

## Staycations

Don't cancel those plans for the family vacation just yet! Or, maybe you should explore another option that will put less miles on the car and more money in your pocket. Staycations are popular alternatives to vacations that are spent around or close to home, yet offer many of the same elements as their pricier counterparts.

Staycations can be designed to fit almost any budget. A few simple calculations can quickly reveal how the process of planning for an occasion to relax, bond, and enjoy each other, while keeping a lid on the family budget, is time well-spent!

Creating quality time together is a universal trait of strong families. It sounds like a simple concept. However, family time can all but disappear from any household without purposeful plans in place. Reductions of activities like family dinners, vacations and reunions can, over time, rob families of the fibers that unite them.

Making family time a priority throughout the year helps to build stronger households. Family time generally results in healthier and happier families, and staycations offer an inexpensive opportunity to bond at home, or away from home.

Consider the following as you begin charting your course to the staycation that best fits your family:

Staycations do not have to be long. Often, the best route to family fun is a short one. Whether it is a weekend, week or other time period, determine the best length for your family. To jumpstart the planning process, consider a few probable dates and pencil them in on the calendar.

Reflecting on your budget and desires, establish whether you will plan your staycation around the home or extend it to county, regional or statewide perimeters. Many families opt to do a mixture of these.

Jotting down some possible in-house activities and outings will help determine your approach. Many excellent destinations are often found right under your nose! I can think of numerous locations within Bibb County or west-central Alabama---all within an hour's drive. Of course, we have our own great in-county destinations like Tannehill and Brierfield, as well as numerous locations of interest along the Cahaba River and Talladega National Forest that even some Bibb Countians may not have visited.

If you're itching to get out of the county, there are numerous Alabama State Parks within an hour's drive---Oak Mountain near Pelham, Chickasaw near Linden, Paul M. Grist near Selma and Lurleen B. Wallace near Northport. With the exception of Chickasaw, I've never been to any those myself! Other options might include museums, zoos, amusement parks or municipal parks.

At the house, great activity options include cookouts, game nights, competitions and movie nights. When personalizing this family time, be creative and think outside the box!

Get your family to visualize the family staycation as a fun, yet important time to strengthen and enjoy the family. Staycations offer critical benefits to families and, inevitably, the areas and communities where the families live.

Finally, keep your objective in mind. What do you hope to accomplish? For most, a staycation offers the family adequate time for unwinding and rest, yet also encourages sharing, enlightenment and connecting. Lastly, make it fun for all family members!