your holiday budget further.
- 2. Travel slower** "Staying put in places for longer can save money on accommodation, transport, daily living expenses and attractions – everything!"
- 3. Choose carefully** Don't rush, and do your research. Choosing cheaper destinations, travelling outside of peak times, and comparing accommodation rates between suppliers can make a huge difference to how much your trip ends up costing. ■

To our contributors, thank you

[Maggie Dent](#)

[Lloyd Fernandez](#)

[Sharon Gourlay](#)

[Dr Cathie Harrison](#)

[Prof. Jennie Hudson](#)

[Dr Neda Meshgin](#)

[Tourism Western Australia](#)

[Western Australia Visitor Centre](#)

External sources

[*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*](#)

[*Journal of Psychological Science*](#)

[*Psychosomatic Medicine*](#)

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