

John's Vacation Tips

1. Avoid Xmas week and Feb. School Vacation weeks. Prices are high, everything is crowded, and airfare is often double and sometimes triple.
2. Travel before Xmas for great deals...the weeks from Thanksgiving to Dec. 24 offer low prices, good skiing in VT/NH or outstanding beach weather in the Caribbean. And you can get a great tan for the holidays.
3. Don't be shy about taking the kids out of school a few days. Most teachers are pretty good about getting homework in advance when you notify them.
4. Getting several families or 3-4 couples together to rent a house is substantially less expensive than even luxury hotels. And you don't have to eat 3 meals a day out at restaurants.
5. Even if you're not a skier, consider a winter vacation at our Stowe VT or Bretton Woods houses. I ski every 2nd day when I'm there for maybe two hours and that's enough for me. But the views are tremendous, the houses very luxurious, and the amenities second to none. It's a great relaxing vacation up in the mountains in winter.
6. Take time off from work! No-one on their death bed has ever been quoted as saying: "gee, I should have spent more time at the office".... If you need to stay in touch with the office, our houses have high speed internet service and free long distance telephone. Better yet, avoid all guilt and invite your boss or some big clients with you (might even be tax deductible if you're "business entertaining". And if you invite your boss and his/her spouse along, who will get that next big promotion do you suppose???)

7. Best deals are fall months (Sept/Oct) for the Caribbean houses. Dec. 1-20 at the ski houses in NH and VT. If you don't care about skiing or summer, the April/May or November period at the ski houses is a real inexpensive getaway for the weekend (like \$ 995) split among several couples.
8. Travel light: We have a washer and dryer at each house so don't bring more than one suitcase. And for the Caribbean, don't bring any fancy clothes for nightlife. The best restaurants welcome you with shorts and a polo shirt.
9. Always get a direct flight whenever possible. And if you're flying, get an early morning flight out as they're much more reliable than an afternoon flight. If you're flying to the Caribbean and have to switch planes (Boston has not direct flights to St. Maarten yet), San Juan is the best airport to switch. Why? There's many flights from San Juan to every Caribbean island on American Airlines and other carriers so if you miss one connecting flight, the next is only 90 minutes later. If you miss your connecting flight in say Miami or Pittsburg, you'll wait another day (to get to Paradise). Plus San Juan is a beautiful airport with easy U.S. customs on your return flight. (Miami and JFK are much more difficult for customs)
10. Let your kids bring a friend with them. Their parents can spring for airfare or lift tickets or whatever, but the kids will have a blast. All our houses were designed to accommodate children, but of course, watch kids around pools at all times.
11. Get a passport now, even if you don't need one.
12. If you love to dine out on great French food and you like to meet people from Europe and all over the world, St. Maarten/St. Martin (SXM) is the island for you. If you feel safer being in the good old USA, then St. John is the island you want to visit (no passport needed for U.S. Virgin Islands)

13. Ski snobs say New England skiing is #####.....Baloney. I've been to Jackson Hole and Lake Tahoe (Heavenly ski area), and I can't say there's much of any difference between Stowe VT, Bretton Woods NH and those (ultra-expensive) western ski areas. Some ski areas in southern VT or NH have poor conditions but when you get far up in northern New England (like Stowe or Bretton Woods at Mt. Washington), it's a different world. Last year Stowe VT had something like 320 inches of natural white powder. And they start making snow at Bretton Woods and Stowe around Nov. 15 usually thru later April.
14. Do something different on vacation...something you haven't done before. Try fly-fishing (with a guide) in summer in Stowe or Bretton Woods NH. Or swim with the dolphins at St. Maarten, or do a snorkeling boat day trip on St. John. Or have a local chef come to the house and prepare dinner something you ordinarily might not order at a restaurant. (see our website for local caterers who will come to any of our ski or Caribbean houses). Do as they do in Europe, and cook a big meal at noon time and enjoy some fine wines, then take a long afternoon nap.
15. Most importantly, meet some of the local people. First of all, they depend on tourists like you and me to make a living. Get to know them and their families. Ask their opinions. Spend money locally when possible (on St. Maarten, Carib Beers are 75 cents at happy hour at Ms. Busby's beach bar but \$ 6 each at the Westin hotel 300 feet down the beach). You will generally find that people who live in tourist destinations are a different breed and very friendly so be polite and outgoing and inquire about their family and background and you'll make a friend for life. Each of our housekeepers also does some catering so ask them about what they can offer your group (for the ski houses...I like a huge turkey dinner all cooked with mashed garlic potatoes, salad and a veggie prepared for me when I arrive up in Stowe or Bretton Woods around 7pm on Wednesday night as I let the kids skip school thurs and fri). For \$ 150 or so, this catered meal will feed a small army—very well.

16. Please re-read # 1 and avoid those peak holiday times. You'll have a much better time and save thousands of dollars.
17. Bring a digital camera, or buy one, and take a ton of photos. Take the best ones and upload them to www.zazzle.com and blow them up and then get them framed for you and your friends. Something people will keep forever—along with the memories.
18. You're on vacation....do what you like, when you like. But try something different when possible so you can look back on this trip and talk about it with friends.