



Preparation for a Bon Voyage

It's time for families to vacation together, to celebrate weeks off from work and school. Yet often parents of special needs children are hesitant to take trips or vacations due to their child's challenges. For instance, they often feel that vacation resorts may not have the accommodations they need, or that visits to relatives or friends may be more stressful than they're worth.

Parents shouldn't have to put their travel plans on hold. Rather, a vacation provides a great opportunity to expose your child to a world they've never experienced before. Your child can learn new things and have fun, while bringing the family together at the same time.

Traveling with a special needs child does take some planning. Parents have to ask themselves: What does my child like to do? Where would he like to go? Are there any hotels or destinations in that area that would accommodate my child's needs? There are many resorts that cater to children with special needs. (See the sidebar below.)

Here are some tips parents can follow to make their vacation one that their child will remember:

- Before the vacation starts, parents should explain to their child where they're going and what they'll do there.
- The vacation schedule should be as detailed as possible so the child knows what to expect. Special needs children often follow a daily regimen and become easily upset when there's a deviation from that schedule.
- The schedule should also include time for the child to rest, indicating when and for how long.
- Parents should watch for signs that their child may become overstimulated. While they want their child to have fun, parents should set boundaries to avoid overload.

By following these guidelines, parents can spend less time worrying about their child during vacation and more time enjoying it.

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Recommended Destinations:

Sesame Place (www.sesameplace.com)

Challenge Aspen (www.challengeaspen.org)

Holiday World & Splashin' Safari (www.holidayworld.com/access.html#pass page)

Vacation Home Rentals (www.discovervacationhomes.com)

Smugglers' Notch Resort (www.smuggs.com)

Surfer's Healing (www.surfershealing.org)

Autism on the Seas (www.alumnicruises.org/Autism/Autism_Home.htm)

Finger Lakes Wellness Center and Health Spa (www.giftsretreats.com)

Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium (www.mote.org)