



The Pool at the National Hotel in Miami Beach, Florida.

Squish, Climb, Splash: A Family Adventure

Tips to Having a Fun and Successful Family Vacation

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The Miami Herald

There is never a dull moment when you vacation with a two-year-old. And there are always such wonderfully fun lessons to be learned, too.

For instance, we allocated the first day of our family vacation to the zoo. God allocated that same day to watering his plants. OK, so it was not quite rain. I mean, it was hardly worth the embarrassment of losing another fruitless struggle with that rusty old umbrella.

But it was more than just a mist. Bit by bit, it overtook me. My sneakers cried out «Squish! Squish! Squish!» as I walked. My wife started calling me «soggybottoms.» I was getting downright moldy.

Little Lady, on the other hand, was in Seventh Heaven. This was finally her chance to take out her brand new umbrella. Her umbrella was her newest, most favorite toy that her way-too-picky father would not let her play with in the house. But today, she could play with it all day in the rainy mist or misty rain or whatever the big people want to call it.

Vacation Adventure Lesson #1: Find the silver lining. And if you can't, get yourself an umbrella.

A TRUE ADVENTURE VACATION: MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

A few days later, we headed to a lookout in a mountain park. Along the paths, we found ourselves trying to dodge speeding cyclists who thought «maximum 15 miles per hour» means «Yee-haw, we've reached warp speed!»

Seemingly lost, we stopped to ask directions. The young lad we approached pointed straight up. «It's a half an hour back the way you came, or you can take these stairs,» he advised.

I doubted whether either my pregnant wife or Little Lady could handle the stairs, but they both wanted to try. (Seventh Heaven might be an umbrella, but a toddler's first six heavens apparently involve climbing anything in sight - and a mountain was just as good as anything else, I suppose.)

At the top of the first flight, we saw that the next set of stairs was even higher. A lady behind us said, «Try counting them to pass the time. There

are 205 steps.» Was that meant to be encouraging?

Amazingly, Little Lady climbed 180 steps, and my pregnant wife was able to keep up at Little Lady's conveniently slow pace. I had to carry one of them up the remaining 25 steps (no, not my wife!), where I dumped the stroller and picnic basket so we all could catch our breath.

My wife started calling me «soggy-bottoms.» I was getting downright moldy.

Vacation Adventure Lesson #2: It's amazing what you can do when you try, and it's more than amazing what some people will try.

FAMILY FUN IN THE HOTEL POOL

Our vacation was also the first chance for Little Lady to swim. We placed the water wings on her arms and stayed really close as she swam in the pool at our hotel, the National. This suited her just fine for almost three minutes. Then she wanted to swim «all alone» (her favorite words).

You might have heard that the biggest danger for a new swimmer is sinning. Or hitting your head on the edge of the pool. Or developing cramps from too many French fries just before swimming and drowning in your own cholesterol (or something like that).

In fact, the big danger is a big mouth. Little Lady closed her mouth whenever I reminded her. But just 3.2 seconds later, her mouth would be open again, shouting «Lookit me!» and «I did it!» and other eloquent cries muffled by the gurgle of water pouring into a gaping mouth.

Vacation Adventure Lesson #3: Sometimes it is worth getting excited about life and shouting it out to the world ... even if people do keep telling you to shut your mouth

Next time you go on vacation, bring a toddler along. I promise you three things:

1. You will get less rest than Santa Claus on December 24.
2. You will always have a fun adventure.
3. You will learn more than you ever wanted to.