
A Vacation Isn't All Fun and Games for the Nanny



Kevin P. Casey for The New York Times

Kate Makinson, standing at center, is a nanny for the Nordhoff family of Bellevue, Wash. As part of her arrangement with the Nordhoffs, she will travel with them. Top of Form

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A FAMILY vacation is an oxymoron," says Tracy Nordhoff of Bellevue, Wash., outside Seattle. "It's just living with kids in a different place."

So, when Ms. Nordhoff, her husband and their blended family of seven children, aged 3 to 18, travel, they make sure that they have a flexible, reliable child-care provider whom everyone knows and trusts: their nanny. Although the summer vacation season has just ended, many families like the Nordhoffs are already talking to nannies about their next trips.

Many companies have handbooks outlining policies regarding pay and overtime while traveling, but there is no standard way to pay the nanny for her business trip: the family vacation. As with many other job situations, though, communication about expectations can help.

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If you want a nanny to accompany your family on vacation, here are some points to keep in mind:

- During job interviews, describe to prospective nannies how often and where your family usually travels, and what the general hours and pay would be for such trips.
- Before each trip, discuss specifics about the schedule, workload and any additional compensation.
- Remember that being responsible for your children's safety and happiness in an unfamiliar place can be challenging and stressful—even for a professional.
- Give your nanny time off to relax and explore. That way, the nanny will be better able to take care of the children when necessary and be more likely to want to accompany the family on future vacations.

Roughly 40 percent of nannies travel with their employers, according to the International Nanny Association, a nonprofit group based in Houston. And parents offer a litany of reasons for including nannies on their vacations: the chance to make flexible activity schedules, for example, or to have more time alone or for adult activities like wine-tasting or dancing. For families like the Nordhoffs, an extra set of hands allows parents to kayak and ski with older children.

Probably the most often-cited benefit is the comfort level for both children and parents. "When you leave your kids with a hotel baby sitter," said Jim Anderson, a banker in Manhattan and the father of two, "and they're crying because they don't know her, and you don't know her either, it's hard to enjoy dinner." A nanny knows the family's rules and routines and already has its trust.

Perceptions regarding the benefits to the nanny, however, can vary greatly. Some parents may think that they're offering a chance to go to a new, fabulous place. That may be true, but some nannies can also feel trapped - on call at all hours, with no time alone. While parents may see a beach bungalow as a dreamy place to relax, a nanny may see it as an unfamiliar place where a child has few toys and has to eat different foods. The nanny may also see safety issues if the rooms aren't child-proofed.

"Remember, the nanny's not on vacation, she's working," said Elizabeth Walsh, owner of NannyQuest Inc., a placement agency based in Atlanta. "It might not be as big a deal for her as the parents think."

Of course, many nannies do find pleasure in visiting new places and experiencing a level of luxury that they may not be able to afford otherwise. "I am very lucky and well aware of it," said Keely Barthold, a nanny who has traveled with her employer and two children to Italy, Mexico and Palm Springs, Calif.

When it comes to payday for a vacation, nannies' employers will often disburse the usual salary - which can vary widely, from an average of \$420 a week in Houston, for example, to \$648 in New York, according to the nanny association - and will cover food, travel and lodging expenses. Others add a daily bonus of \$50 to \$100 to compensate the nanny for being away from home, or they may come up with a 24-hour rate, perhaps \$150 to \$250, so they don't have to keep track of work hours. A few simply add 25 percent or more to a nanny's weekly salary; occasionally, they double it.

Other financial extras vary with the circumstances. An allowance of \$30 to \$50 a day may be added for meals if the nanny is not staying in a house with a stocked kitchen - or in a hotel. If the family is in an expensive city, \$25 to \$50 may be added a day for sightseeing.

Travel salaries can also vary by workload. If the nanny is responsible for watching a second family's children at the beach as well as her employers', for example, she may receive double pay.

But extra compensation isn't always monetary. "The key is to understand what will make the nanny happy," Ms. Walsh said, whether it is the privacy of one's own hotel room, gifts such as a ski lesson, or extra money. Most important, parents and nannies should sit down together when planning the vacation and discuss schedules and compensation.