

Bedford Family "Mushing" Vacation

BY ROBERT BEDFORD

My wife Gretchen wanted the whole family to spend a few days together on a vacation. It had to be relatively local and not too expensive. With three teenage kids, two in college and one in high school, it was tough to find a few days for us all to be together. She found a window of time in January last year when everyone was on school break and she and I could find time to escape from our busy work schedules. I admit it was an added benefit to find a place where the work world couldn't find us for a few days! Here was the challenge: What could we do in January, close by, and in roughly three days?

DOGSLEDDING ANYONE?

Gretchen thought about the Poconos. It was cold, and though we don't ski,

maybe we could find a nice lodge and drive there? Surfing the web, Gretchen found a website with info on a place that offered dogsledding or "mushing." Okay, everyone likes animals. Unfortunately, there was not enough snow at this particular place. (We know *this* winter that would not be a problem!) Now that we had a unique and fun idea, we had to find out where there was snow within a drivable distance that offered dogsledding? Nowhere, unfortunately.

So we looked at other options. New York City – maybe a show? Maybe Atlantic City? Nothing looked appealing. Also the thought in the back of Gretchen's mind was the kids were not necessarily onboard with spending time as a "family." So it definitely had to be short and interesting!

BETHEL MAINE HERE WE COME...

So, finding nothing within driving distance, where could we fly that was cheap and would have dogsledding available? Minnesota? They had dogsledding but that wasn't close or cheap. How about New England? Gretchen called a few dog mushing operations that offered packages. It seemed that no one had snow yet and it wasn't cold enough to freeze the lakes solid so we could sled across them. Still, she left a few messages and Steve from New England Dogsledding (www.NewEngland-DogSledding.com) in Bethel, Maine, called her back. They were running – they had snow, rooms at their Telemark Inn Wilderness Lodge, and dogsledding packages. It was only an hour and a half drive from Portland and flying there was cheap. Who the heck is going to Portland, Maine, in January? We are!

My wife casually mentioned the plan to me and our teenagers...everyone was tenuously on board. After looking at the weather report, we knew we had to upgrade and expand our winter gear. Thermals, boots, wool socks, gloves, parkas, snow

pants, face masks, sunglasses, hand warmers. We gathered what we had and scoured the Internet and discount stores for the rest. Yes, I now own pumpkin-colored Under Armour capri thermals (TMI)!

We headed out, of course had a mix up at the ticket counter, ran for the plane, and luckily I didn't have a heart attack. Thank goodness the flight was uneventful as was the rental car, which was at least front-wheel drive. On the way to Bethel, we stopped at a Burger King to grab some food. The town was a little reminiscent of a Steven King setting. I accidentally took someone else's fries from the counter and there was a confrontation. My son exclaimed, "I knew I shouldn't have come, Dad's going to get us killed." Luckily, the tension died down after I bought the local "Mainiac" lunch and we were back in the car and hopefully headed to a peaceful place.

RUSTIC BEAUTY IN BETHEL

The scenery was beautiful. Bethel is near the border of New Hampshire. We started seeing big mountains and there was snow. Lot's of it. We found the road up to the lodge and it was basically impassible. Now what? We parked on the side and started walking with all our gear. Like a hero, over the hill came Steve to the rescue on his sled with a team of dogs. YES!

He got us up to the property by dog sled. I actually ran behind the sled because it was too heavy with the kids and all of our gear. As we approached, we could hear the dogs in the woods. It was absolutely magical. Like a movie set. It was feeding time and there were a lot of dogs. Each had their own color-coded house and all were friendly. The kids' faces lit up and we knew we were going to have fun. Immediately the family went around hugging these beautiful dogs, picking out their favorites.

The lodge was great. A huge woodburning stove heated the whole place and an orange cat named "Wiskers" slept behind it. We ate at a big round table with the few other guests, which everyone enjoyed. We talked, played board games...just hung out in the warmth of this rustic lodge.



Unless you are the lead dog, the view never changes!



TRAVEL TIP

Pack the stuff you easily get at CVS, but won't find in remote locations or in the woods!



Justin and Lead Dog "Dark Star" – grandson of former Iditarod Champion.



My Fantasy Vacation

Just my wife and I in the South Pacific on a romantic island getaway.

FAMILY TIMES IN

Florida

BY KATELYN INMAN

Anna Maria Island is a quaint little island paradise. It's located on the Gulf of Mexico, directly west of Bradenton, Florida, about an hour south of Tampa. We stay at the beachfront Via Roma Beach Resort located near the middle of the seven-mile long island. It's a relaxing resort of stucco buildings, Romanesque columns, and breezy palm trees. The perfect place to get away from the chill

of this winter, which is just what I did in February.

My family has been going to Anna Maria Island since I was a baby. We timeshare at the Via Roma Beach Resort. Throughout my childhood, this destination offered a very family-oriented vacation that included not only my parents and brother, but my grandparents as well.

Over the years, I have met a few lifelong friends here. We used to keep up via snail mail throughout the year (oh pre-texting days, lol). Throughout college, I came to visit during spring break with friends. We spend the majority of our week out in the sun-

shine swimming, enjoying a game of shuffleboard or volleyball, and playing on the beach.

The island has a free trolley service that runs continuously, which is great for shopping and getting to our favorite bike rental spot, Beach Bums. They have quite a selection of rentals, but we usually rent the tandem bikes and set out for an adventure! Our favorite restaurants include the Sandbar for the gorgeous view, Mr. Bones BBQ, and Sharky's Seagrill for what else but SHARK BITES. Yum!

This has been, and always will be, my favorite vacation spot because it holds so many cherished memories. I cannot wait to continue the tradition and take my own children here one day.

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Family is Forever!



My Fantasy Vacation

I would love to spend a month or so traveling around Europe. I'm not picky on who I go with, but family is always great. Must-sees include Paris, Rome, Venice, and Dublin.



TRAVEL TIP

I always pack an extra set of clothes and any essentials in my carry-on, just in case my luggage gets lost!

Bedford Family *Continued from page 6*

CARING FOR CANINES

The next morning we helped out with the dogs' care; feeding and, yes, shoveling poop onto the "poop sled." We learned how to load the Alaskan Huskies up into the trucks to transport them to the launch location. It's quite an ordeal. Then we headed over to the White Mountain National Forest where they run the dogs.

Silvery birch trees and the cleanest pale green river ran through this wintry wonderland. It was like a scene from a postcard or an Ansel Adams' photo. We had two sleds with teams of eight dogs on each. With some training, the kids and I learned how to hitch up the teams. My twins Chelsea and Robert, Jr., learned quick, which was good because they had their own sled with their little brother Justin in it.

Our dog teams were made up of a mix of dogs from relatives of former Iditarod Champions (the ultimate 1000-mile dogsledding race held in Alaska) to puppies in training, bred specifically to become lead sled dogs. The two lead dogs that left the biggest impression on our family were "Kurt" and "Dark Star" (see picture). They were direct descendants of Iditarod Champions and absolutely live to run and pull a sled. There are also retired dogs on the New England Dogsledding property. While this is not always the case, here these dogs are treated with utmost respect

and special care after a long life of pulling sleds in subzero temps. They stay by the house in a special pen eating a mix of hot dogs and Alpo.

FABULOUS FAMILY FUN FOR ALL

The kids loved everything about the trip from the adventure of traveling to a remote Maine location to learning how to hitch and drive a team of sled dogs to feeding and cleaning up after them.

All agreed it was awesome and the best family vacation ever!

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The Bedford Clan – Cold but feeling adventurous!
(Gretchen, Rob, Jr., Justin, Chelsea, Rob)