

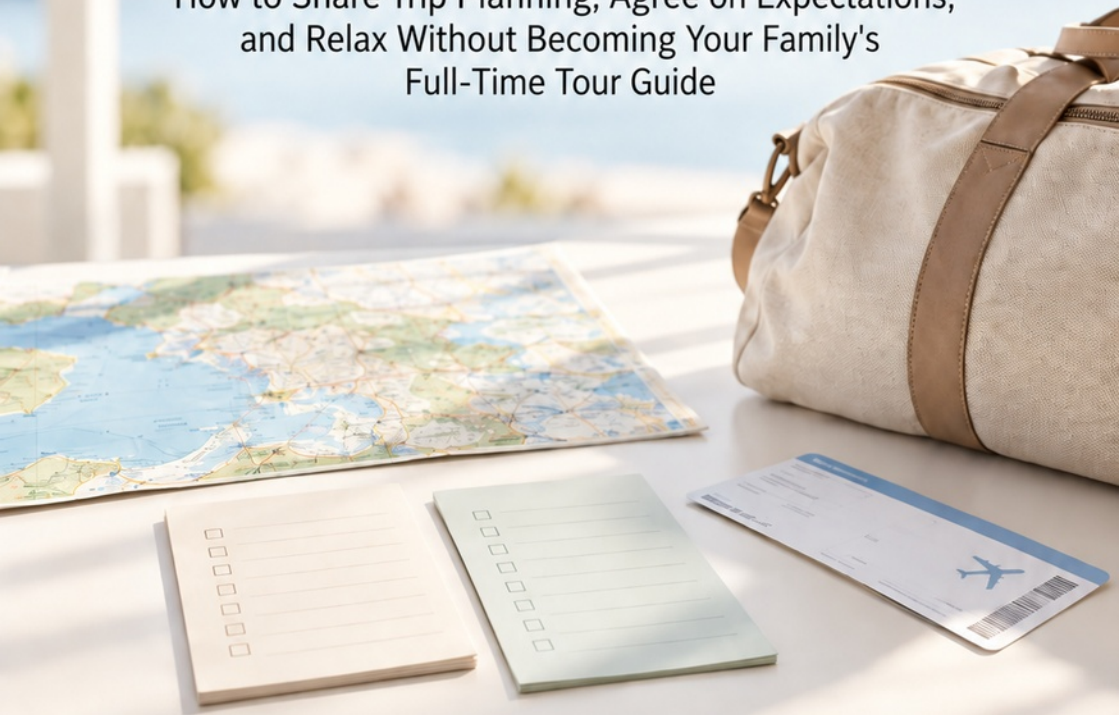
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PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

Even on Vacation, I'm Still in Charge of Everything

How to Share Trip Planning, Agree on Expectations,
and Relax Without Becoming Your Family's
Full-Time Tour Guide



We've got a problem. But relax. It can be solved -
and we'll even have something to laugh about.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRO	1
Chapter 1 - How You Became a Travel Agency Without Anyone Paying You	6
Chapter 2 - Before You Start Planning, Agree on What "Vacation" Means	12
Chapter 3 - Divide the Trip So Nobody Has to Manage the Whole Thing.....	19
Chapter 4 - Stop Making a Hundred Tiny Decisions Every Day.....	25
Chapter 5 - What to Do When the Plan Falls Apart and Everyone Looks at You.....	31
Chapter 6 - You Are Not a 24-Hour Tourist Information Desk	37
Chapter 7 - How to Relax When Your Brain Is Still Running the Project	43
Chapter 8 - A Vacation Is Not Successful Because You Completed Everything	48
Chapter 9 - How to Say, "I Don't Want to Handle Everything Anymore" Without Calling a Family Crisis Meeting	53
Chapter 10 - Traveling With a Partner Is Different From Traveling With Children, and Both Are Different From Traveling With Friends.....	58
Chapter 11 - A Vacation That Still Works When You Stop Managing It.....	63
Chapter 12 - When Everyone Wants Something Different and Everyone Is Right.....	68

Chapter 13 - How Not to Fall Back Into the Old Pattern on the Next Trip	73
Chapter 14 - Go on Vacation, Not to Work in Better Weather	78
Chapter 15 - A Big Family Trip, or How Not to Become the Director of a Summer Camp	84
Chapter 16 - What to Do When Something Genuinely Difficult Happens	89
Chapter 17 - A Vacation Without the Full-Time Tour Guide Job.....	94
Chapter 18 - Packing Can Be Shared Responsibility Too	99
Chapter 19 - Do Not Let Daily Service Consume the Entire Vacation.....	104
Chapter 20 - The Hardest Part: Actually Letting Go.....	109

INTRO

Is Everyone on Vacation Except You?

A vacation was supposed to be a break. At least that was what the definition, the hotel photos, and your fairly optimistic assumptions suggested. You paid for a hotel with a pool, so naturally you imagined that at some point you would become a person who actually sits beside that pool. Instead, it is 8:17 in the morning and you are checking the weather, breakfast hours, the route to the car rental office, parking availability near the museum, and whether the restaurant everyone wants to visit tonight actually takes reservations. The rest of the family is wondering whether it is time to go down for breakfast.

At 8:24, someone asks: "What are we doing today?" And that is the exact moment you discover that you did not go on vacation. You merely changed offices.

Your new job title is Head of Leisure Operations. Your responsibilities include transportation, food services, logistics, entertainment, weather forecasting, negotiations between the "I want to lie down" department and the "we have to see something while we're here" department, plus customer service for complaints such as, "Are we nearly there yet?"

Compensation remains largely symbolic.

If you usually organize family trips, it probably did not begin with some grand plan to seize control of every vacation. One year, you simply found a good hotel. Then you bought the tickets because somebody had to. Next time you checked the airport transfer. After that, you started booking restaurants, planning sightseeing routes, downloading offline maps, and

reminding everyone that bringing identification is surprisingly useful when traveling abroad.

After a few years, nobody says, "Maybe we should plan our vacation together." They say: "So where are we going this year?" The difference is subtle, but psychologically and financially quite noticeable.

The problem is not that you enjoy planning. Maybe you genuinely do. You might even find comparing hotels, reading reviews, and analyzing three different driving routes enjoyable. The trouble begins when enjoying planning is automatically converted into responsibility for the entire trip, and responsibility for the entire trip starts to mean responsibility for whether everyone has a good time.

That is an impossible assignment.

One person wants sightseeing. Another wants rest. A third wants local food, preferably something suspiciously similar to pizza. A fourth says they do not mind what you do and then rejects the first five suggestions. Someone wants early starts. Someone else believes that before ten in the morning, humans should not be required to make decisions more significant than choosing between coffee and another coffee.

Meanwhile, you are trying to design a week in which all of these people are happy at the same time. They will not be. And that is very good news.

You do not have to create the perfect vacation. You only have to create a vacation you are not solely responsible for.

This book is not about how to plan better holidays. We will not be deciding whether Tenerife, Tuscany, or a cottage seventeen kilometers outside a small town whose owner promises that "the forest is right nearby" is objectively the best destination. This is about something else: how to stop

being the person who thinks for everyone before the trip, during the trip, and after the trip when somebody needs to work out who actually has the beach photos.

We will talk about sharing responsibility without turning your vacation into a corporate spreadsheet with an OWNER column. We will talk about expectations before they become complaints. We will examine why asking "What do you want to do?" often solves absolutely nothing, and why someone who says "I don't mind" should still have a voice, but not an unlimited license to complain about every decision the group eventually makes.

We will also deal with one of the biggest traps faced by competent, organized people: if you can do something faster, easier, and better than everyone else, you gradually start doing it every time. Then you wonder why you always do everything.

On vacation, this trap is especially clever because each individual task seems tiny. Checking ferry times takes three minutes. Booking a table takes five. Choosing a beach takes ten. Finding parking takes four. Buying tickets takes seven. Answering "What time are we leaving?" takes thirty seconds.

The problem appears when you perform these thirty-second and five-minute tasks all day long. Eventually everyone else is relaxing, while you are managing their relaxation. So here is the first important rule of this book: A vacation should not need one person in order to function.

If the entire trip falls apart the moment you stop checking your phone for half a day, you did not create a holiday plan. You created a system dependent on one administrator. And the administrator would quite like to go swimming.

Chapter 1 - How You Became a Travel Agency Without Anyone Paying You

There is rarely one clear moment when somebody becomes the family vacation organizer. There is no election, nobody hands you a badge, and there is no performance bonus in the form of a free drink beside the pool. The role develops slowly and almost innocently.

First someone says: "You're the best at finding hotels." That sounds like a compliment. Then: "You already have all the apps."

That sounds logical. Next: "You know how to do this." Still perfectly reasonable.

And a few years later: "So what are we doing tomorrow?" Suddenly you discover that you have become the national coordination center for a four-person family holiday.

The Competence Trap

The better you are at something, the greater the risk that you will start doing it for everyone else. This applies at work, at home, and on vacation. The person who once found a good flight quickly gets permanent responsibility for flights. Someone who understands hotel booking websites better than the average person understands a television remote becomes Minister of Accommodation.

The mechanism is simple. You do something efficiently. Other people get used to you doing it.

You do it more often. They stop even noticing that it is a task. Eventually, one of the most dangerous sentences in any relationship appears: "But you always do it."

Yes. And that is precisely why it may be worth asking whether you should continue.

The goal is not to divide every task with mathematical equality. If you enjoy choosing hotels, there is little point forcing the job onto someone who spends four minutes comparing options before announcing, "They all look the same." Fairness does not mean splitting every single task exactly in half. It means making sure responsibility for the success of the whole trip does not sit entirely with one person.

You can choose the hotel while someone else organizes the airport transfer. You buy the flights while another person handles the car. You suggest three places to visit while someone else chooses restaurants for two evenings. This is not about perfect arithmetic. It is about making sure you are not simultaneously the search engine, ticket office, map, reception desk, and tourist information center.

The Invisible Part of Organizing

The most exhausting part of planning a trip is often not the tasks themselves. It is remembering that the tasks exist. Someone may say: "But you only booked the hotel."

Except before booking it, you checked the location, reviews, weather for that month, airport transfer, beach, breakfast options, cancellation rules, room category, and whether "sea view" means an actual sea view or the possibility of spotting a tiny blue triangle between an air-conditioning unit and the building next door.

Then you remember the payment deadline. You remember online check-in. You check the baggage allowance. You know where the documents are. You download the airline app. You save the insurance policy. You send everyone the booking

number, which nobody saves because "you've got it anyway."

This is organizational load. You are not only completing tasks. You are carrying the whole system in your head.

That is why the request "Just tell me what I need to do" is often less helpful than it sounds. You still have to decide what needs doing, assign it, remember the deadline, remind the person, and check whether it was completed.

You have become a project manager. The project is called "relaxing."

Do Not Delegate Tasks. Delegate Responsibility.

This is one of the most important distinctions in the entire book. Delegating a task looks like this: "Can you check what time the ferry leaves tomorrow?" The person checks.

"10:30." Excellent. Now you still need to ask where it leaves from, how early you need to arrive, where to buy tickets, and how to get to the port.

Delegating responsibility looks different: "Can you handle the ferry tomorrow? Check the times, tickets, departure point, and let us know tonight what time we need to leave." Now that is a complete piece of the trip.

The difference sounds small, but it is enormous for your brain. In the first version, you are still managing the process. In the second, you can genuinely stop thinking about it.

The same principle works before the trip. Instead of: "Could you check car rental companies?" Try: "Can you take care of the car? Choose a sensible option within our budget, check the insurance and pickup rules, and if nothing looks strange, book it."

Of course, this requires something that highly organized people can find surprisingly difficult: allowing another person to do something differently from the way you would do it. They may choose a parking lot one hundred meters farther away. They may buy tickets for 11:00 instead of 10:30.

They may pick a restaurant that would not score 9.4 in your private analytical system. If you intend to check, correct, and optimize every delegated decision afterward, you are not delegating. You are conducting an audit.

Vacations Do Not Need Auditors

People who are used to organizing everything often say: "It'll be easier if I just do it myself." And very often, they are right. It will be easier to do it yourself.

The first time. Possibly the second. But if you continue doing everything yourself for the next ten years because it is quicker, you will create an extremely efficient system in which everybody depends on you.

You are choosing between short-term efficiency and long-term peace. Sometimes it is worth allowing someone to spend ten minutes finding information you could locate in three. Those extra seven minutes are not wasted. They are an investment in the future moment when someone says:

"Don't worry, I'll take care of it." And you genuinely will not need to check.

Try a Simple Test

Before your next trip, write down all the things you normally do from the moment someone first suggests a vacation until you close the hotel room door for the final time.

You do not need a spreadsheet worthy of an international tour operator. A simple list will do: destination, flights, hotel, insurance, luggage, documents, transfer, rental car, attractions, tickets, restaurants, routes, pre-trip shopping, check-in, airport parking, and arrangements for the dog, the plants, or a particularly demanding ficus.

Then mark everything that is your responsibility. If you discover that you have marked almost all of it, your problem is not vacation planning. Your problem is a monopoly.

The good news is that monopolies can be broken up without a family commission of inquiry. Start with two or three complete areas of responsibility that can belong to someone else. Do not ask, "Can you help me?" Help still suggests that the project belongs to you.

Say: "I want us to split the planning this time. I'll handle the hotel and flights. You take the car and two sightseeing days."

It sounds different because it is different. You are not asking someone to support your plan. You are creating a shared plan.

What If Nobody Wants to Organize Anything?

That can happen. Your family may have become accustomed to an all-inclusive model in which "all-inclusive" includes you. So when you say, "Let's share the planning this year," someone may reply: "But you like doing it."

A classic. You can say: "I like some of the planning. I don't like being responsible for the whole trip."

That distinction matters.

You can enjoy cooking without wanting responsibility for every meal the family eats. You can enjoy driving without wanting to be the only driver on a two-week road trip. You can