

# My Teens and I Seek Out Arcades on Every Family Vacation

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The author's teens love going to arcades on family vacations. Imgorhand/Getty Images

- Traveling with my teens can be difficult, but we, thankfully, all love arcades.
- Every time we travel, we stop at an arcade and waste hours there.
- It's the only place where we all have fun and are able to connect as a family.

Traveling with my teenagers is a whole new ballgame. Gone are the days when I could plan a vacation and choose the activities — with them just happy to be along for the ride.

Now, I have to consider my three teenagers and their likes and dislikes. I also have to involve them in the planning. If I make the wrong decision, I risk the teenager sulk raining down on me. Nobody wants that.

To make it more difficult, my kids like different things: My daughter could spend hours digging through thrift store racks for "treasures," my middle son could spend all day fly-fishing, and my youngest son prefers to be active on a food tour or bike ride.

Thankfully, I eventually found the holy grail that keeps everyone happy on a family vacation: an arcade.

## **We stumbled upon our first arcade as a family in Portland**

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I discovered our mutual love of arcades a few years ago when we visited Portland. It was much hotter than anticipated, and most of our planned activities were outdoors. We needed something to do to get us out of the 100-degree afternoon temperatures.

In a desperate search, I found Ground Kontrol, a two-story arcade that not only fit the bill for an air-conditioned establishment but was also met with excitement from all three of my teens.

We spent much of the afternoon there, enjoying our favorite arcade games and even a few that were new to us. I was surprised by how much time we spent in the pinball area, considering it was never something they gravitated to before.

## **We now visit arcades on every family trip**

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Our top spots are tiny retro arcades with '80s music and games like "Frogger" and "Pac-Man." If they serve pizza and beer, we might ditch our dinner plans to continue the arcade fun.

We recently, for example, spent two nights at High Scores Arcade in Monterey, California, fighting off typhoid and cattle thieves while playing my favorite childhood game, "Oregon Trail," with my sons. I was thrilled when we walked in and saw the hand-built game cabinet housing the retro keyboard and monitor, but I was more surprised when my older son wanted to join me in playing.

We strategized the time of year we'd start our cross-country journey, how many cattle to purchase, and what amount of clothing was the least we could get away with. I'm proud we made it to Oregon with four of our five family members alive (sorry, Dad). Best of all, I shared memories with my son of playing this game as a child when we visited the "computer lab" at school.

This arcade quickly became a favorite. It had a jukebox that only played '80s music and games set for open play (you purchased an hourly or unlimited wristband when you arrived). The arcade also sold some inexpensive snacks and drinks, including beer for the parents. A corner of the shop was set aside for those needing a break from the action (like moms).

We returned for a second night since we enjoyed it so much.

## **We've found endless benefits to seeking out arcades on trips**

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I think it's something about being together, yet separate, that makes arcades a top pick for us. Just when I think we're all sick of each other, I locate them playing multi-player "Pac-Man." It's a sibling miracle.

Visiting an arcade offers some downtime without being stuck in our tiny hotel room, all on our phones.

When we visited Hungry Sasquatch/Thirsty Sasquatch on a recent visit to Vancouver, Washington, we went for the pizza by the slice. Still, the arcade games allowed me to sit and enjoy a local brew while checking my email. We spent an hour or so there, and it was enough of a reprieve to get us out and exploring the city some more (after an ice cream, of course).

There's also the friendly, low-stakes competition that comes with an arcade visit. Sometimes, with three kids of different ages, the youngest gets left out when the older two are better than he is at an activity. Arcades have a way of balancing that out, as we all have different games in which we excel.

Plus, I love showing off my epic "Tetris" skills in head-to-head combat with one of my kids. Thank you, GameBoy summer of 1990.