

Travel

Visiting Portugal's tranquil Tomar. K4

Family vacationing: Slowing down the pace in Las Vegas and Utah's scenic national parks



Plain Dealer Travel editor Susan Glaser and her mom at Arches National Park in Moab, Utah. Steven Brunot, Special to The Plain Dealer

Traveling with Mom

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SPRINGDALE, UTAH — "Faster, Mom, faster," I urged, as we neared the end of the Emerald Pools Trail at Zion National Park.

I was hungry, it was getting dark and I couldn't possibly walk this slow for one more moment.

She sped up her pace. I checked my impatience. And together, we enjoyed one more mother-daughter bonding moment out West.

At first glance, traveling to several national parks with an aging parent may not sound like the best option. But it's not as crazy as it sounds.

I give credit to the folks who designed these incredible public spaces.

The trip had been her idea. Last February, she mentioned that she'd like to travel back to southern Utah, a favorite vacation spot for her and my dad.

Over the decades my mom and dad traveled a lot, but my mom, who turned 79 last month, hadn't roamed much in the two years since my dad died.

I, too, was eager to experience the national parks of the southern Utah, a state I had never visited. So I proposed we go together. And the planning began.

MULTIGENERATIONAL TRAVEL

At first glance, traveling to several national parks with an aging parent may not sound like the best option for multigenerational travel. But it's not as crazy as it sounds.

I give credit to the folks who designed these incredible public spaces. While there were numerous opportunities for serious adventure-seekers in every park we visited, there are also plenty of paths and scenic drives better suited to older, less mobile travelers.

SEE FAMILY TRAVEL, K2



Above: Walking the paved Parus Trail at Zion National Park. Susan Glaser, The Plain Dealer

Free entertainment in Las Vegas: Watching the Bellagio fountains dance to music. Susan Glaser, The Plain Dealer

Editor's note

This is the first of several stories from Plain Dealer Travel editor Susan Glaser about her recent trip out West.

Coming next week: 24 hours in Las Vegas (and no gambling).

Family travel: Vacationing out west with an older parent

FROM K1

My husband tagged along, and we tackled some of those more difficult trails in the early morning or when my mom rested in the afternoon. But for the most part, I planned this trip with her abilities and interests in mind, not mine.

It wasn't an easy adjustment to make — no one in my family would ever accuse me of being a relaxed traveler. I like to jam as much as possible into my days on the road. Traveling with my mom, I simply couldn't do that.

It did help that she visited her rheumatologist a couple of weeks before we left, receiving a cortisone shot in her ankle to help take care of some persistent arthritic inflammation.

And we were off.

Our itinerary: Fly into Las Vegas and spend one full day touring Sin City, two nights at Bryce Canyon National Park, two nights in Moab touring Arches National Park, and finishing up with three nights at Zion National Park.

Our trip fits into the growing trend of multigenerational travel. According to one recent survey, 40% of leisure travelers took at least one multigenerational trip in the past year, typically defined as three generations traveling together. Our trip included just two generations, but the motivations were the same: family bonding away from the stresses and duties of daily life at home.

Among our numerous highlights:

- › Swimming with the sharks at the Golden Nugget and betting on 1960s favorites at "Hollywood: The Show" in Las Vegas.
- › Playing competitive pinocle while waiting for pizza at a picnic table outside the Lodge at Bryce Canyon.
- › Watching fellow hikers encourage my mom at Zion, cheering "Judy, Judy" as she struggled to complete what was probably a too-rigorous hike. The park ranger insisted it was an easy route. "Anyone can do it," he said, though I suspect he'd never tried it with an almost-80-year-old.

There were a few challenging times, as well, particularly in the morning, when my mom was slow to rise and get ready, and my husband and I were impatient to start our day.

So we struck a compromise — he and I woke up early, took a short hike, then returned for breakfast and our next adventure. This worked best when we were staying closest to the attractions, which is a key recommendation from this trip.

My mom and I have traveled together before. We took a trip, just the two of us, to the Hocking Hills area last year, but for only one night. We've also traveled with my kids, now both in college, to the Florida Keys, Disney World, Mohican State Park and elsewhere.

The two of us had planned one other big trip together a year ago, to Costa Rica. But she got the flu and we ended up canceling. Thank goodness I insisted on travel insurance.

This trip, too, seemed unlikely to happen through much of the summer. My mom got sick back in June, and experienced a long, slow recovery period. Every week I asked her if she thought she'd be strong enough to go, and every week she said no. Finally, about a month before our mid-September departure, she said yes. That's when I bought our plane tickets.

Everything else we booked was refundable (hotel reservations, primarily), but I told her that once our flights were purchased, there was no backing out.

She worked to regain her strength in the weeks before we left by walking in her neighborhood and going to physical therapy.

Even so, she was sometimes slow on the trails. The longest hike she completed was 2 miles, the mostly flat Riverside Walk at Zion. She was affected by the altitude at Bryce, with an elevation of between 8,000 and 9,000 feet, so we limited our hiking there to the Rim Trail. At Arches, with an elevation of about 5,000 feet, she took frequent breaks on the short hikes we did together.

Fortunately, these parks aren't just about hiking. We spent a full afternoon exploring the 18-mile Scenic Drive through Bryce, stopping at look-out points and scenic views. The scenic drive through Arches was even more spectacular — with eye-popping rock formations in every direction.

And the drive from Bryce to Arches — we took the scenic route along Utah 12 through Capitol Reef National Park — was simply spectacular, one of the most incredible roads I've ever been on.

We spent time in the park visitors centers, attended ranger talks, dined in the lodges and explored the towns of Moab and Springdale.

There were a few bad decisions and missed opportunities. Negotiating portions of the Las Vegas Strip late at night on foot was exhausting and much more crowded than I remembered. And I wish we had gotten out onto the Colorado River during our time in Moab. We needed an extra day.

I wanted to see it all — I always do — and I didn't. But that only means that I'll have to go back. Maybe when one of my daughters is my age.



The pool at Cable Mountain Lodge, located just outside Zion National Park in Springdale, Utah. Photos by Susan Glaser, The Plain Dealer



A cabin at Bryce Canyon National Park is a short walk from the canyon rim.



Las Vegas' High Roller observation wheel. Associated Press



The 2.2-mile Riverside Walk, categorized as an "easy hike" by the National Park Service, follows the Virgin River through Zion National Park.



The pool at the Las Vegas' Golden Nugget is built around an aquarium with sharks and fish.



Spectacular scenery can be seen from the car between Bryce and Arches national parks.

Tips for traveling with an older parent

Plan the trip together: My mom had been to all of these places before, I had not. I made the reservations, but she helped form the broad itinerary. Initially I hadn't thought to go to Arches — it's 250 miles from Bryce — but we added it, and I'm glad we did. My mom also picked our hotel in Springdale, Cable Mountain Lodge, which was terrific.

Hotel location is critical: Being close to the attractions was important, so my husband and I could slip out for a hike or other activity while my mom rested. This worked well in Las Vegas, where we stayed downtown and Steve and I walked to the Mob Museum on our first morning in town. At Bryce, we stayed inside the park, which allowed us to walk out our door and onto a trail.

I picked nicer hotels than I otherwise might have because I knew my mom would be spending a fair amount of time in the room. Our suite at Cable Mountain, just outside Zion, offered a patio with amazing views of the park. It was pricey, but worth it.

At every destination, I booked two rooms. At the Gonzo Inn in Moab and Cable Mountain Inn in Springdale, I booked large suites with two bedrooms and communal living space — a perfect choice. At Bryce, we shared adjoining rooms in a Western Cabin, located perhaps 300 feet from the canyon edge. Highly recommend.

Don't plan too much: I am notorious in my family for packing my itineraries. I held back on this trip, particularly after our late-night flight west. Most of our afternoon in Las Vegas was spent at the pool.

Plan down time: My mom likes to rest in the afternoon (sometimes I do too), so I tried to keep a couple of hours free after lunch for napping, reading, resting.

Plan the flights well: I admit to really botching this tip. We flew Frontier Airlines to Las Vegas, on flights with late-night departure times that left us all (not just my mom) exhausted. We left Cleveland after 10 p.m., arriving in Vegas just before midnight (3 a.m. Eastern time). Then we took a red-eye home, leaving Vegas just before midnight, landing in Cleveland at 6:50 a.m. It was brutal, but I had a \$1,000 Frontier voucher that I didn't want to lose. So we dealt with it.

Frontier has since added a daytime flight to Las Vegas three times per week; Spirit Airlines also flies to Las Vegas. Southwest does as well, but recently cut back its route to weekends only.

Be open to new ideas: I probably wouldn't have chosen a Motown show in Las Vegas if my mom wasn't with me. But it was great fun, and much cheaper than some of alternatives I was considering. No doubt she wouldn't have taken a \$32 turn on the new High Roller Ferris wheel. But I bought the ticket in advance so she couldn't say no.

Most important tip: Relax and have fun.