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Dallas-area bargains for vacations at home

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Dallas Moms blogger Lisa Keys-Blair of Frisco is used to crunching numbers in her work as an operational risk manager for [Bank of America](#). It didn't take her long to see that her original summer vacation plans were not working out with her budget.

She estimated that taking her family of four on a vacation similar to the one they took to DisneyWorld in Orlando last [Thanksgiving](#) would cost nearly \$5,000.

She decided that the family – husband Garriet, daughter Finley and son Garrison – could have fun close to home and still stay on budget. She checked out three local hotels that offer activities to keep the kids occupied. Here's her report:

Great Wolf Lodge

100 Great Wolf Drive, Grapevine. 817-488-6510.

www.greatwolf.com.

The average price for a family of four is \$289 per night. This includes a family suite with two queen beds and a sleeper, plus time at indoor and outdoor water parks. KidCabin suites with a mini log cabin for the kids cost extra.

It does not include breakfast, but there are several restaurants on site. You also can bring your own food and store it in your mini-fridge, but you have to eat it in your room.

To maximize your time at the waterparks, check in and get your wristbands at 1 p.m. even though your room is not guaranteed until 4. On the second day, you can stay until 9 p.m., although you must check out of the room by 11 a.m. There are two locker rooms, so you can get dressed even if you've checked out.

"The water park is only accessible to hotel guests, so the lines never get too long, and the pools are never too crowded," Lisa writes. "This helps curb complaints and keeps the fun going."

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Photos by MARK ROGERS/DMN
Lisa Keys-Blair and her daughter Finley, 8, enjoyed a slide at Great Wolf Lodge recently on their family staycation.

Lisa advises taking a break to explore other activities, including free bedtime storytelling. A Paw Pass, \$75 per child, includes activities, a pair of [Crocs](#), arcade tokens and more. The activities can be purchased separately but would cost more.

Lisa's bottom line: While this is the priciest package she sampled and can cost \$600 and up if you include all the extras, it's a lot of big waterpark fun and still a deal compared to an out-of-state vacation.

The Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center

1501 Gaylord Trail, Grapevine. 817-778-2000.

www.gaylordhotels.com.

Lisa recommends the SummerFest Wonderland Adventure "best value" package, which starts at \$229. It includes one night's stay for a family of four, breakfast for two adults and two children and a batch of kid's activities, such as the Cheshire Cat's Challenge (a scavenger adventure), plus a fireworks show, daily resort fee and self-parking.

The basic package has fewer activities.

Factor in the cost of eating at the on-site restaurants, which can average \$50 per meal for a family of four.

"My children each had their own favorite attraction," Lisa writes. "My 8-year-old daughter loved the tea party, and my 4-year-old walked away with a huge grin from the puppet show. All of us enjoyed the atrium, especially at night, as the art and gardens lit up with twinkling lights."

Lisa's bottom line: A good, medium-priced vacation package that should cost less than \$500 for a family of four, even with all the extras. She calls it "an excellent escape from the daily grind." SummerFest events end Sept. 6.

[Homewood Suites](#)

455 Central Expressway North, Allen. 214-383-6673.

www.homewoodsuites.com for other area locations.

The most cost-effective choice Lisa found was the Homewood Suites, where weekend rates start at \$99 a night, including breakfast buffet. Monday through Thursday, rates include dinner. You can fill in other meals using the fully equipped kitchen in each guest room.

After checking Homewood Suites in Allen, Lisa found that while the on-site activities don't rival the Gaylord Texan or Great Wolf Lodge, her kids loved the large hotel lodge with the 52-inch television and couch and eating and gathering area, pool, sports court and fitness center. Garrison was so enthralled, he cried when they left.

Lisa says a Homewood Suites stay works out best if you venture out for nearby attractions. The ones she liked best near Allen are Heard Museum in [McKinney](#), Allen Premium Outlet Stores, Gold Class Cinema with full meals and big, comfortable chairs, and Watters Creek, an outdoor shopping center with restaurants, free music and free activities for the kids.

Lisa's bottom line: A great deal for a getaway that can cost less than \$260, even accounting for outside activities. Lisa advises families to bring games, movies and popcorn and plan to visit area attractions. **Read** Lisa Keys-Blair every Thursday on the Dallas Moms Blog at **momsblog.dallasnews.com**.