

FORMING MEMORIES WITH CHILDREN



A few years after I graduated from Fellowship, I met up with one of my co-fellows, Dr BF, at a conference in San Diego. We shared details of our lives, and invariably talked about our families and finances. Like most American doctors fresh out of Fellowship, Dr BF had a six-digit tuition debt. In spite of this, his spouse had insisted that they go for a good vacation every year. She felt that it was important to develop fond memories with their children.

That got me thinking – Emily and I had three very young children at that point, and traveling on a plane for a “holiday” sounded more like a major combined air, land and sea operation. Thus, being the ever pragmatic, hassle-free Singaporean, I opted to do nothing. However, after reflecting on both Dr BF’s words and my own childhood experiences, I realised that there is merit in having annual vacation trips with the children – I will always remember the coach trips to Malaysian towns with my family, my first flight to Bangkok, and playing on the beaches of Pattaya with my sister...

And so, the moment my youngest child was self-propelling, I planned for not one but two trips at once. Our first destination was Seoul, South Korea. The flight was an adventure in itself, but with my kids being slightly older, they handled themselves well and thoroughly enjoyed the plane ride. The other adventure was when we struggled with food orders at little eateries, in our attempt to savour the local cuisine – all because we were much influenced by *Jewel in the Palace*.

On our trip to Japan, we flew in to Kobe and travelled to Osaka to see the city. It was a real adventure

negotiating the railways and subway lines. (Foreign visitors can sign up for the Kansai Thru Pass and avail themselves to unlimited travel on certain railways and subway lines.) We then visited Kyoto before finally ending up in Kobe again. There, we visited the Kobe Earthquake Memorial Museum and the children learnt to be prepared for an earthquake.

With that success, we have been going on trips at least once a year. In 2013, we made a long journey to the US where we embarked on the quintessentially American vacation – a road trip. We visited friends in Cincinnati and Cleveland, and the walk through the wintry landscape in the Cleveland Metroparks reservation when the first snow had just fallen was an unforgettable experience. We wound up our holiday in New York City during Thanksgiving week. Standing around the block in Times Square waiting for Toys“R”Us to open on Black Friday, having a turkey dinner in the hotel, and fidgeting about in the bitter cold for Macy’s parade are some of the all-American memories deeply etched in my memory. The following year, we travelled to Melbourne, Australia. The children learnt much about the unique animals of Australia. We also visited Sovereign Hill, an old gold mining town in Ballarat, where they enjoyed wearing the wide brim leather hats as miners.

When I look back on the last few years, the kids have grown up really fast. The eldest is now taller than Emily and they will someday leave for college and get on with their own lives. In the end, there is nothing more meaningful in our lives except the friends and families we have, and the memories we all share. And in these memories we live forever. ♦

PROFILE



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Legend

1. First snowfall in Metroparks, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

