

**Ep #198: Singapore, Hong Kong & China:
Megan's 17-Day Family Trip on Points**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

Ep #198: Singapore, Hong Kong & China: Megan's 17-Day Family Trip on Points

Alex: Megan's back today to share about her 17-day trip to Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing. Her family has now visited all six Disney Castles around the world and they also sailed on the Disney Adventure out of Singapore. Listen in to hear how they used points and miles to save.

Welcome to *Points Talk*®. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points.

All right, so today we have some good news and we have some sad news. The good news is that Megan is back on the podcast to talk all about her family of five's trip to China. They went to Hong Kong and Shanghai so that they could visit all, is it six Disney Castles that there are currently?

Megan: For now, until Abu Dhabi opens.

Jess: Yeah, so they marked off the last two Disney Castles that they had. They also went on the Disney Adventure cruise out of Singapore. Cannot wait to hear about that. The sad news is that Megan's last day with us was on August 31st. She has been instrumental to our team for the last three years and we are so sad to see her go. But she has been working on her own brand behind the scenes, and she's going to tell us a little bit more about that before we get started with her trip to China and Singapore.

Megan: So, over the last year and a half, well, actually, we had this idea for a very long time. I think I told you guys about this last March, like 2025. So it's

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been a while. So I have been working on growing my own brand, Travel Keeper. I offer trip planning services like as a travel agent and travel consults, like if you just want to get on an hour call and talk through your trip where you're DIYing a lot of it, but you just want to talk through it. That's an option. But the big thing I've been really working on is a family trip planning app.

And I recognized that there were all these apps where you could put all your stuff in. And I've been using the same Google Doc since 2013. So, and but none of them really were geared towards families and none of them were geared towards the way that we travel, where it's like we're paying cash for some things, we're using credit card points for some things, we're using free night certificates, like all that stuff.

So this I've created one of the only if, I mean, I think it's the only one that allows you to track your costs and keep track of your itineraries in points, free night certificates, your credit card credits, and then it calculates your cash, like what you would have paid, and like your savings that you have with your points. So if you're keeping a spreadsheet doing all that, this does it every, like everything for you in one place.

So you can do all the basic functions for free. There's also a pro tier that allows a couple fancier features like sharing with collaborators or like working between your computer and your phone to be able to take it on your trip. And that's \$39 a year. And that's the newest part of this. But the best part is all of this is just me. My husband like checks everything because he works in or has worked in cybersecurity, so he makes sure that everything is secure and safe.

And I don't track anything. I don't want to make money off of people's content or their information. So everything is encrypted end-to-end. So if you ever use like the Signal app, it's kind of like that. So everything is scrambled on your device. It's yours. You only keep the key. I can't see anything.

And any feedback, I like, everything, every update I've made has come from your feedback. So anybody that's using it, my DMs are open, my email is open, and it's like it's constantly getting better.

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Jess: Yeah, I noticed that when you share, when you share about it, you're like, "Oh, this person sent me this DM, so I made this change." And the thing that's nice is because it's just you and your husband, you can just, you can roll these things out quickly. It's not like it has to go through a chain of like, "Okay, let's do this and let's approve it." No, it's just like if it sounds good to you, you just do it. So I love that.

Megan: Yeah, and you can just download it for free.

Pam: I love how it has so many features, Megan. I have not signed up for it yet because in my mind I'm thinking, you know how I do guys. I always say, "Well, I don't have a family." Even though I'm traveling with family all the time. But I can tell that this is something that I want in my life. I'm going to be downloading it and you know, I love that it keeps track of your costs and what you're paying cash. I always wonder, what did I really pay for that? You know, because in cash because I don't know. So yeah, so I think it just sounds amazing.

Jess: I was going to say Pam is the one out of all of us who has shown up at the hotel on the wrong day. And so this could be a really good addition. This could be a really good addition to your app stack, Pam.

Pam: It could, it could, it could.

Megan: Yeah, so you can put every detail of your itinerary in there. You can add little notes, and you can just download it for free. And the free version really does a lot. And I kind of want to keep it that way because honestly, I don't want to make money off of something you don't need. So all the features that are paid actually cost money to run. So I'm trying to keep it that separate. So anything that doesn't cost me anything stays on the free version. Anything that does cost me money is on the pro version.

And you can find them on the App Store under Go Travel Keeper and on Google Play, I actually got the name Travel Keeper. So I updated that one recently. Or you can just check out my website on gotravelkeeper.com and find all the links to everything I just talked about there.

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Jess: We will link all of that in the show notes so that you do not have to try and find it on your own.

Megan: Yes, thanks guys.

Pam: Well, I even think your pro tier, I mean, \$39 a year, that's nothing. You know, I'm sure it pays for itself over and over again. So I am actually can't wait to, you know, get off this call, load it and start using it because, yes, Jess said I sometimes do get myself in a bind.

Megan: And tell me if anything can be better, please, because that's really the only way it gets to become the way that everybody wants to use it. And I am just so open to feedback. I'm not going to be offended if you don't like something or it could be better.

Pam: Sounds great.

Jess: All right, well, Megan, tell us. So let's get into the trip now. By the way, none of this is, Megan is not paying us anything to say anything about Travel Keeper. We are just, she was so great to us, so we figure it's the least we can do. But let's get into how this trip came about. I think I know the reason for the Disney Castles, and then maybe you just decided to throw the Disney Adventure out of Singapore in there since you were going to be on that side of the world anyways.

Megan: Yeah, and that's just how my trips always kind of go. They like start out like, oh, we're going to go for a week, and then this turned into a 17-day trip plus an extra day in New York City. So it was just, it just kind of ballooned out of control a little bit. But when my kids turned 10, they get to pick the trip destination for our family. And my twins turn 10 next week. And so this is what, the end of August. And so they picked, they wanted to go to Disney. And I was like, guys, we go to Disney a lot in the last couple of years.

Alex: You're like, you could choose anywhere you want to go, and you're choosing Disney, which we love Disney, but like anywhere you want to go for your birthday trip. Yeah.

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Megan: Yeah, like for Rose, we did Harry Potter.

Alex: You don't even need to convince me to take you to Disney. I'm already going to be taking you. Let's choose something else.

Megan: Yeah, I was like, let's think a little bit bigger because we can do that. It's a direct flight from Rochester. It's not a big deal to go to Orlando. So we compromised and I kind of negotiated with them to go to the Asia Disney Parks. So the girls had been to four of the parks. They haven't been to Hong Kong or Shanghai and Tim and I hadn't been to Shanghai yet. So those were our goal of like, okay, well, we'll all go to Hong Kong and get our, the girls will get their fifth park and then we'll all get our sixth park together at Shanghai. So it just really worked out to do it that way.

So of course, over this trip, we positioned in New York City, we went to Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing. And really how it came about was that I got those direct flights from New York City to Singapore. And I'll get into more like the points that we use and everything in a minute.

But so we, I got those flights, and I was like, well, if we're going to be in Singapore, let's just get over the jet lag while we're there. So we spent two days in Singapore. And then I was like, well, the Disney Adventure cruise just started sailing in March. So let's book that for the end of July because that'll be an easy way to just not have any pressure of, like, waking up early or staying up late or trying to fit in all the sightseeing.

Alex: That's a classic Megan thing right there. Well, we're already going to be here. We might as well add this.

Megan: Yeah.

Jess: This is Tim's favorite thing to hear, right? When you're like, "Well, we're already going to be there."

Megan: And as usual, it's kind of like, I have to get it all planned out before I even tell Tim about it because he just gets overwhelmed with all my constant changes. And I'm like, oh, we're going to do this or this. And he's like, wait, didn't

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you just tell me we're going to do something different? I was like, yes, but this is the final plan.

Alex: You're like, it's already all taken care of. You don't have to do anything. Just show up.

Megan: Yeah. And we used a ton of points. So I kind of, I think Pam wrote a blog post in 2024 about like where we would go if we had a 100,000 points. And I was like, I want to go to Shanghai Disney. I need to check off my last Disney park. Like, that is on my list of goals.

And so I've been saving points specifically with this trip in mind, and we used a ton of points, like close to 1.6 million points for the five of us. And that still didn't cover everything. So it covered a lot. It cut off probably almost \$20,000 worth of the cost of the overall trip. But obviously we couldn't pay points for the cruise, and we didn't pay points for a couple of the hotels. We got the family rate.

But I think the most important part that I kind of want to cover is that we went to China without a visa. And I think a lot of people were really curious on how we did this. So I want to make sure I kind of explain it and then I'm going to include the actual link in the show notes so you can see the government official website and make your own decisions on it. So right now, China has a 240-hour visa-free transit policy. And so that is like 10 days. So it starts midnight the day you arrive plus 10 days. So you basically get your arrival day and 10 days in China without having to go through the lengthy visa process.

Last time I went to China, Tim and I went 2014. That was actually our first trip on points. And it was like three hundred-some dollars. We had to send our passports to get the visa, and it was kind of this whole ordeal. And I was like, I'm not paying all that just for a couple of days just to go to Disney.

Alex: Yeah.

Megan: So this really worked out to be a good loophole. And the key is that the place you arrive from and the place you continue on to after China cannot be the same. So you can't go from the United States to China back to the United

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States. So what we did is we went from Singapore to Hong Kong. And for this policy, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan count as third regions. So those count as separate regions/countries in this policy.

So we went from Hong Kong to Shanghai, and then we took the high-speed train from Shanghai to Beijing. So you can move within China once you are in the country. And then we exited from Beijing to Singapore. So Hong Kong and Singapore were the two different like first and third countries.

And it really wasn't complicated. I was really nervous. Like we're on the plane from. So I printed all of our confirmations. So I wanted to have all of our flights there and then all of our flights back to Singapore showing that we were going to two different places. So I had them all stacked together, all printed in a folder.

They checked them in Hong Kong before we boarded the flight. Like they called us up to the desk and the guy took pictures of everything, entered it all into the computer. And then when we're boarding the plane, I looked at Tim, I was like, what if they tell us we can't come in? Like, I was starting to get real sweaty and nervous about it.

But we landed in Shanghai, we went through immigration. It took maybe 20 minutes. I went first. So like I, she was like, where's your visa? And she was kind of annoyed with me because there were counters that specifically said 240 visa-free. And the guy sent us to one that didn't say that. So I think I like made this lady do extra paperwork and she was not happy about it.

Alex: But you're like, hey, I didn't get in this line. They sent me here.

Megan: Yeah, like I was like, we're just going where we're told because I don't want to cause any scenes or anything. Like I am following the rules. So she kind of was a little annoyed and she's like, where's your visa? And I was like, we're going to use the 240 visa-free policy. And she kind of rolled her eyes, but then she looked at my paperwork. It took her a couple of minutes and then she gave me my, like, stamp.

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Alex: She's like, oh, this girl's prepared. She knows what she's doing. I don't need to be upset. She's crossed her Ts and dotted her Is. We're good.

Megan: Yeah, exactly. And there was just like a little sticker in our passport and then she sent me through. And this was the first time this also happened with us where we weren't allowed to go up as a family. They made us each go individually. So the girls had to go by themselves. And I don't know if there's an age cutoff for that or if that was just what it was. I don't know.

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: I know, I can't imagine being like, here, three-year-old, walk up by yourself. And they're like, what is happening?

Megan: And so, like, I went first and then she like told me I had to go stand behind the yellow line like behind her desk. And so I just stood there, and then Tim sent the three girls individually, and then he went last. So we kind of sandwiched them in between us. So nobody got stuck behind the line. And that was it. And then they just like sent us straight through and it was no problems. And even leaving, usually sometimes they make you scan your bags going through the customs section just to make sure you don't have anything illegal in your bags. We just had our backpacks and the guys just waved us through. They didn't even make us scan our backpacks.

So like entering was no big deal at all. All that stressing was worth nothing. So it all worked out. Everything was easy. But I definitely check the policy before you use it. It can update. It can change. I think originally when it started, it was only a couple days and now it's up to 10 days. There's 53 countries included. So the US is on there and there's a couple others like the UK and Australia. But always, I would definitely check the official government link before you try to do this.

Alex: Yeah, that would be bad.

Jess: All right, so how did you get to China or to Singapore, I guess, to begin with?

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Megan: So we positioned to from Rochester, New York to Newark. United just has the best options for us. And we paid 11,000 miles and \$5.60 with the United Card member discount and flew to Newark. And Tim's company actually has an office out of New York City. So we flew in on Wednesday night and stayed in the city, and then he went to work on Thursday while the girls and I did some sightseeing.

And I booked the Voco Times Square Broadway, which is an IHG hotel. And so I booked one room with our Chase Sapphire Reserve®, that Select Hotels credit for the \$250. And so you have to use it, it has a two-night minimum. So I booked that room for two nights, but the other room I only booked for one night on IHG points because our flight was Thursday evening. So we didn't need to sleep there a second night. So on Thursday morning, we just like moved all the bags into the one room that we had for two nights, and the hotel didn't care. They were actually sold out. They were like, that actually works for us.

Alex: They were like, thank you. We can give this to somebody else right now.

Megan: We can sell this to somebody else right now. So while Tim was at work, the girls and I did all kinds of New York City sightseeing. We walked up to the Museum of Natural History, went through Times Square, the American Girl store, Lego store, and ate pizza like three times in 30 hours. And then Thursday night, we flew from JFK to Singapore on that is the current longest flight in the world until I think London is going to have a flight to Sydney or somewhere in Australia. And that next 2027, I think that starts. So that'll be the new longest flight in the world. But for now, if you want to get the longest flight in the world, JFK to Singapore is it on Singapore Airlines.

Pam: How long is it?

Megan: They said it was going to be like 19 and a half hours, but I think we clocked in just around 19 hours. But it was like over 10,000 miles, like 10,500 some miles. So we literally were almost the exact opposite side of the world from New York City.

Alex: Oh my gosh.

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Megan: Yeah. So we I booked that through Singapore Airlines. I booked premium economy, and I got the saver fare. So it was 80,500 miles each and \$5.60. I think a few months ago, they had a devaluation. So I think these flights now are 84,500 miles. So it's not too bad, but it's still very reasonable for the length of the flight and in premium economy.

I looked at flying economy, but all the economy flights had us laying over in Frankfurt. So the flights from Newark and JFK that are direct to Singapore only have premium economy or business class. And the economy flights with the layover were still only like 10,000 miles cheaper. So it really wasn't worth the cost savings to do that.

Jess: And Singapore Premium Economy is really nice. That's what we flew when we flew from San Francisco to Singapore, the three of us were in premium economy, and I had no complaints. I thought it was great.

Alex: Yeah, same.

Megan: I really liked it. And I had no issues getting five seats. It looked like I could get up to eight. So, like there were, there was a lot more availability because the business class only had two saver fares. And I was like, I'm not spending all these extra points to fly all five of us in business class. Like the girls' legs don't even touch the ground, so it's not worth it for me.

But I agree. I thought it was great. It was kind of nice being on the plane that long because you could really settle in. Everybody slept probably like 10 hours. Like, we slept a lot because it was we left at 10:30 at night, New York time. So we literally got on, we ate dinner. The girls didn't even eat. They just went right to sleep. And they slept all basically till morning. And the flight attendants were so great. They were like mixing up cocktails in the back, like these Singapore Sling cocktails, like in these giant liter water bottles. They were like mixing cocktails and then people were just like hanging out with them in the galley. They had a snack cart with like Doritos and Oreos and potato chips and Kit Kats.

Pam: Kit Kats.

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Megan: All kinds of stuff. Yeah, they had all kinds of treats.

Pam: I remember, I was very impressed with their treats on that flight. I don't know why, because sometimes there's just brands I don't like, but I had several Doritos, I had several Kit Kats. I was loving that.

Megan: Yeah, I think the girls ate like a dozen Oreos.

Jess: So you're getting your money's worth with those \$5.60 as taxes and fees.

Megan: Exactly. And one more tip was on the app ahead of time, this is one of the flights that you can book the cook for the adults and then the kids, you can choose kids' meals if they are 12 and under. So you can choose kids' Western food or kids' Asian food or there was a kids' vegetarian option too. And you can choose any one of those. So that was a really nice option too because the meals were a little fancier. Like, it was like braised beef and Hungarian chicken and something else. And I was like, my kids aren't going to eat that. So they got the kids meal and it had like chicken and vegetables and like it was it was pretty good. And they had and they came with like a juice box and another Kit Kat and a like a little cookie and a dessert. So they were happy.

Alex: Oh. That's awesome.

Megan: So once we landed in Singapore, we stayed at the Andaz, which I think the three of you also stayed at. And so we were there for two nights and I booked two rooms. Standard rooms sleep three, but only certain rooms sleep three. Not all of them do. So I booked room one with my Chase Sapphire Reserve Edit credit because then I was like, okay, well, Tim and I will be covered for breakfast, and then we get the \$100 resort credit. And that covered the girls' breakfast for at least one or two mornings. So that was really nice.

And it only cost like 26,000 points on top of that \$250 credit for our two nights. So I thought that was a really good deal because the hotel is really nice. The location, you can walk most everywhere. There's a metro stop literally in the basement, so that was super easy too. And they had the Hyatt family rate plan.

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So our second room only cost \$408 for both nights. So it was \$204 a night and that, you can't beat that for a second room.

Jess: That's a great deal for that hotel.

Alex: No, that's a really nice hotel to pay that little for such a nice hotel. Did you guys like the hotel then?

Megan: I really liked it. It was so clean and like new and well taken care of. And the staff were really nice. We didn't get connecting rooms even though I requested that, but our rooms were right next to each other. So and each room had like slippers and robes. So the girls, so we had everything in one room and every we do like everybody shower and bedtime and then they would like wear their slippers and robes down to the other room with Tim. Like we like split up. So he took two kids and I took one kid.

Jess: That's cute.

Megan: Yeah. And so the one room had a king bed and the other room had two twins. And I was like, well, can we get a rollaway? And she was like, we don't have any. Like we're we're very busy. And this is the other thing I learned. August is a very busy time. Like, of course, the kids are off school, but even in Asia, they go back to school around the same time we do in September. So it was very busy. And but she was like, but I can make a super king out of the two twins. So the twins are like a one and a half. They're not quite a double. But so they push the two twins the bed together and made like a giant like super king-size bed. And so that fit three people like no problem.

Alex: Oh, nice.

Megan: Yeah. So in Singapore, we used the metro to get around. It was super easy. We just tapped our credit cards in and out. We did get the girls' passes because like we only travel with so many credit cards. Like I was like, how am I supposed to get my kids? And you can only use the one card for one person because you're like tapping in and out, and they need to track who's using it. I was like, okay, this is too complicated. So we got them their own passes, and

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they had like little Hello Kitty characters on them. So that made them very excited.

Alex: Oh, cute. And that's like a cute little souvenir then to have too.

Megan: Yeah, and they can't and they just had like it was like a vending machine. So you just paid the vending machine. It cost like 10 Singapore dollars and then the card was a \$5 deposit and then you got \$5 to use on the metro. So it kind of really worked out too, and then we just kept them at the end.

Jess: How sad is it that when my family of six travels and we have that issue, I just whip out my wallet and I'm like, here's a card, here's a card, here's a card. Maybe I travel with too many cards.

Megan: I know, I literally take one. Like I have one, Tim has one, and then we take our debit card just in case. And so in Singapore, we just spent two days kind of relaxing. The breakfast buffet at the Andaz was so good. Like there a million options of Western food, Asian food, Indian food, like cold cuts. They were making waffles every day. It was so good.

We spent all morning one day at Gardens by the Bay and Marina Bay Sands. So just like wandering around there. They had a Jurassic Park exhibit at the one area in Gardens by the Bay. And then they had a Disney exhibit in the Floral Fantasy area. So we just got the ticket and did everything while we were there.

Jess: They must have known that y'all were going to go on the adventure and get your last Disney parks and they did that special for you.

Megan: I know, it was just so magical. And then we went to the Merlion Park, which is their mascot for Singapore.

Jess: Yeah.

Megan: And Satay Street. We had dinner there the last night and that's like, it's kind of like a food court and everybody's kind of cooking their own thing and you can get chicken on a stick, and it's it was really good.

Jess: That sounds awesome. Sounds like y'all did a lot.

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Megan: Yeah, it was a lot, and we still were able to like relax and kind of because it was it was hard. Like, we landed at like 5:30 in the morning and we were just so turned around.

Jess: Yeah, that's the thing with Singapore is that you land so early in the morning that yeah, it's a little rough.

Pam: Hey, we know you did a lot on this trip because you had a post with the girls and Tim and Tim was wondering when the vacation started because you were getting up like at 6 every morning. So.

Jess: It was like day 15 of the trip. When are, when is the vacation going to start?

Pam: When is the vacation starting? So, so yeah.

Megan: The other problem was, not only the crowds, it was so hot. It was so hot everywhere. And we're in upstate New York. Our summers are like, it's like 65 degrees today and raining. So it was like 96, 97 degrees Fahrenheit most days. Like it was it was hot. So getting up early was just, we had to do it to survive.

Pam: Right.

Alex: Yeah, that makes sense.

Megan: From the Andaz, we took a Grab, which is like Uber, to the Disney Adventure cruise, which was at the Singapore cruise port. This ship only sails from Singapore. It only does three and four nights. There are no ports. So you literally get on the ship, you're there for the three or four nights, and then you come back to Singapore and that's it. Which in my mind, I was like, this is ideal because we don't really like getting off the ship anyways. So I like to enjoy the ship. And I have a lot to say about this, but I'm this isn't the point of the podcast, so I'll just give you the rough overview.

Alex: Now people's ears, like just, they're like, wait, but I want to know everything.

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Megan: I know, I know. I had too much. I'm on like day six of trying to recap this like on my Instagram and I'm like, oh my God, still so much.

Alex: So just go see Megan's Instagram stories for the full picture then, right? Your story highlight?

Megan: Yeah. So this ship was not built by Disney. It was originally a casino company. And I think as somebody who loves Disney, I think it's very obvious. I think the flow of the ship is kind of rough. It's not really meant for families. Standard rooms only sleep four, but all the other ships have rooms that sleep five. You can get rooms that sleep six, but they're concierge. And I'm like, for three or four nights, like I'm not paying four times the amount just for three or four nights for concierge when we got two rooms, and it was like \$3,500 for our three-night cruise total for two rooms. And our rooms were connecting. But I just thought the flow was rough.

There weren't as many hand-washing stations as the other ships. Like on the other ones, you go through the buffet, you're forced through the hand-washing station. And there's like cast members there telling you, like, wash your hands before you can enter. Here, we showed up to the lunch buffet on the first day, and there was one sink. And I was like, by the time the five of us washed our hands, like 30 people had just walked into the buffet and are like touching all the silverware. And I was just like, I can't. My germaphobe was.

Jess: When you told me this, she had told us some of the more negative things about the ship, but as soon as she mentioned this, I was like, okay, it's off the, it's off the list because my germaphobe self is already paranoid about getting sick on a cruise ship.

Megan: Yes.

Jess: And then add in that no one is washing their hands. And I'm like, nope, not doing it.

Alex: I 100% agree.

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Megan: Yes. And the ship is huge. So this ship fits 6,700 passengers. All the other Disney cruise ships fit about 4,000. So I thought while the layout was kind of off and the flow was rough, they really made it beautiful. Like, there were some really, really nice areas. Like there was a Tiana lounge and I just loved it. Like, it was like emerald green and gold. Like, it was so beautiful. And they have an interior section. So there's like a stage in the inside of the ship where they do like all the shows. So they had a Duffy show, an Avengers show, the regular like Sail Away show. And like those were really cool. Like, we loved the show.

There are rides on the upper deck. So there's a roller coaster. There's like a little like driving car thing and then like a spinny kind of Dumbo-kind of ride. Which those were geared more towards like the little kids, but the roller coaster, like they, the line was never shorter than an hour. Like everybody was waiting for it. And Tim and the girls rode it and they loved it. And so that was really cool and unique.

The one thing I had a hard time with is that our rooms, so we had two rooms and our rooms were linked. So I had me and two kids in one room and Tim and Rose on the other room. And a lot of the characters require you to book in the app on the ship. So from every day at 4:00 p.m., they kind of launch the like all the options. And so from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m., you're like scrambling to get all these characters booked. And it was only letting me book one room. And I was like, why can I only get three people booked for this? Like, this is so frustrating. Like, this is not how this works on other ships. Like if you're booked together, you book everything together.

Alex: Yeah.

Megan: And so I like ran to guest services because I thought I was doing something wrong. And I go and I was like, the line was like a mile long because it's the first day. So I'm standing there and a cast member comes up and she's like, well, what can I help you with? And I was like, I'm trying to book these characters, and it's only letting me book for my one room for three people, but I have a family of five in two rooms. And she just literally shrugged and goes, that's just how it is on this ship. And I was like, so frustrated. I was going to cry

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because I was like, that's not the answer, because you're going to force families into two rooms and then not allow them to all do the same things together. Like that makes no sense.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: And I can see how it would also just be frustrating to have to spend your time on the ship trying to book these things. Like the thing I like about the other ones is on the other ships, you can pre-book. You know, like they have the princess gathering that you book ahead of time. So you're not like on the ship trying to book things while you're there.

Megan: Yeah, I actually had somebody DM me and they were like, if I wanted to do that, I would go to the parks. And I was like, that's kind of how I felt. Like, I felt like I was like that anxious like you're like scrambling to get everything booked and it just cuts right in the middle of your day, right before dinner. And I was I thought that was a little frustrating.

So my workaround was, I booked for three of us. Oh, and the other thing that the cast member told me was, you need to have two phones and try to get two spots. It was almost impossible getting one spot, let alone two spots at the same time. So I just booked for three of us and took, and gave Rose my spot. And I was like, she is going to take my picture. And we were given a hard time a couple of times, but we had a couple cast members that were like, that's fine. Like, no big deal. But like I shouldn't have to do that. Like it was.

Alex: No, and to me, like it doesn't really, like that's what Disney does so great is their customer service. And so it just seems strange that they didn't have that done better. You know, like it just like when you were explaining that and I was watching your stories and I was like, this just does not seem like something Disney would do.

Megan: I know, I know. And so part of me is like, okay, well this ship just launched in March after being delayed for a couple months. It was supposed to, I think, sail in January. We were there at the end of July. So I'm like, okay, maybe part of this is they just still need to work out some kinks. It was rumored,

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we did have somebody tell us that they originally had a five-year contract in Singapore and it's been cut to three. I couldn't find anywhere that was confirmed, but I am curious, like, where is it going to go next? Like, are they going to change how things are done?

I hope they keep the Duffy characters because they're unique to the Asia parks and my kids just like love them. It's so cheesy and little kid-ish, but it's like part of that Disney magic of like, oh, they're unique and they're different and they're special. I hope even if this ship comes to the US or something, I hope they keep that show because it was just really cute.

Jess: Yeah, it looked really cute in your stories when I saw that. I was like, I want to see that.

Megan: Yeah, so not all bad. It was beautiful. We still had fun, but we did have to make a rule on the second morning that we're like, nobody's going to complain. Because I noticed that, like, I was getting mad. So I was like voicing my frustration and then the girls were starting to pile on. And I was like, no, like okay, we need to stop. Like, let's just have fun. Make the most of it.

Alex: Disney cruises are so magical. And you just go in with this expectation, like, this is just going to be like all our other Disney cruises, and it's going to be so magical. And I'm sure there were like you, like there was moments of magical, but then you have other things that you're like, this isn't how they do it in our other Disney cruises. Like this. So it probably just threw you off at first, and you're like, okay, just got to like manage our expectations and be like, this is going to be different than our other Disney cruises.

Megan: Yeah, and ultimately, I wouldn't fly to Singapore just to sail this ship. Like, it really just worked out in our itinerary that I could fit a three-day sailing in. But if it comes to the US or goes somewhere else different, like I don't know where they would put a ship that big, like what port that could take it. But if it would try something different and come closer where I didn't have to fly 20 hours to get on it, I would try it again.

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All right, so after our cruise, we flew from Singapore to Hong Kong and we flew Singapore Airlines. I just booked directly through Singapore, and it was 12,400 miles and \$51 each. This was about like a four, five-hour flight. Like, it wasn't super long, but it was decently long, and we were just in regular economy, and that was it was totally fine, very nice. Like, the crew members were just so nice on these flights. Like Singapore Airlines must really have good training.

Alex: They are the best.

Jess: They are.

Alex: Yes, they're so good.

Megan: And in Hong Kong, we stayed at the Grand Hyatt and we were there for three nights and I booked two rooms and they were each 25,000 points a night. And I had a Club Access award on both rooms. Thanks to Jess for one of those. And I this hotel, like this was a, I would say, like we are not bougie travelers. We do not stay in super nice places, but I would say this was a true five-star hotel. It was really nice. We showed up and they already had our two rooms connecting. They already had the rollaway in one room. Like, they did all the things I requested, and I didn't even have to ask for it. Like it was just done.

Alex: So nice.

Jess: I love when that happens.

Megan: And the Club Lounge was so nice. Like we were ate dinner. They had afternoon tea and they had breakfast there every morning. So we barely had to eat out and that also is just such a huge cost savings of and to wake up and because everybody's awake at like 5:00 a.m. when you're in a different country with the jet lag. And so the lounge would open at like 7:00 a.m., and we were the first ones there every morning like waiting for them to open. But it was so nice to not have to go find something to eat. And you just like go upstairs and it had really nice views of the bay in Hong Kong. Like it was a really, really nice hotel.

Jess: That's awesome. Sounds great. Sounds like a really great use of the club access award too.

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Megan: It really, it really was. And we did have one. There was a French guy who him and another guy were there speaking French. There was some kind of, because it's connected to the convention center. And so there was some kind of like fashion convention. And we overheard him complaining to management that there were children in the lounge. And the manager took it so well because it wasn't just us. There were other kids there. And everybody was being, like I would tell you if my kids were being bad. Like they were being very well behaved.

Alex: Well, your kids, this isn't your kids' first rodeo. They know how to travel. They know what's appropriate and not.

Megan: And like we and like we overheard them talking to the manager and the manager was like, I understand, I understand, I understand, but there's no age requirement for our lounge. Like when we were in at the Grand Hyatt Seoul, kids under 12 were not allowed in the evening hours. So I wonder if they had that expectation, but this one, the only thing it said was if they were 12 and under, they had to have an adult with them. So there weren't any, like, age restrictions on it. So we were kind of like, whatever, not our problem.

But while we were in Hong Kong, we went to Disneyland and again, we just use Grab, the same as we did in Singapore. And I think I forgot to mention, but you don't even need a separate app. Like, I opened the Uber app and Grab just popped up inside the Uber app. So you can just pay with your payment that you already have on Uber and just book all of your cars that way. And it was like not expensive.

Jess: Nice.

Megan: To get from the airport to the hotel would have cost us like \$25 a person on the shuttle, but like a Grab was like \$65 for all five of us. And I think the best part about that, too, is like we've run into the issue of a lot of the taxis only fit four people and they specifically say on the back, like four people. And there's very few that are like vans in Asia. But with Grab, we were able to book directly into like a six-person car. So we were able to get like minivans every time. And the minivans they have there are way nicer than our minivans. Like, they all had

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like cooling seats in the back. They all had like little tray tables. They had all kinds of stuff. So they were, it was nice to be able to do that and get out of the heat and not have to like hop on a metro all the time.

Jess: That's awesome.

Megan: But we spent the day at Disneyland and it was \$105 US an adult and \$80 US a kid, which isn't the big cost savings that we previously had on like Tokyo Disney. But this, it was still cheaper. I paid for the early entry, and we were like the fifth family into the park.

Alex: That's so cool.

Megan: I know. It was so nice. And actually it was super hilarious. We walk into the park and there's like one other like American family that we hear speaking English. And Tim's like, oh, like he has a Buffalo Bills hat on. And like everybody near us are Bills fans. And so Tim like just casually walks up to him and was like, "Go Bills." And the guy turned around and was like, "Tim?" And I was like, we're in Hong Kong and of course you know somebody here. Like.

Alex: That is crazy.

Megan: Yeah, and it was somebody that he actually went to high school with. And he like they just didn't really recognize each other that much. And the guy was like, I thought that was you, but I wasn't sure. And Tim's like, I don't remember who this guy is, but.

Alex: That is so crazy.

Megan: Yeah, so it was just so funny. They were going to visit their family in Thailand. His wife is Thai. So they were going to go visit her aunts and uncles that live there and they were stopping in Hong Kong on the way. And I was just like, how funny is this? Like the only other American family here and we know them.

Jess: Yeah. That's so funny.

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Megan: But we loved it. So Hong Kong Disney has a couple unique to them rides, which is really cool. Mystic Manor is the big one and there's another roller coaster that's like kind of like the Yeti ride in Animal Kingdom where it like goes forwards and then you go backwards. So they had some, and they have a Frozenland, which was really cute. It was an easy, like, one day. You didn't need more than one day. Like we stayed, we were there right when it opened at like 8:00 a.m. and then we stayed until probably like 6:00 p.m. And we did every, we did every ride, some of them twice.

Jess: Okay.

Megan: And it rained all day. So like, it was like pouring rain. I brought ponchos just like cheap dollar store ponchos and I threw them in my fanny pack. So like that saved the day. Our shoes were soaked, but we were dry.

And in Hong Kong, just a couple other things that we did, we visited the Kowloon, we went to the goldfish market. You can go to, so Tim Ho Wan is like one of the big like dim sum restaurants and that was recommended to me multiple times. We never made it there, but I wanted to make sure I said that because people really love it. And then we took the tram up to Victoria Peak, which is like the viewpoint. And it's just like an old-timey kind of like way to tram where it goes up on either side. So that was kind of cool to do too.

And then, so from Hong Kong, this is where we went to Shanghai. And so I booked our flights on China Eastern through Flying Blue, so like through Air France. And they actually gave me the 25% award discount for the kids. So that was interesting because I thought in my mind, I'm like, okay, this only works on Air France. It doesn't work on Delta flights. But it worked on this one. So that's something to check too if you have little kids.

Jess: Well, that is a steal. 6,000.

Megan: Yeah. So like, it was only 9,000 miles and \$43 for the adults, and the kids were 6,750 miles each. So that was a, that was a real deal for us. All the cash flights were kind of crazy. They were like a couple hundred dollars, like \$200, \$300. And I was like, this flight, particularly, was not very long. I'm like,

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why is this so expensive? Like, I don't understand. So we're using the points on that really worked out.

And I did originally have trouble finding, so to be able to like pick our seats, the China Eastern website was only in like Chinese. And so then I'm like reading on like Reddit. I'm like, okay, well, how do I book our flight or seats? And people are like, well, you can do it through Kenya Airlines, which is also in the same alliance. And I'm like, okay, that wasn't working. And then eventually I was able to create an account on China Eastern and get it switched to the English side so that I could see what I was doing. But I had to add each confirmation number separately and pick our seats separately. So I was still able to get our seats together, but I had to do like one at a time. So that was a little frustrating, but it worked out, and it is possible even though people on Reddit were like, you can't do it. It did work out.

Jess: Megan's like, I will find a way.

Alex: Everything's figure-outable for Megan. She'll find a way.

Megan: And then, so we stayed at the Marriott Shanghai Resort Zone, and this is right near Shanghai Disney. It's right in the same area. And we were there for two nights and the so total for the two, for the one room for two nights was \$179 US. And I was like, I can't remember the last time I paid under \$100 for a decent hotel. Like.

Jess: That's crazy. That's awesome.

Megan: So we paid cash. It was going to be 13,000 Marriott points, and I just felt like that really wasn't a good deal. Even using Marriott points, I was like, that's a lot of points for only an \$ 80-a-night hotel room. But the hotel was, it was nice. It was not on the scale of the Grand Hyatts or the Andaz. And but it did its job and we were super close to Disneyland. So that was super, that was nice because that was the whole point of us really being there.

Alex: Yeah.

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Megan: But we were able to, oh, and it offers a free shuttle to the parks and to like the Bund, which is like the viewing area where you can see like that famous like skyline of Shanghai.

Jess: Oh, nice.

Megan: So yeah, and the hotel offers all that for free. And so Tim and I were checking in and the girls were like, we're going to go check, they were just like wandering the lobby and there was like all this like Disney stuff and they had like a panda display. And then they all come over and they all have like these stuffed pandas. And I was like, where did you get those? And they're like, some guy gave them to us.

Alex: Oh, that is funny.

Megan: Like a worker? I was so confused.

Alex: Like some stranger just handing out prizes to little kids?

Megan: Yeah. And I was like so confused. And they're like, yeah, over here. And they took us over and the guy like, they the guy who was working at that particular spot did not speak a lot of English, which was fine. And he just kept saying like, yes, yes, like it's okay. And I was like, okay, all right, this is real. Like you didn't have to pay for these.

Jess: You didn't steal these.

Alex: That is so funny.

Megan: Yeah. So in Shanghai and Beijing, we used Didi to get around. So this is like Grab and Uber. So it's kind of the same thing, but it's a separate app. I set it up on my phone, and it worked totally fine, but it wouldn't accept my US credit cards as payment. So I had already set up Alipay separately, which is kind of like Venmo or PayPal where you just they can just like even at Disney, they could scan your QR code on your phone and you just pay that way. Like nobody used cards, nobody used cash. Everybody used their phone for everything. So I did set Alipay up ahead of time with a with a couple different cards and so then

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when I used Didi, I was able to just process the payment through Alipay, which took care of that problem because I don't know why I wouldn't take our credit cards, it didn't really give a reason.

But yeah, so we did the Jade Buddha temple, there's a silk shop, you can see how silk is made. There's a really nice, the Yuyuan Garden. And then Nanjing Road, which is kind of like their Times Square. Like it has big buildings and lights and it's kind of cool. And then of course, Shanghai Disneyland. And this one was a little cheaper. So this one was \$99 US and \$75 US a kid.

And again, we paid for the early park entry. So at both parks, the early park entry like more than paid for itself. It was like \$25 a person and you get in an hour before everybody else and we were able to ride like five or six rides before the park actually opened. So we got in, got our castle pictures, and then just immediately went to the rides and that \$25 like, saved our day on both parks because we got so much done.

Jess: That's awesome.

Alex: Yeah, that is so nice.

Jess: So worth it.

Megan: And they also have Premier Access, which is their version of Lightning Lanes. So for Shanghai, we actually bought a package of like eight and they're, they're kind of like set rides. You don't get to pick which ones, but then you can buy individual ones in addition to those. So we did that for a couple of rides. Like, they have a whole Zootopia Land, and this is the only Disney park with a *Zootopia* ride. So we rode that twice because I was like, this is really cool and unique. It was kind of like the *Ratatouille* ride at Epcot, like that trackless where you like you move through the ride, but it's like real smooth and it's kind of like, I guess even like the *Star Wars* ride, like the Rise of the Resistance.

Alex: Oh, yeah.

Megan: Yeah, so that was really cool and that was totally worth it too.

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Jess: Yeah.

Megan: And so the Shanghai *Pirates of the Caribbean* is also the only one that is based off of the actual movies. And that one was really cool and that was way more advanced than the ones we have in the US. It had like big screens with the ships and like all these scenes and like the water at one point, you go up and the water rises and I was like, how is this happening? Like we're just in a boat.

Alex: That's cool. Yeah.

Megan: But that was really cool too. And it was just also just so hot. It was like 97 degrees this day.

Jess: Oh my gosh.

Megan: They were giving out like bags of ice for people were holding on their wrists. They were giving out free water to everybody. And they really did they helped deal with the heat and a lot of the rides have like fans blowing and misters and air conditioning. So it for how hot it was, it wasn't terrible, but when we were outside, we were sweaty.

Alex: How did the what was your and Tim's and the girls' favorite park of the two? Did they have a favorite, or?

Megan: I think Shanghai is the best one. I actually, I love Disney World because I think it's just a great destination. But Shanghai as a park, I think might be my favorite individual Disney park because it's just so beautiful. It is the newest, so that might play into how nice it is and clean.

Alex: When was it?

Megan: I think 2016 it opened. So they just had their 10-year anniversary.

Alex: Wow, that is new.

Megan: Yeah.

Jess: That's crazy.

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Megan: So it's like new. Yeah. Yeah, 'cause we were in China in 2014 and it was just being built. And Hong Kong just had their 20-year anniversary. So they had like special like character stuffed animals and stuff like in their in their anniversary outfits and stuff, which were really cute.

But Shanghai was really cool. It was really unique. It was really clean and nice and we didn't have, so I've seen some complaints about the crowds and people and even on a hot day, like the one character, one of the Duffy characters, she had like a 300-minute wait all day. And I was like, who is waiting five hours to meet a character?

Alex: That is wild.

Megan: But other than that one thing, the lines were relatively reasonable, like all within like an hour or so. And of course, like during the parades, they went shorter and.

Jess: I would be like, "Hey kids, I will buy a Duffy costume and dress up as Duffy before I will wait 300 minutes."

Megan: But yeah, so I really loved it. They're building a Spider-Man Land right now. And actually on the Disney, so on the Disney Adventure cruise during the Marvel show, the Avengers show, they asked, they brought like five kids up and they were from all different places. They were from like Hong Kong, from Taiwan, from China, from Singapore. And they asked all of them who their favorite character was and every single one said Spider-Man. So Spider-Man must be incredibly popular over there.

And Shanghai Disney is, we saw the top of the roller coaster and at first I was like, is this going to be like the Incredicoaster at Disneyland in California? And then I googled it and it's like, no, there's going to be a whole Spider-Man roller coaster and land that they're building right now. So that also looks really cool, and I'm like, maybe we need to go back again.

Alex: Oh, that is cool.

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Megan: Yeah. And then from Shanghai, we took the train from Shanghai to Beijing. And what I thought was so interesting, besides the fact that we didn't use cash this entire trip. Like didn't even have to take cash out, nothing. Everything was on our phones or credit cards. But when we booked our train tickets, everything and even our Shanghai Disney tickets, everything is linked to your passport, or if you live in mainland China, you have a like government identification, like ID card. Everything is linked to that. So you don't have to have tickets, you don't have to have QR codes. They literally just scan your ID, and that's your ticket to get in. And I thought that was super interesting and really nice because it even worked for our train tickets.

So like we showed up at the train station and we're looking around, I'm like, do we have to get tickets? I booked them through [trip.com](https://www.trip.com) and so this, there's a separate app for that and I just booked my our tickets through that and so they kind of like put out a wish list kind of thing. So if you book them ahead of time, you won't get your actual tickets until at least two weeks before your train your train time. So I booked it through that and then just got like almost within an hour a confirmation that we had our tickets, and then, but our seats weren't together. So at first I was like, okay, I'm a little nervous about that, but we had three seats together and then one right in front. So the girls sat there and I sat in front of them and then Tim sat with two guys up in towards the front of the, we were all in the same car, but he was up towards the front of the car.

But the train ride was so interesting. So luckily I had two like, early 20-something girls in my row. And they show up and they were the window and the aisle and I was the middle. And I looked at them and I said, do you want to sit together? And they were like so excited that I offered them to do that. And I was like, no, actually you're helping me too. Like now I don't have to sit between the two of you chitchatting the whole like four-hour train ride.

And the other interesting thing about the trains is that so our train had only two stops. So this was like the high speed, the like the direct train, but there were two stops along the way. And so you can order from a QR code through Alipay and you can order food and then when it makes one of the stops, the food is delivered to the train and then the train attendants bring it to your seat. I was

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like, how are people getting Starbucks coffee and Subway subs and KFC buckets of chicken? I was like, where did that come from?

Alex: That is crazy.

Jess: Oh my gosh, you just, Ted is now going to want to go on this train. If he can get a bucket of KFC delivered to his seat. That's enough.

Megan: Yeah. And I was so bummed because I didn't figure this out until after the second stop and the girls next to me got food and I was like, okay, they have to be ordering this somehow that we just don't know about. And I thought that was so cool because it was just so convenient because the train was like four and a half hours, and it was like right over lunchtime. We left at 10:00 a.m. and got in to Beijing around like 2:30. So I was like, this is really convenient. But yeah, just another example of China living in the future. And I'm like.

So we got to Beijing and it was super easy getting out of the train station. Like it was. The one thing that people kept asking me was like, how hard was it to travel to China? And I really have to say, it was no harder, because of technology, than traveling to New York City, to Paris, to Rome, any big city, it was exactly the same. It was so easy because of technology. Like you didn't have to speak Chinese. There's English everywhere. And if you don't know it, I had like Google Translate on my phone that I could look up the, you literally just hover over the word and it translates it for you automatically.

Even in Shanghai Disney, we had an issue with our seats. We had paid for premier access and they couldn't get us in time or something like that. And the girl was literally speaking into her phone, translating it and then showing it to us to read what she was trying to explain to us. So, like it really was so easy and like we were there in 2014, so this is 12 years later. I cannot believe how advanced the country is since the last time we were there. Like it was it was just so crazy.

But yeah, so like when we got into Beijing, same thing, we literally just like followed the crowd, exit the train station, scanned our passports to get out and there was no problem. We got right out of the machine. And then we just

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followed the signs that had like little like walking pass, you could read and it was like Didi this, like car e-hailing is what they were calling it, e-hailing for like Didi pickup. And we just followed the sign all the way up to the second floor and then called our car, and they just came and picked us up and took us straight to the hotel. And I was like, man, this is so nice.

And so we stayed at the Grand Hyatt Beijing for three nights. And again, we had two rooms and this hotel was only 15,000 points per night. And again, we had a Club Access on each room. And this was the first time this has happened. I mean, you guys are Globalist, so you might get this kind of experience. But so we show up and we go to the check-in desk, and she sees that we have Club Access awards on our thing. And so she sent us up to the Club Lounge to check in. I was like, this is the first time this has happened.

So the girls and I were able to like eat snacks while Tim sat down and like, did all the check-in stuff. And I was like, this is really nice.

Jess: That is nice.

Alex: Yeah, that's awesome.

Megan: But again, like the Club Lounge had like a view of Forbidden City. So like you just looked out and you just and it was on the top floor of the hotel and it was just so beautiful. The hotel again was really nice.

We did have connecting rooms and everything kind of just like worked out nice for us. And so we had like two twin room and then a king room with a rollaway bed. But we got to the room and there wasn't a rollaway bed in the room. So when we went up for dinner to the Club Lounge, I just went to the desk where we checked in and was like, hey, can we get a rollaway? And she was like, I don't know if it's going to fit in that room. And then the other guy was like, it'll be fine, just put it in. And I was like, okay.

And so while we were in Beijing for our three nights, our big thing was, I was like, we need to go do the Great Wall, and I want to go to the Summer Palace because those were two things that Tim and I did on our trip. And the funny

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thing is, when we did that trip in 2014, I was actually pregnant with Rose, our oldest, and so I took a picture of like these little booties on the Great Wall of China. So then we found the tower where we took that and like took a picture of her sitting there and I was like, oh, this is so cute.

Jess: Oh, that's cute.

Megan: And we booked a private tour on Viator, and it was I got 15X on Rakuten. So the whole tour was about \$600 for the five of us. And this was a private tour. They picked us up at 7:30 in the morning. Lunch was included and then they dropped us off at like almost 6:00 in the evening. So we were with our guide and driver all day. So more than worth it. Because again, it was like 98 degrees that day.

Jess: Yeah.

Megan: And he knew all the tricks. So our guide was Jerry. I'll link the Viator link in the show notes because if you're going to Beijing, like book this tour. He even said to take his WhatsApp number and you can just message him directly and he'll set it up for you too because I tried to book it direct via email and I didn't get a response. So I booked through Viator just because that was the only way I could get through. But now I'm like, okay, now I have your WhatsApp. Now I can tell everybody exactly where to find you.

But so we got picked up at 7:30 in the morning and we went straight to the Great Wall. It's about an hour and a half drive. And then we took, so you can there's two options. You can take the chairlift up and then the little, like, roller-coaster-like cart thing, like alpine cart down. But the line for that was like two hours long. And I was like, it's 100 degrees, I'm not waiting for this.

Jess: Yeah.

Megan: So instead, we took the cable car up and back, and it's just like they fit like six people. And the line for that, we literally just like got in line and probably within 10 minutes, we were on the cable car going up. And so that was way

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more worth it than waiting two hours in line just to be able to like say we did the chairlift and the little alpine cart.

But it was just so cool just walking on the Great Wall. Like our guide kind of like we stood in the shade and he like explained some stuff and then he was just like, go and explore. I'll be right here when you're done. And so we had a lot of time to just like, wander around, check things out, take pictures and videos and like, the girls were singing the *Mulan* songs.

Alex: That's cute.

Megan: It was like they were like, it's just like in the movie.

Jess: They were like, we're going to infuse Disney in every aspect of this trip.

Megan: Yeah. Yeah. And like they and it was just like so good and our guy Jerry was so good and I thought it was so, his English was amazing and I like asked him, I was like, did you learn English in school? And he was like, no, like we learned, he was like at my age. He was probably like mid-40s. And he's like, at my age, we learned like our ABCs in like middle school. And he's like, and that was about it. But now like the kids start a lot younger learning English. And he's like, I watched *Friends* over and over, and that's how he learned English. It took him two years.

Pam: So did he talk like Joey?

Alex: How you going?

Jess: How you doing?

Pam: That's it. Did he ever say "how you doing?"

Megan: No, he didn't. But he had such a good sense of humor and I was like, you know how hard it is to number one, learn another language, let alone be funny in another language. Like I was it was so impressive. And he said that like he started out working in a factory and he was making like \$100 US a whole every month. And that's that's what his pay was. And he was like, I don't want to live like this. So then he started working at Forbidden City in the gift shop and he

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was like realizing, he's like, I need to learn English so I can speak to all the guests coming in to tour. And then he was like, and then he saw, he's like, then I was like, I want to be the guy with the flag. I want to be like leading the tour because that is where you make the money.

Pam: That's great.

Megan: And so he kind of just like worked his whole way up and he was so amazing. He has two kids, so he was also great with our kids. He was very patient and he explained everything so well to everybody and it was just also even just the cultural stuff, like he was just so open. We'd be like, oh, well, we saw like little girls dressed up, and they were in like kind of traditional, like Chinese-looking outfits and he's like, that's not really traditional. He's like, they're kind of just doing that for photos. And I was like, oh, okay.

And then the funny part is last time we were in China, Tim and I were stopped so much, people were asking to like take pictures with us. And this time our kids were getting stopped. Like random adults coming up saying, can we get a photo with your children? And I kind of just like left it up to them. I was like, do you want to? And they were like, no. And I was like, sorry, no. And then like Jerry would tell them to like shoo shoo, like go away.

And his explanation was that a lot, so it was very busy and because everybody's getting ready like summer holiday before going back to school. And he was like, a lot of these are tourists from other parts of China where they don't live in big cities, where they don't experience a lot of Western faces. And so to them, he was like, your children just look like dolls. Just like you look at their kids and you're like, oh, they're so cute. He's like, they're doing the same thing. They're just a little more bold about asking to take pictures of you. Like.

But there was one little girl who was probably about the same age as Eleanor and Amelia. So probably like nine, 10 years old. And she came over and asked for a photo. And Eleanor and Rose said no, but Amelia was like, okay, fine. And she took a selfie picture with Amelia. And I was like, this is so cute. I was like, she's going to go tell all her friends at school.

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Alex: That is cute.

Megan: Yeah, so after we did the Great Wall, we went and had lunch. Again, it was kind of like a touristy stop. It was like they sold like jade jewelry and like figurines in the downstairs and then lunch was upstairs. And I was like, now we've done enough tours where like this is just part of it. And so after lunch, then we went to the Summer Palace and we did just kind of like a walking tour through there. And then they dropped us back off at our hotel.

So yeah, if you want to book a tour in Beijing, contact Jerry. He will hook you up with whatever you need. Oh, the nicest part was, we had since our driver was just ours for the day, he had a cooler of ice water in the trunk. So every time we came back to the car, he was waiting right at the door with like fresh bottles of water for everybody. And I was like, this was totally worth \$600 for the entire day.

Jess: That's so nice.

Megan: And then we also did Forbidden City. I kind of screwed this one up. Tickets open seven days in advance and they were sold out. Like they sold out so fast. So I actually booked a cheap tour through [trip.com](https://www.trip.com) and we met up with our tour at like 9:00 a.m., and then after like the first hour, we just like ditched them. I was like.

Jess: That's a good little hack. That's a good little hack, Megan.

Megan: And it was it was so hot and the tour was like 30 people and I was like, okay, and we had like a break. It was like a break in the in the tour and I just told him, I was like, you are so great. Thank you so much, but it is too hot for us. We need to just be done. And he was very understanding.

And then from there, we took a Didi over to Tiananmen Square. And last time we went, I'm pretty sure we just walked right in, but the security line, we got in line and I was like, we're not waiting in this. It was so long. So if you want to do that, you make sure you do it in the morning. And the group tour lines seem to be moving quicker. So definitely do that instead if that's easier for you.

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And then we went to Jingshan Park and the Temple of Heaven, and both of those just kind of like wandered around and checked them out. And that was pretty much our three days in Beijing. And again, it was just so hot and so busy and it's summer travel and that's just when we can go, you know. So we just made the best of it.

Jess: So speaking of hot, if you could do it over again, would you go at a different time of year? Or if people have more flexibility, would you suggest they go at a different time of year?

Megan: Definitely. Yeah, I would probably go in like October.

Jess: October, okay.

Megan: They said the Great Wall is open all year round, so you can visit it, but it does snow. So you it does get cold. So I'm not sure I would go in like December, January, February, but that would still be cool if you had a Christmas break and that was super long. Like, some kids get like a month off or two weeks off over Christmas or New Year's. Like that would be a really great time. But I would probably say last time we went in May, and that was hot. So probably that, like March, April and then like end of September until like early November are probably like the best times to go for the heat.

Jess: Okay. Okay, cool.

Megan: But yeah, no, like it was, it was just so easy. I couldn't believe how easy it was to do. Like it was like not stressful at all. We had no issues with anything. And it was just really, really a great trip.

All right, so from Beijing to get back home, we flew Singapore Airlines again. And so I booked this all on one ticket. And we went from Beijing to Singapore, and then we had like an eight-hour layover in Singapore, but the airport has so much to do. Like, we had no problems spending time there.

Jess: Yeah.

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Megan: And then from Singapore to Newark. And I booked those again, premium economy on Singapore Airlines and it was a 104,500 miles and \$35 each. Again, no problem getting five, which the premium economy really seems to be the sweet spot for families.

Jess: Yeah.

Megan: Because, again, the business class was only two saber seats, which is just too many points. And then we just did the reverse on the way back. We landed in Newark at like 6:00 a.m. Tim and I each had two United Club access awards. So we went to the United Club for three hours and charged all of our tablets and everything. And then we just had a quick like 45-minute flight back to Rochester and that was it.

But yeah, no, it was, it was crazy, and it was so nice to like take the kids back to see something that we had experienced and kind of like had really fond memories of. And the funny thing was that when we went there in 2014, I was like, let's go somewhere where we probably wouldn't take kids. And now I'm like, here I am with three kids that are 10, 10 and 11, and I'm like, let's go to China.

Jess: That's awesome.

Pam: Oh, this your trip is amazing to me. I mean, you can tell that Megan's got this all figured out for family travel. I think that you know, your new app is going to do amazing. I cannot believe the experiences that your children have had. I know that from you, one of my most favorite experiences of travel was standing on the Great Wall, and these kids have already done it. I mean, it blows my mind the experiences that you've given them.

We really appreciate you sharing this, you know, absolutely amazing, I feel like complicated trip, you know, with all with all of us. And I just want you to know, Megan, how much we are going to miss you and how much we have really loved working with you. It's just not going to be...

Megan: I won't be far.

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Pam: I know, but it's not going to be the same. So, I mean, as I'm look as I'm looking, I can see all of our faces. I'm used to seeing four faces, and now we won't, Megan won't be our fourth face, and it's just kind of, it's just, you know, I don't like change. Let's just say that. I don't like change at all.

So anyway, we appreciate all that you put into, you know, the Squad, these years, we wish you nothing but the very best, and I can't wait to see where Travel Keeper takes you.

And if any of you enjoy.

Megan: Thank you.

Pam: Yeah. If any of you enjoyed this episode, please leave a review and share it with your friends and family.

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