

herd instinct

Holidaying with friends, family or those with a shared passion has benefits that go beyond financial savings.

WORDS RENAE LEITH-MANOS



Paris, 2006



Church, Aurach bei Kitzbühel, Austria

OVER THE PAST five years, group travel has become one of the most popular ways Australians go on holiday. Whether for a birthday celebration, anniversary, sporting event, overseas marriage, or just because, travelling with a group of friends or family members offers a raft of new experiences and memories – and often at surprisingly competitive prices. Groups take villas in Tuscany or Fiji, others go on driving trips across America in a convoy of minivans, or travel by train and stay in apartments in the big cities. There has also been a big increase in group travel on coaches, people wanting to be part of a large group trip. People are often so time-poor and exhausted, when they go on holiday they don't want to drive themselves.

Different travel agents and carriers offer a range of discounts for groups, depending on the number of people on the trip, the location of the holiday and the transportation companies involved.

Group tours can be quite specific in their requirements and travel agents stress that one person in the group needs to do the organising to ensure everyone knows what the trip involves, the costs, and is in the right place at the right time.

Different strokes for different folks seems to be the theme. We asked five group holidaymakers to share their experiences.

Michelle Black

Business services manager,
Queensland Department of
Education, Training & Arts

When Michelle Black's sister Megan called from their parents' Gold Coast home to tell her to come over straight away, the last thing she expected to hear was that her parents were taking the whole family to Europe for their first white Christmas.

The family travelled together for a month, primarily staying in large apartments so they could cook and have their own space, but still be together.

KITZBUHEL PHOTOGRAPHY: KITZBUHEL TOURISM/
ALBIN NIEDERSTRASSER

"I think a lot of people can afford to go away together as a family, but they don't do it and it's a shame. To have an experience and create memories like that as a family group is the most fabulous thing. Mum and Dad had been to Europe before, but none of us ever had. The nine of us spent Christmas in Kitzbuhel, Austria, which was magic. It's a small ski village with 16th-century buildings. There was snow, Christmas markets, little

boutiques and Europeans dressed in stylish fur and leather boots.

The priority was family, so one couple would mind the children while the others went out, or we'd all go out together. In Paris the apartment was spread over two floors and overlooked the Eiffel Tower, about 100m from the lawn at the front. We went to Paris, Florence, Rome, Nice and London.

Travelling with children, we spent at least four days in each location, so we weren't rushed.

We bought Eurail passes and travelled by train, which was very special and the kids loved it. People were so warm and friendly throughout Europe.

We thought about putting it off until the younger child (Annie, 18 months) was older, but by then the older child (Stephanie, 14) probably wouldn't have wanted to travel with Grandma, Grandpa, Mum and Dad, so we just thought we should go now. We'd all do it again tomorrow." >



*Quercia al Poggio,
Monsanto,
Italy*



QUERCIA AL POGGIO PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS CHUN

Chris Chun

Artist

Chris Chun spent two years planning for his partner Matthew's 40th birthday in Italy last year. A group of 27 friends celebrated for a week in a Tuscan villa.

"Forty is a significant milestone and after going to a few, we wanted to do something special. I lived in Rome for about six months several years ago, so knew Italy quite well. The first step was sending out a newsletter-style email asking for expressions of interest 18 months before. We sent out 60 and felt overwhelmed by the response when 30 said they were interested.

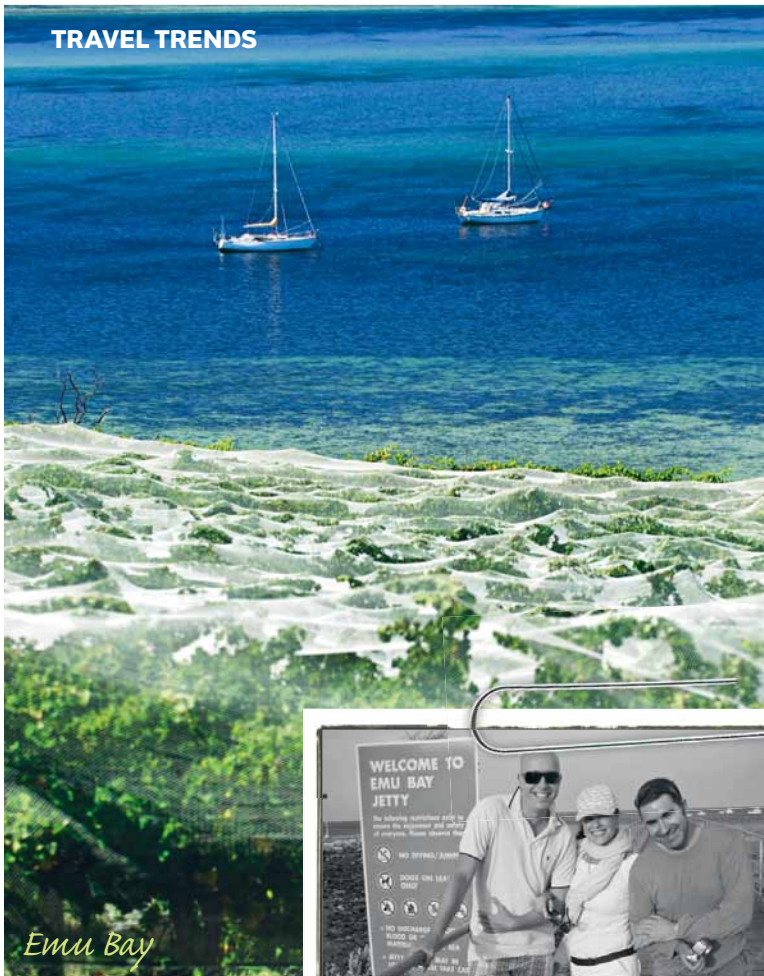
A year before the day, we booked a villa called Quercia al Poggio [in the Chianti region] through Tuscan Enterprises in Sydney. It is set on an amazing estate where olive oil and wines are made and had two pools, a tennis court and outdoor wood-fired oven. Nine months beforehand we sent out a note comparing the cost with a nearby three-star B&B, pointing out our trip worked out cheaper for guests. We asked for a 25 per cent non-refundable deposit and booked everyone in.

We also went over to check out the house six months before the event, to ensure it was what we wanted and to book some restaurants nearby, particularly Matt's birthday dinner. We arranged the birthday dinner in the local town with cake and a menu while we were there and explored the area so we could let people know where the supermarket was, suggest daytrips and so on.

When the time finally came, it was just brilliant. Most people came for a week, but we were there for two. We had a host of activities planned and people could join in or do their own thing. One day we arranged a four-car expedition to the fashion factory outlets outside Florence, our guests hosted their own cooking master classes, which were great fun, and we just had a great time.

The key to making group travel work is a group of laid-back, easygoing people. It's important not to be in each other's faces 24/7. People had a lot of freedom. At the end of it all, we gave each guest a DVD. We've already had lots of requests to organise another trip soon." >

TRAVEL TRENDS



Emu Bay



Kangaroo Island, 2006

Ferdinando de Freitas

Director, Garlands Florist, Sydney

When a friend invited Ferdinando de Freitas to Kangaroo Island for New Year's Eve, he wasn't sure what to think. He had never been there, and wasn't sure about it as a celebratory New Year's Eve location. But after accepting the invitation, he had the most relaxing time ever.

"I'm not someone who can travel alone, but I also don't like big groups, so four was the right size group for me. We flew into Kingscote and hired a luxury beach house, Birubi, on Emu Bay which was incredible. All of my friends keep asking why I went somewhere so obscure for New Year's Eve, but it was pure luxury to be in a beautiful house with three friends, miles from the business and pace

of Sydney. It was truly fantastic, so relaxing. Most days were spent just sitting on a beach two minutes' walk from the house, re-connecting with friends. My mobile didn't work, which was also a blessing. We hired a car at the airport and picked up some local produce. The seafood on Kangaroo Island is amazingly fresh, with great lobsters and fresh vegetables. I was in charge of the cocktails and the others cooked. I couldn't recommend travelling like that more highly, it was fantastic. On the last day, I couldn't believe it was already time to go, it went so fast. It made me realise how fast Sydney is; that you need to make time for friendships. And what better way than a short break?"



Aspen, 1986

Rob Hore

Retiree

In February this year Rob Hore and his wife Dorothy flew to Aspen, Colorado, with 26 friends to enjoy the ski slopes. It all started 35 years ago, when a group of five couples went to Perisher and had a brilliant holiday. It turned into an annual group trip. Hore has been organising group ski trips to the US for the past 27 years, alternating between Aspen and Vail.

"Travelling in a group is a great thing to do. Most of us are businessmen, architects, solicitors or builders, and we find everyone in Aspen is so friendly, hospitable and generous. I'm retired and most of the others aren't, so I do all of the organising through a travel agent. In Aspen we stay in North of Nell [a condominium hotel] in self-contained units, which allows some privacy if people want to stay in one night or cook their own meals. I usually book a section of the property for the group. Most nights we have a dinner booked somewhere and it's up to people whether or not they come. But the majority do most nights and we have a lot of fun.

Group travel offers a great social experience. Each year different people come – even neighbours have come along. The Americans seem to gravitate to Australians in groups, and we find them shouting us all rounds of drinks, giving us tips on the latest spots and enjoying time out with us.

The key with group travel is to give each other space as well as time together. Many of the group this year went on to do other trips afterwards. Last year we went to Playa del Carmen in Mexico, then back to Sydney." >

EMU BAY PHOTOGRAPHY: BEN SEARCY/ACPSYNDICATION.COM

TRAVEL TRENDS

Wayne Godfrey

Accountant, AGL



Wayne Godfrey is chairman and founder of the Down Under Disneyana Club, an organisation for people who love Walt Disney. Last year he arranged a group trip for seven Disney fans to travel to five Disney properties over 32 days to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Disneyland Anaheim, California. Ranging in age from 34 to 50, none of the seven have children, but all have a passion for Disney and walked more than 280km through the various theme parks. Godfrey used a local travel agent specialising in group travel.

“Three of us started the trip in Tokyo with four days at the Tokyo Disney Resort, then the other four joined us at Hong

Kong Disneyland for the resort’s first birthday party. Disneyland Paris was next. None of us had been before. Then we flew to Disney World Orlando, Florida and Disneyland Anaheim for the 50th anniversary.

There were some amazing once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. An exhibition in Paris featured hundreds of pieces of Disney artwork over three floors, from sketches to models of the characters. At the Walt Disney Studios in Burbank we were shown around by a Disney cast member we’d met in Orlando. He took us behind the scenes and we saw the sound stage where *Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World’s End* was being filmed.

The absolute highlight was seeing Walt Disney’s barn, which was in his backyard, where he created some of the original characters. It is only open one day a month, but was opened specially for us.

We stayed on-site at the Disney properties for most of the trip, but didn’t spend every minute together. Different people were interested in different aspects of the parks. Travelling in a group was great. We all got along well and enjoyed each other’s company. Next time I’d give people more notice; with a group of over 20 you get discounted airfares. But travelling in groups, people need at least six months’ notice.”

