



Grandmother
**SUZAN
DICKSON**



We've been entrusted to take our two grandchildren, aged almost four and 17 months, on a holiday.

The destination is up to us, and the choices are many. What about a trip overseas to broaden their minds? Or an island resort? A cruise? Camping? We list pros and cons for each and agree that the overriding pro is that we spend quality time with our grandchildren and continue to build our already strong bonds.

The overseas trip is quickly discarded. Not only would we have passports, vaccinations, flights, accommodation and in-country travel to organise, we are unable to erase the vision of dealing with a sick child in an unfamiliar environment. We also realise that the children are too young at present to appreciate travel in another country. Similarly, a visit to a capital city, with its museums, galleries and public buildings, would be best kept until they are older.

An island resort or cruise holiday, on the other hand, is more appealing. Each provides a wide variety of activities for both children and adults. And, if we need a break, we can take advantage of childcare facilities, and medical facilities

are nearby, if required. We would be able to spend lots of quality time with the grandchildren as our basic needs, such as meal preparation, laundry and housework, would be taken care of.

Despite these two positive options, we decide on a camping holiday, the benefits of which include helping with problem-solving, increasing self-confidence and promoting family bonding. However, camping in a tent conjures up visions of rain-soaked bedding, constant supervision around the campfire and shared facilities, so we opt for cabin camping. A cabin with comfortable beds, our own facilities and sufficient living space in case of rain is the perfect introduction to the joys of camping. Limited or no access to TV or internet means we can concentrate on having fun together while making meals, collecting wood, fishing, playing hide-and-seek, going on scavenger hunts and creating our own special area. In addition, we don't have to go far from home and we can take the car with as much gear as we need. Perfect!

Suzan Dickson is a doting grandmother to three grandchildren.



Parent of children
with special needs
**MELANIE
WHYTE**



With the world becoming more and more socially aware, I'm a firm believer that you can holiday anywhere in the world with special-needs babes, but there are places that make it that much easier - Fiji, for one.

Fijians by their very nature are so beautiful, unassuming and generous of spirit that most children will feel at ease with them - but they have taken it a few steps further now. There is a special school in Sigatoka that caters for all manner of disabilities, ranging from mild autism and Down syndrome to the most profound of physical and mental challenges. Recently, a walkathon was held to raise money for the special school; it raised more than FJD\$61,000. Last year they raised FJD\$42,000, which enabled them to purchase a 4WD to service the remote communities where these children often lived unaided by anyone except their parents. Caring for special-needs children has become such an important matter to the people of Fiji that even the Prime Minister himself took part in the walkathon.

All resorts in Fiji that accept children have kids' club facilities and babysitting,

but Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort takes it even further with its Meimei private nanny service. Even better, many of the staff have undertaken extra training to work with special-needs children. Most are now certified in first aid, including the use and administration of EpiPens, as well as food-allergy training.

I think perhaps the biggest drawcard to a country like Fiji is just their inclusiveness. My children have always been welcomed with open arms into spontaneous games of pool volleyball, always given a high-five and been greeted by name as the staff walk past them, and, most importantly, never been made to feel any different. Their skill levels are well catered for, which is by no means unimportant when your two children lay at opposing ends of the spectrum, and at the end of every day when their tired little bodies hit the pillow, the smiles on their face say it all. Vinaka, Fiji!

Melanie Whyte is a mum of two autistic tweens and has been in the travel industry for 20 years. Visit her profile page (travelmanagers.com.au/melaniewhyte).