

*Hobson's Choice

Rainbow Vacations for Family Bonding

COACH



"Beware the Ides of March"... Julius Caesar (William Shakespeare)

The prophetic words of the soothsayer pronounced in 44 BC may probably bring the ghastly scene of Julius Caesar being put to death by his conspirators and the resultant mayhem and upheaval caused in the Roman Empire. In present times for the school/college going youth this era seems to be replaced by a highly exciting period in academics where the students are put into tremendous pressure as competition gets tougher by the day. Though there may be disagreement on how to destress the student evaluation system, there is unanimity in the fact that this exam period causes lot of strain both on personal and family fronts. Due to tight regulatory controls exercised at the graduate and post-graduate level the students are under pressure to perform at the click of the button as many of these exams are conducted online. Though there are many organisations which take good care of the stress built up among students, still every year the society suffers from negative exam pressure often resulting in loss or damage to life. Therefore as the soothsayer says, "Beware the Ides of March!"

In order to reduce this tension, the doting parents often promise a lot of goodies to the children post the exam period. For the rich and affluent it may take a form of a trip abroad with a Rolex/iPod/Gucci gift in tow. The very mention of such excursions probably makes a student work hard to capture the exam sentiment and come out a winner. Others belonging to the middle and lower middle class families may also be promised with a trip to the hometown or a round-robin trip to Goa or Kerala beaches and what have you! Here there is a positive attempt by the parents who dangle these lollipops so that their wards present a brave face and receive the battering without a whimper.

However there may be another category of students who have neither the resources nor the family motivation to enjoy a vacation beyond the boundaries of their towns. In smaller towns and habitat, the parents may be keen to utilize the volunteer inputs of the children maybe to decorate the home or seek their help to complete some unfinished domestic agenda. Or maybe the children would just while away their summer in chasing their lost opportunities in sports, games as well as some short term treks and mountain paths. Thus the summer would be spent in seemingly non-descript activities devoid of any charm or conquest for that matter. But they remain bonded to their families and their neighbourhood probably building networks for future.

Therefore the question that arises in one's mind is what is the best way to spend a vacation? Rather than judging the issue on affordability I believe it would be appropriate to view the children's vacations as a unique opportunity for bonding both at the family and societal levels. As we all know, the school/college routine of a student in urban as well as rural areas often tends to be robotic with a ward chasing the school schedule from Monday to Saturday. Sunday may provide a brief respite, but this interval is just enough for the student to brace oneself against the next week's onslaught. Though the festival/national holidays do act as breaks in the monotony, this space is not wide enough to strengthen the family and societal bonds. In the olden days probably a visit to your grandparents/relatives in the upcountry towns or distant locations would help provide such opportunities. But with nuclear/DINK/DIOK families, these outlets might have vanished.

Undoubtedly what is left now is to salvage the family bond holding the child to the mother-father-brother-sister linkage so that they understand each other better and thereby build and sustain lifelong partnerships. It would be interesting for the child to learn the games/sports from their family members rather than reach out to coaching classes. I am proud to say that my brother taught me to ride a bike before anyone else in the locality could achieve that right balance; while my mom challenged me to ride a car before I could barely climb into one. Most of the games that I played were through family coaching, and though I didn't set the playing fields on fire I had learnt enough to teach my children and the neighbourhood when the occasion demanded. This indoctrination at home taught me not merely the nuances of the game but also the values and the spirit which are the soul of the sport.

As I look back to the vacations spent at home surrounded by family members, I have no words left to express the gratitude of this invaluable gift of the summer vacations bestowed on me. As Leslie Dreyfous put it beautifully in the New York Times,

"Family values are a little like family vacations – subject to changeable weather

and remembered more fondly with the passage of time. Though it rained all week at the beach,

it's often the momentary Rainbows that we remember"

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*Hobson's choice is defined as a choice of taking what is available or nothing at all.