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Grand Tours With Grandparents Are the Growth Area in Travel

When Parents Aren't Invited, Look Who's Invited: Steaks and Riding an All-Terrain Vehicle

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By ALINA DIZIK

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After Sally Frame Kasaks retired as chief executive of a retail clothing chain, she was eager to return to explore destinations she'd hurried through on business trips. In the past three years, she has been to Japan, Tanzania and Australia's Great Barrier Reef. And each time she brings along a pint-size companion—one of her grandchildren.



Each child picks one destination and there is "no editing" by the parents, says Ms. Frame Kasaks, 69, the former CEO of Ann Taylor who lives in Ormond Beach, Fla. In July, she and her husband, Ivar Kasaks, took their 12-year-old grandson, Carson Moyer, to Australia.

As grandparents pursue adventure travel well into their golden years they are taking grandchildren along for the ride. Many forgo the expected one week domestic road trip or Disney excursion and instead book honeymoon-worthy trips to remote places.

The purpose, grandparents say, is to expose the kids to other cultures and foster independence. Maybe that's why parents aren't invited.

Audio

Reporter Alina Dizik talks to WSJ This Morning host Gordon Deal about taking grandchildren on extravagant vacations.

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"When [grandparents] get to travel without that middle layer, it creates a strong bond," says JoAnn Bell, vice president of programs at Road Scholar, a Boston nonprofit educational travel operator. On Road Scholar trips, grandparents are allowed to bring just one grandchild at a time (exceptions are made only for twins).

"They develop this relationship without the interference of the parent. It's one of the things we are pretty strict about," says Ms. Bell. Parents looking to tag along are steered to another one of the group's offerings, she says.

Starting in fall 2011, the organization has been emailing a list of available tours to clients and encouraging them to peruse it with family members over Thanksgiving. By Christmas they can decide on a destination and book it. "The bonding starts with the selection," Ms. Bell says.

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Children from about 10 to 15 are in the sweet spot for the grand tour with grandparents. Their daily needs usually aren't terribly urgent, and with parents thousands of miles away, they actually complain less and behave better, many grandparents say.

"It gives them the opportunity to share their vision of the world directly with their grandchildren," says Richard Harris, senior vice president of product and operations at luxury tour operator Abercrombie & Kent.

"The grandparents and parents don't exactly see eye-to-eye." Costa Rica, China and Alaska are popular destinations, he says, with trips typically lasting three weeks.

In a slow leisure-travel market, catering to older travelers and multigenerational itineraries has been a lifesaver for many travel agencies and tour operators, says Marcello Gasdia, an analyst at PhoCusWright, a New York-based travel-research firm.



Mildred and Geoffrey Chesbrough, left and right, with grandkids, clockwise from upper left, John, Cameron and Katherine. Chesbrough Family

In 2012, about 10% of leisure travelers 65-plus took a trip with someone under 18, he says. "This is one area that's the area of growth," he says.

Geoffrey Chesbrough, 72, a retired rear admiral in the U.S. Navy, spent a couple of years in Italy in his 40s and says he returned with his three grandchildren on a tour earlier this year so they could "soak up the antiquity." He can't quite forget the slight case of sticker shock he had after a \$400 dinner they had near Florence in June. His grandsons, John, 13, and Cameron, 11, ordered \$70 steaks, and his granddaughter, Katherine, 13, had veal. "I thought they would all stick to pizza," Mr. Chesbrough says.

Sometimes he found he had to flex parenting muscles that hadn't been used in decades. "My biggest fear was when

we got into big crowds," says Mr. Chesbrough, who did frequent head counts. After a few days, he and his wife, Mildred, put a limit on how many bottles of soda the children could drink each day.

It can be hard on parents when they are left behind. "I've never gone to any of these locations. I was very envious," says Ingrid Kasaks, 46, who lives in Toronto and whose three children have each accompanied their grandparents to the other side of the planet.

She says she didn't set any ground rules for Carson's trip to Australia this past summer, but admits she felt a tad nervous to see a photo of him on Facebook riding an all-terrain vehicle on a cattle ranch. "It was all part of the adventure," she says.

Dragging along a cellphone with an international calling plan was out of the question, says her stepmother, Ms. Frame Kasaks, who adds that it isn't her "personal style" to check in with constant phone calls. "There are ways to keep in touch without hovering," she says. Carson also used Instagram to post photos of his surfing lessons at Bondi Beach.

International travel's hefty price tag puts vacations like these out of most parents'

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reach. And it can be a source of tension that baby boomer grandparents have the resources while their adult children might not.

Rafael Garzarelli, 63, and his wife, Shawna, took their 11-year-old grandson, Mikael, and 16-year-old granddaughter, Kelsie on a two-week luxury tour of South Africa this year with Micato Safaris.

It was nothing at all like the vacations he took with his own children when they were growing up, he says. "That's always the thing that comes up [with my grown children]," says Mr. Garzarelli, a construction equipment company owner in Salt Lake City, who spent \$20,000 per grandchild on the trip. "When they were little, I didn't have the option," he says.

Mr. Garzarelli says they loved watching Mikael and Kelsie pet baby lions, and the staff at the safari camp even managed to locate Cocoa Puffs, his granddaughter's favorite cereal. "They get really spoiled," he says.

Some tours offer cooking, photography or other activities for kids while adults visit a museum or enjoy a pre-dinner drink. Operators say grandparents often worry the kids will be bored.

"The success is to balance both the time together and the time apart," says Mr. Harris of Abercrombie & Kent, which offers a Galapagos tour where kids learn to tie towels into animal shapes while adults attend a lecture on wildlife.

Grandparents often are surprised to see their young offspring acting like adults. Elaine Pesky says her food-obsessed 14-year-old grandson, Henry Herrman, was thrilled when he realized he'd be dining at a two-star Michelin restaurant in Paris.

"He says to the maître d', 'Oh my goodness, if I'd known I would have worn my cuff links,'" recalls the 73-year-old travel agent in New York, who began booking such trips for clients about 10 years ago.

She and her husband took Henry to the London [Olympics](#) and Paris last year for his 13th birthday.

In July, Steve Danziger and Sheli Dansky-Danziger took their granddaughter Mariah Miller, 13, on a two-week trip through U.S. national parks with tour operator Tauck.

Mariah kept a journal and added brochures and maps to make a scrapbook, and through the tour operator's partnership with a volunteer program, the three volunteered to paint a house. "The trip was for her, it wasn't necessarily for us," says Mr. Danziger, a 64-year-old orthopedic physical therapist in River Edge, N.J.

Carolyn Maples and her husband, Mike, are almost done giving each of their six grandchildren a trip of their choice for their 10th birthdays. They have been to China, France, Alaska, Scotland and Italy.

Ms. Maples says she was caught off guard when her granddaughter, Josie, lost a tooth this past summer in the middle of a formal dinner at the Four Seasons in Florence.

"She kept her mouth closed and I took her to the ladies room," says Ms. Maples.

Later, a waiter brought cookies from the tooth fairy.

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