

## Families Unite: Traveling With Your Extended Family Can Be A Blast

### Free Online Tools Can Help Plan The Ultimate Extended Family Vacation Or Reunion



(NAPSA)—Despite the country's economic woes, people aren't about to give up their summer vacations, as Americans are expected to embark on 322 million domestic leisure trips during summer 2009, according to the annual summer travel forecast by the U.S. Travel Association.<sup>1</sup> This is a slight decline of 2.2 percent from summer 2008, but U.S. Travel stipulates that leisure travel remains resilient in the current economic climate.

Even with these high numbers, people are still looking for good deals and bargains for their trips—even more so than in years past. Some are finding that traveling with a large family can help offset travel costs with price breaks (the number of people for price breaks varies among destinations), special family seating at restaurants and airline promotions.

Extended family travel, while nothing new, is becoming more popular than ever. A survey published by the online travel company Orbitz LLC found that trips with extended family members are the top choice for group travel.<sup>2</sup> Whether it's for an old-fashioned family reunion at the local park, a cross-country trip to your family's favorite theme park or even a cruise, families vacationing together provide comfort in times of uncertainty.

There's a lot of excitement that comes with a family trip but planning and managing all the details for such a large party can be quite a task. If your family is like most, your sister is in Denver, your brother's family is in Toronto and your grandparents have retired to Florida. So making sure everyone is on the same page can be challenging if you don't take advantage of technology to help you manage the process and make it a less stressful experience for everyone.

• **Where should we go?** There are many free planning tools and services on the Web that are easy to use and will keep you and your family in touch and able to share ideas from one central source. For example, with Microsoft Office Live Workspace,

your family can create a spot to store "to-do lists" and share ideas for campsites, points of interest to visit, potluck items for a family reunion and much more—all for free. Families can also use Microsoft Office OneNote, a digital notebook that provides one place for people to gather their notes and information as well as a powerful search tool to find what they are looking for quickly.

• **How will we all stay in the loop?** Take the burden off Aunt Mary, the trusted planner of every family reunion and trip, and avoid hundreds of calls to her for trip information. She can easily build a Web site in no time, using Microsoft Office Live Small Business—no HTML knowledge needed. The site can showcase maps, directions and even photos so you can reminisce after the trip is over and you are back home.

• **What should we do?** Plan a fun-filled schedule using your family trip workspace—but remember to also add in time for breaks and naps! Family time can be wonderful but intense, so when posting schedules online, make sure to put in personal time for everyone to rest prior to the next outing.

• **Remind me—when are we going again?** Create save-the-date cards using online templates from Microsoft Office Online<sup>3</sup> to serve as reminders of vacation dates, reservations and other important information. You can also create fun family postcards for the kids to send to their friends from your vacation spot!

Whether your family decides on a destination vacation this summer or simply a "staycation" to explore your own town, you can pinch your pennies in a way that doesn't diminish your fun. If planning a large family meet-up is what you choose, keep it simple and let free technology tools serve as your virtual travel agent.

*For more information about free online tools to help plan your family getaway, visit Microsoft Office Live at <http://www.office.live.com>.*

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Travel Association, published May 13, 2009, <http://www.ustravel.org/pressmedia/pressrec.asp?Item=968>

<sup>2</sup> Orbitz Traveler Update Report, published Feb. 2008

<sup>3</sup> Users need Microsoft Office to use the templates or can download a free trial copy from <http://www.office.microsoft.com>.