



Multi-generational journeys

It may sound like a nightmare to some, but going on holiday with the entire family is in vogue, writes **Danielle Teutsch**.

Last year, Paul and Wendy Ballesty made a remarkable offer to their five adult children: to pay for everyone to have a skiing holiday in Queenstown, New Zealand and babysit the grandchildren while they had fun on the slopes.

They did some research on the internet and booked an entire wing of a hotel, eight rooms in all, to house the children (Brad, Louise, Anthony, Matthew and Patrick), their partners or spouses and five grandchildren. All up, there were 17 people, ranging from 63-year-old Paul to five-month-old Taj.

During their week-long holiday, they had two celebration dinners (one of which was to celebrate Paul and Wendy's 40th wedding anniversary) and organised two maxi taxis each day to take everyone, plus ski equipment and prams, up to the Coronet Peak ski area. Sometimes the children went out for dinner on their own while Paul and Wendy babysat, and one night Paul and Wendy went out for dinner.

By all accounts, it was a great success. For the children, who flew in from Sydney, Macau and Queensland, it was a chance to catch up and relax, with babysitting on tap.

For Paul and Wendy, it was an opportunity for the family to bond and for some extended time with the grandchildren.

"For us, it was lovely to have all the family together. We don't get the chance to get them all together that often, even at Christmas time," says Wendy.

It was a win-win for everyone, not least for the littlest family members who basked in the attention of so many loving adults.

The Ballestys are not alone. Multi-generational travel is becoming increasingly popular.

Grandparents are fit, cashed-up and eager to travel (and often willing to foot the bill for the trip) and parents with young children want a break, with quality babysitters. If everyone manages to get on well, it can be the ideal holiday.

Cathy Wagstaff, editor of *Holidays With Kids* magazine, agrees multi-generational holidays are becoming a travel trend.

"It has really taken off. It frees up the parents to spend some time together," she says. As evidence, Wagstaff cites the Hilton's Fiji Beach Resort and Spa, built in 2006 with a flexible design that caters for large family groups. The

resort's villas have connecting rooms that can open out to a shared living and barbecue area.

Wagstaff says the fact that many extended families are now scattered across the globe means family reunions (in places such as Fiji) are only going to get more popular.

Hardy Schneider, director of boutique travel agency Cruise Express, says three generations of families are also lining up for cruises. "Cruising lends itself to a family get together, because there is something for everyone. There is a disco for the teens, kids' clubs for the younger ones, shows for the oldies."

Schneider says the success of the holiday depends on prior planning and discussion to make sure everyone's needs are catered for. Often, it's a case of choosing the right cruise (10 days is adequate); and the ship with the right facilities.

For example, the Holland America cruise line has a "teens only" loft and a spa. Regent Seven Seas Cruises has its Club Mariner with activities for youth such as whale watching and learning to draw aquatic animals.

Crystal Cruises has a supervised junior activities program and a dedicated children's playroom with games, craft materials and video games. Crystal Cruises also caters for family reunions with its connecting rooms and suites.

The best scenario, Schneider says, is for everyone to do their own activities with plenty of opportunities to interact.

"Everyone can see each other as little or as much as they want."

Meg Hall, general manager of Kamuka Worldwide (a British agency that runs adventure tours), says it's not just resorts and cruises that are popular with extended families, but more intrepid holidays too.

Hall, her husband Jon, their 18-month-old son Max and Jon's parents recently went to Vietnam.

The two couples rented adjacent hotel rooms so they were close but not "living in each other's pockets".

Their itinerary was relaxed so that everyone could have a rest or sleep in the middle of the day. The grandparents loved having quality time with young Max, while Meg and Jon enjoyed being able to go out in the evenings for a drink or dinner,

knowing their son was in the best of hands.

From Max's point of view, Vietnam was like a giant playground. He loved the tuk-tuks, the



colourful fish ponds, the lanterns, the staircases and the novelty of public transport.

And he could flit between his parents and grandparents. "Max had four 'islands' he could go to," Hall says. The bonding time he had with his grandfather, in particular, was "worth bottling".

Hall, 36, says she is not surprised multi-generational travel is taking off. She is a typical generation X-er who loves travelling – having roamed everywhere from the Amazon to the Sahara Desert.

"Generation X are massive travellers and we don't want to give it up just because we've had children," she says.

"I still wanted to do something adventurous and fun."

At the same time, there is an army of so-called grey nomads – active retirees who are interested in travel.

When these interests converge, as they did for

the three generations of the Hall family, it can mean a holiday that suits all parties.

Hall says the special experience of travelling with her family made it one of the best trips she's ever been on.

The success of the Vietnam trip means that Hall is now looking at introducing a new range of family tours for Kamuka Worldwide with an age range of 0-80. Currently, the minimum age for children is five.

"Parents are really looking for this type of holiday when children are in the toddler years because that's when they are most exhausted," she says.

As for the Ballesty clan, they have not organised their next family trip yet. However their children are already floating Japan as a possibility. As Paul says: "When you have been married 40 years and your family are still happy to go on holidays together, something must be right."

> TIPS TO MAKE IT WORK

- Have a family discussion before the trip. What does everyone want out of their holiday?
- Some families like to cram together in a single house, while others prefer to spread out in separate hotel rooms. Connecting rooms that give the opportunity for socialising and privacy are a good compromise.
- Book early - some cruises and hotels have a limited number of interconnecting rooms.
- If travelling, keep the pace of the itinerary relaxed to allow for some rest, which is particularly important for the youngest and oldest family members.
- Trip length is important - not too long. About five to 10 days is good, depending on the destination.





> TRIP NOTES

ISLAND ESCAPES

■ **Hilton Fiji Beach Resort and Spa**
This resort on Denarau Island has a flexible design for its villas, so family groups can holiday together. Villas have their own barbecue areas. Phone +679 675 6810 or see www.fijiibeachresortbyhilton.com.

■ **Mana Island Resort Fiji**
This resort has deluxe oceanfront bures with ocean views and private balconies that can accommodate two adults and two children. They can be interconnecting for larger family groups. The resort has plenty of family-friendly facilities. Phone +679 6650423, email nktn@ihug.com.au, or see www.manafiji.com.

CRUISING

■ **Cruise Express** is a small travel agency that can organise a variety of cruises. See www.cruiseexpress.com.au; phone (02) 9810 5377.

■ **Crystal Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises** both have a range of children's activities on board. For information, phone Wiltrans International (agents for Crystal Cruises and Regent's Seven Seas Cruises) on 1800 251 174, email travel@wiltrans.com.au or see www.crystalcruises.com.au.

ADVENTURE

■ **Kamuka Worldwide**
This UK-based adventure company runs family adventure tours to destinations such as Borneo, Thailand, China, Cambodia, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. Phone Kamuka Worldwide's Sydney office on (02) 9279 0491, email adventuretours@kumuka.com.au or see www.kamuka.com.au.

FAMILY WEEKENDER

■ **Oaks Pacific Blue Resort, Salamander Bay, Port Stephens**
The Oaks apartment group has one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments in Australia and New Zealand suitable for extended families. Phone 1800 884 071 or see www.theoaksgroup.com.au.

SKI

■ **For ski holidays, Snowy Mountains Holiday Centre** can organise family group packages including accommodation, lift passes and car hire. See <http://smhc.com.au>.

In New Zealand, the **Cardrona Alpine Resort** has child-friendly ski areas and kids' centres that cater for children from three months to 14 years. The resort has two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments. See www.cardrona.com. For accommodation options in Queenstown see www.queenstown-nz.co.nz.



Family affair ... (clockwise from far left) Meg Hall holidayed with the in-laws in Vietnam; Hilton Fiji Beach Resort; the Ballesty clan celebrated on the New Zealand slopes; underwater at Mana Island Resort in Fiji; street vendors in Vietnam; the beach in Nelson Bay.
Photos: Getty Images; Jessica Hromas; Natalie Grono

