

Family beach house fun: Casino nights, luaus, competitions

Renting a house for a week or so with extended family or friends is an economical way to vacation while offering quality time with loved ones. It's easy to fill your days with swimming, hikes, shopping and dining out, but there are also ways to have fun at home with themed game nights, dinners and parties. My husband's family rents a beach house every other year or so along the North Carolina coast, and we always have several nights where teams cook dinner and plan games for the rest of the group.

We've had competitions such as beach Olympics, "Iron Chef America," Wii bowling and a family friendly pirate "pub crawl," among many others. The prep can be as involved or as simple as you want. The goal is to pick a theme appealing to all ages. Last summer we had a group of 19 people, ages 8 to 77, sharing one house. After the beach house and dates are chosen, teams are formed, with team members sworn to secrecy until their night arrives.

For a casino night, my sister-in-law designed money printed with the faces of several family members and everything we needed to play bingo, blackjack and roulette. We also purchased decks of playing cards printed with a family vacation logo. A Vegas-style buffet of baked potatoes and burgers included options for those on gluten-free, vegetarian and lactose-intolerant diets. One team changed it up a bit with a Sunday brunch: "Easel Like Sunday Morning." It was a take on popular wine-and-canvas parties. We had stretched canvas panels, paint, felt berets and stick-on moustaches. Our challenge was to paint a beach scene, which also gave us a souvenir to take home.

Younger generation

Kristin Zerkle, 45, of Columbus, Ohio, said her



In this photo Nicole Nussbaum, Katie Pollack, Kristen Nussbaum and Robert Nussbaum paint vacation scenes as part of an 'Easel Like Sunday Morning' theme at a vacation home in North Topsail Beach, NC. — AP

family also tries to involve all ages. Her parents have been vacationing with their six children in Hilton Head, South Carolina, for about 35 years. The group now includes 25 extended family members sharing one house. Faced with dining out with a dozen or so small children, at-home theme nights became a more appealing alternative. Her family has had a luau, pirate night, Mexican fiesta and an Ohio State tailgate, where everyone would wear their Buckeye gear. "Time has gone on and the challenges of having all those people together on a vacation change," Zerkle said, adding that themes had to evolve to

appeal to kids as they grew up. The family's younger generation now ranges in age from 7 to 26, while her parents are in their 70s.

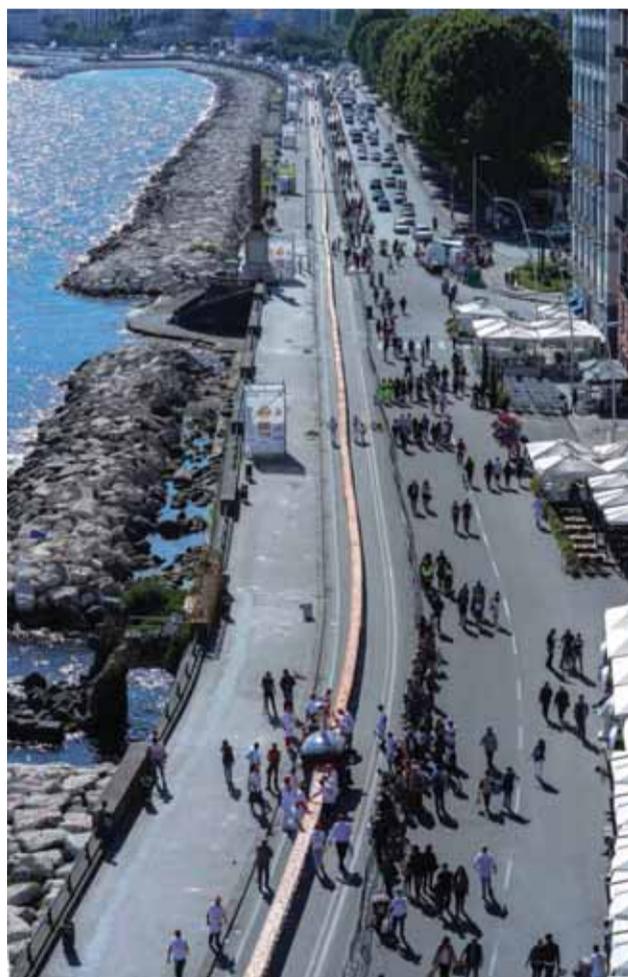
"As the kids have gotten older we have tried to make it a little more adult. We've really stepped up our game," she said. Her family last year marked her sister and brother-in-law's 25th anniversary with a wedding reception. They decorated with wedding bells and put inflatable swans and lanterns in the pool. Her brother put together a playlist for the "White Wedding" theme night that included songs played at the couple's wedding reception in 1990. Zerkle

brought a veil and T-shirts that looked like a wedding gown and tuxedo for the couple to wear. There was a toast and a first dance.

Dance party

An earlier neon-themed dance party included decorating T-shirts, glow necklaces and black lights. Zerkle said involving everyone possible in the prep, planning and execution makes the theme nights a success. "The kids want to know way ahead of time what the theme is going to be. It's turned into something we talk about months in advance and the kids love planning it," she said. Laura Crisp, 52, of Canal Winchester, Ohio, said her family began having a theme party as a way to celebrate her now 10-year-old nephew's birthday, which falls during their beach house vacations every other year in Holden Beach, North Carolina.

Their five families with 19 people share a house. Her nephew chooses the theme and they decorate the house to match. They've had pirates, superheroes and Hawaiian themes. "It's just a good opportunity to decorate a house for a week with papery, fun, silly things," she said. The adults plan games according to the theme and ages of the children, including scavenger hunts divided by age. The experience has helped them grow closer, she said. "I just don't think you would do that silly stuff in your own house. Somehow, when you are on vacation it gives you more permission to loosen up and have that kind of fun," she said. — AP



Neapolitan pizza makers attempt to make the longest pizza to break a Guinness World Record along the seafrofront of Naples. — AFP photos

Home of pizza smashes record with mile-long margherita

Naples has reclaimed the world record for the longest pizza after more than 200 chefs rolled out and cooked a mile-long margherita on the waterfront of the doughy delicacy's home city. The record-breaking snack measured up at exactly 1,853.88 meters (6,082 feet), smashing the previous record of 1,595.45 meters (5,234 feet) set at last year's World Expo in Milan, Italy's food and agriculture board Coldiretti said.

Hundreds of chefs from all over the world spent most of Wednesday assembling the pizza from raw ingredients of 2,000 kilograms (4,400 pounds) of flour, 1,600kg (3,527 pounds) of tomatoes, 2,000kg (4,400 pounds) of mozzarella cheese, 200 liters (53 gallons) of oil and 30kg (66 pounds) of basil. It was then baked in line with the city's best tradition by wood-fire in five custom-made motorized ovens. The record attempt had initially been scheduled for Sunday but had to be postponed because of bad weather in the southern Italian city.

It was organized to promote Italy's bid to have the art of Neapolitan pizza-making recognized by UNESCO as part of the world's heritage, distinguishing it from what purists consider to be inferior forms found elsewhere.—AFP



Neapolitan pizza makers attempt to make the longest pizza to break a Guinness World Record.