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AMERICA
ON THE
GO

You Can Take the Kids Along

Children won't exclaim
over the scenery—but
they'll bring along a fresh
sense of wonder that
can turn your vacation
into a never-to-
be-forgotten event



By VIOLET WEINGARTEN

Author of "You Can Take Them with You," a guide
to traveling through Europe with children

THE FIRST TIME we took our children on a vacation trip was almost the last.

The whole way from our home in Pleasantville, N.Y., to the West Coast, we fidgeted about whether it was going to work out. Finally, we arrived at Muir Woods, the first stop on our tour of California. We marched our two daughters into the heart of the soaring redwoods and told them to look and ponder.

"These trees grow to a height of 364 feet," I read from a guidebook. "And they were old during Biblical times." Their father added.

Kathy, who was then six, drew herself to her full height of 48 inches and peered upward.

"My, they're even older than Mommy!" she said.

"Bigger, too," commented her 10-year-old sister Jan.

Undaunted, we pushed into the High Sierras. We stood them before Bridal Veil Falls; we showed them the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir; we dragged them up to Glacier Point. With glassy eyes they looked and said: "Uh-huh."

Finally, we were irritated to the point where we had to do something—so we decided to join them. As soon as one of nature's wonders showed itself, we would call out, "Duck, kids, scenery!" They in turn took to crying, "Lookit the neat dump!" And from that moment on, some of our best vacations have been spent with our children.

WE HAVE TAKEN THEM west to San Francisco, north to Maine, south to Key West, and overseas to Colombia and Greece. In all that time we have never—well, hardly ever—pointed out a speck of scenery. If we felt they had to look at Mount Katahdin after all that climbing, we gave them the camera and told them to take a picture. We figured they would see it through the viewer.

Children simply will not respond to scenery as such. Skies, trees, rocks, ante-bellum mansions—what do they care about them? Their days are filled with wonder. Like Thoreau, they can see the whole universe in a neighbor's meadow. They don't need the Grand Canyon.

This is why it is futile to expect children to be grateful to you for taking them traveling. So admit it: you're not taking them for their sake, but for yours. They have all the time in the world to travel. But you have only a few short years to travel with them.

Children are quite an asset, too. They will give you

fresh eyes with which to see, commentaries on the passing scene you couldn't buy, audiences for your jokes, and introductions to people you would never meet otherwise.

To enjoy these advantages, however, you have to make a few concessions. A vacation with children must be tailored to their needs as well as your own. Here are some pointers my husband and I have found helpful:

Age—There are those who can make baby formulas over charcoal fires and drive with two-year-olds in their laps. Not us. We like our children old enough so they will make a stab at throwing their jeans into their own suitcases and be able to stay up late enough to have dinner with us in a restaurant. It also helps if they can read. And if they have had American history at school, they might even give Civil War battlefields a second glance.

Transportation—We try to avoid long unbroken motor trips. If possible, we fly long distances and rent a car for regional touring. But when going the whole way by car is necessary, we look for ways to vary the trip. If we can put the car on a ferry for a stretch, fine. If we can detour to a side road, fine. And we will drive half-a-day in preference to a whole day.

Accommodations—Unless we are trapped in the middle of a desert, the whole family never checks into one room. We need to get out of one another's hair in the course of a trip. Separate rooms do the trick.

We also try to find a motel with a pool; it doesn't matter how big. One of the most satisfactory swims we ever had was in an almost bathtub-sized pool near cabins with outside plumbing in the Rockies.

Splitting Up—Togetherness is the main reason for touring with your children, but there are times when it can be too much of a good thing. Fathers and sons can go to baseball games while mothers and daughters shop. Children can dine at the motel restaurant while parents go into town for dinner. Older children and parents can trot off to the movies while the younger ones nap under the watchful eye of a baby sitter or an amiable chambermaid.

Sight-Seeing—This should not be confused with scenery watching. We take in every sight we can, and we make detours to likely attractions. We do all the fascinating, rewarding rubbernecking we wouldn't dream of doing without our children. After all, why are you taking them on a trip if not to get into the Children's Zoo, Disneyland, and the Statue of Liberty?