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Word count 950  
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## "Vacation Blues"

A lesson for family travel

by Kimberly Blaker

It was our first family trip to Disney World, and I was bound and determined to make it a success. Being the savvy, organized person that I am, I purchased our airline tickets on sale well in advance and spent the following months planning the perfect Disney getaway. Our rental car and motel room were reserved, and each day of the trip was planned. Things were really going to go smoothly on our family dream vacation.

On the day of our trip, we arrived at the airport an hour before take off with two bubbly children. I handed over our ticket envelope to the check-in attendant. A moment later, she pointed out that she still needed the tickets.

"They're in the envelope," I said, bewildered.

"No," she replied, "These are just boarding passes."

At that moment my heart began to sink as I recalled that a month ago, our travel agent had issued new boarding passes, and had told me I could destroy the old ones.

As it turned out, I had destroyed the tickets instead!

I proceeded to explain what happened and asked the attendant what could be done. She informed us that reticketing would cost us \$60 per ticket—a \$240 mistake, to be exact.

While disputing the fee, we realized time was ticking, so we agreed to the charge and handed over our credit card, which I had paid off in case of an emergency. However, when our card was run through the machine, it reflected that we had no available credit.

Reaching back into my purse, I complained, "Then I guess we'll just have to use some of our travelers checks."

However, that would have been too simple. To my astonishment, the airline wouldn't accept traveler checks. By this point, a supervisor had already taken over, however, and insisted that was the airline's policy.

Our last resort was the checkbook, which I knew would be a lost debate. The clock was ticking with only 20 minutes 'til take off.

I shuffled away from the desk with tears streaming down my face, leaving my husband to handle the ordeal. How was I going to tell the kids we wouldn't be going on vacation?

Finally, the supervisor gave in and accepted our check, and again, we were on our way.

We arrived in Tampa, the airport I had chosen for the best ticket fares, at 11:00 p.m. We dragged our sleepy children to the car rental booth and gave the teller our reservation number. Handing over the credit card, I assured myself that the airline's computer had just made an error, and since we had reserved the car with our credit card

several weeks prior, if worse came to worse, we could just use travelers checks to cover the rental fee.

The clerk punched in our card number. "I'm sorry but you don't have enough available credit," she announced.

"Then I guess we'll just have to pay by travelers checks," I replied.

"Sorry ma'am," she continued, "we must have a credit card with available credit to secure a car."

How could this be happening? I thought.

But as luck would have it, (if you could call it that) a security guard informed us that if we would wait until 1:00 in the morning, we could catch a ride with a chauffeur who would be heading to Orlando. So, we found ourselves a row of seats where the kids could curl up while we awaited the chauffeur's arrival.

When the van arrived, we forked over a mere \$50 and spent the next hour and a half dozing on the van's sticky vinyl seats, until we arrived at our final destination in Orlando. It was 2:30 in the morning, and we were ready to collapse.

However, when we gave the motel clerk our name, he informed us they had given out our room because we were late.

Of course, the motel *had* tried charging the room to our credit card at midnight to hold it for us—but the charge didn't go through.

At this point, we were numb with frustration. Our three and seven year olds were fussing and ready for bed. So, we caught a cab, which took us to the only motel in the area with a vacancy.

The next morning we awoke around 8:00 feeling hung over from the previous night's adventures. We got the credit card error resolved, found a more suitable motel, and picked up our rental car.

Of course, this was the day we had slated for the Magic Kingdom, but it was already lunchtime and our stomachs were growling. Making our way out of the motel, we noticed a sign in the lobby. A time-share group was offering free lunch and free Disney tickets, and all we had to do was sit through a brief promotional pitch.

"Why not?" I asked my husband. We had to eat lunch anyway, and this way we could recoup some of our loss from the ordeals from the previous night.

With a promise by a time-share staff member that it would take only one hour, including lunch, we were on our way.

Three hours and two irritable children later, we were insisting that the sales person give us our Disney tickets and let us be on our way.

The remainder of our vacation went incredibly smooth, I'm happy to say. Of course, anything would seem smooth after our previous 24-hour ordeal.

So, what's the lesson in this? When you leave town, be prepared for anything and everything, and *always* carry more than one credit card—it's the only way to assure that your family fun doesn't turn into a family farce.

The End

PULL QUOTE: To my astonishment, the airline wouldn't accept traveler checks.

PULL QUOTE: Three hours and two irritable children later, we were insisting that the sales person give us our Disney tickets and let us be on our way.

SIDEBAR IDEAS OR WAYS TO LOCALIZE: Family travel tips or local travel agencies that cater to family vacations.

Kimberly Blaker of New Boston, Michigan is a mother of two. Kimberly writes for parenting and women's magazines across the United States and other publications.

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