

Keep the tension outside the tent

You've just driven out of the driveway for your great Australian family holiday and it starts:

"Mum, are we there yet?"

"Dad, he's taking up too much of the back seat."

"I'm bored - how long 'til we get there?"

Romeo and Juliet's wedding photos are a distant memory as they head off on a three-hour drive to the beach with their little darlings, Ophelia and Hamlet. And judging by the gritted teeth in the front and the whingeing in the back, it's going to be a long trip.

Romeo and Juliet need a few survival tips.

Long car trips and children are not natural bedfellows, so you need to think of things to make them more bearable. Frequent snacks and playground stops for smaller children will make it more pleasant. If they tend to be carsick, pack some small buckets and wet face cloths.

Talking books can keep the whole family entertained. If there's a wide range of ages, personal stereos with headphones can allow the teenagers to enjoy their own music while the smaller ones listen to something else. *Bananas in pyjamas*, *Play School* and *Bob the Builder* CDs may drive you to distraction, but could put blissful smiles on the faces of toddlers.

When you're planning the holiday, it's a good idea to include the kids. Talk about what sort of holiday it's going to be. Every family needs a balance of activities on holidays - work out a plan that lets everyone have a bit of what they fancy. This way the adults wind down and the kids know they will be taken to play mini-golf, out fishing or to the surf.

Taking teenagers on holiday is always tricky, when they don't want to come with you but are not old enough. Try inviting one of their friends. Teenagers are mainly interested in spending time with their friends, so bringing a mate is going to result in less wear and tear on the parents and a better holiday.

A successful family holiday does require a few ground rules. But if you have the same rigid rules and timetable you have at home, it's hardly a holiday.

Younger kids need to understand that mum and dad don't want any little visitors until a certain time in the morning. One ground rule might be that kids need to quietly play early in the morning until mum and dad are up.

Plan easy meals, and get every-one to help take responsibility for them. And if Ophelia and Hamlet insist on Weetbix for dinner three nights in a row, it's not a big deal - you're on holidays. Take it a bit easier on the housework - you're here to unwind, not to create a pristine domestic environment.

If you are staying somewhere new, it's important to let the kids familiarise themselves with their environment. Big caravan parks can be daunting until you know the layout, so take the time to show them useful landmarks.

Part of a family holiday is having some family activities so everyone has some good memories to recall in future years. Board games are a good way to include everyone. Negotiate what different people want to do, and try to make a collaborative decision about the shared activities.

Sometimes conflict may follow you from home, but try not to let it spoil your experience. Make a pact that you will both leave the conflict at home and resist the temptation to make your point.

If conflict does surface, then take comfort that there are likely to be some pleasant places where you can take yourself to calm down.

Remember that a short period of time out for adults and kids can nip a conflict situation in the bud.

So if Romeo and Juliet, Ophelia and Hamlet just follow a few tips for Holiday Relationship Survival, everyone should return home refreshed and relaxed.

Survival Tips

- **Plan snacks, stops and entertainment for the car trip**
- **Involve the whole family in planning what you will do**
- **Let your teenager invite a friend**
- **Relax your normal rules – you're on holiday**