

# Are All-Inclusive Vacations Educational?

by Judy Arnall



"Please respect our school schedule when planning your family vacations." This was a note in the September newsletter when my child signed up for school in junior high. He lasted two weeks before he decided to come home and unschool again. I was intrigued by the directive in the newsletter. I realize that a school has an institution to run, but are family vacations not a form of education as well? You bet they are! Maybe they don't meet the grade outcomes for that particular year, but who cares? If a child is learning, anything, what does it matter that it is not in a particular sequential, outcome-based school year?

Sure, a trip to Germany or Australia may go over well for getting school permission to go, but school officials tend to dismiss all-inclusive vacations as "not real learning." They are considered the junk-food of vacations. However, in unschooling, we don't put different types of studies on a pedestal. All learning is good, and all learning contributes to either knowledge acquisition or personal growth. So what do children learn on an all-inclusive vacation? Plenty!

We learn math by counting up all the calories from the desserts we consume. We also learn the properties of shapes and space when we find out which sand structures hold up best against beach waves. We learn factors and multiples when playing card games at night, and how to add and subtract with board games in the gaming lounges. We figure out Pythagorean theorems when trying to sink a ball in

the pool table's corner pocket, and we learn fractions when watching the bartender mix a virgin Mai Tai. (Then we launch a discussion about sex education when the kids ask why a drink is called a virgin something.)

We learn English by reading a suitcase of books, especially when all digital screens are purposefully not brought along for some much needed unplugged time. One child burned through 5 *Warrior* books in a 7 day all-inclusive. And the kids talk and listen more than they did at home. They hear real conversations and have heated debates with the adults about all kinds of things. I actually get to see the color of my gamer children's eyes instead of the back of their heads playing computer games all days because they make eye contact with me when speaking.

We learn social studies by discussions. Tons of discussions. Everything we see on vacation can spark a discussion. We see the poverty of the land during the bus ride of the airport transfer. We discuss governments, social structures, economies, and political regimes. We discuss if resorts help the local people or hurt the local people. We discuss how first world families can help third world families in real ways.

We learn science by playing with sand, snorkelling in fish pools, observing the natural wildlife of geckos, iguanas, skunks, and many small creatures in tidal pools. One child wondered why the sun set so fast and earlier around the equator than in the North at the same time of the year. They learn about lunar pull, and tides when they leave their favourite shirt on the beach and discover it gone the next time they look up. We discuss how it will perhaps turn up in Australia in five years. They learn about flight and turbulence and just how those monstrous airplanes get off the ground. I didn't take my first flight until age 29. My kids? They are flying veterans from the time they were 10 months-old.

We do physical education by swimming, snorkelling, playing beach volleyball, and hiking.

We do art by making sand creations, and drawing on paper during times we wait in the restaurant.

Yes, all-inclusive vacations are very educational. Sometimes, I feel that we learn more on a vacation than at home because we have long, uninterrupted periods of relaxed time together. I wonder if we could get our expenses reimbursed from our education taxes? Wouldn't that be nice?

Judy Arnall is a child development specialist focussing on non-punitive parenting and education practices. Read her blog at [www.unschoolingtouniversity.com](http://www.unschoolingtouniversity.com)

