

We recently went on a road trip with neighbors. We'd been casual friends, but had never done anything together except for a casual dinner night out. This was a one-week journey to a national park. We agreed to pay for gasoline and our neighbors did the driving in their car.

Everything went well the first day until we arrived at the hotel desk to check in. The clerk said our reservations were for the next day, and she wasn't sure she could find us rooms for the night. Before she could say another word, our neighbors went into a loud fit of complaints and threats. Despite the fact that she showed us the computer print out proving we had arrived a day early, our neighbors kept up their harangue.

We were struck speechless at such unnecessary anger. The clerk seemed to weather the storm and clicked keys on her computer. She hushed the complainers by saying she had two rooms available, not in the main hotel, but in a cabin area a few minutes' hike away. We were all tired, and our neighbors seemed to quiet down a bit.



This pattern of disruption and unnecessary anger at hotel and restaurant service people proved to be their normal behavior. We were greatly relieved when the week finally ended. With that experience, and other similar ones, here are some suggestions for making sure you travel with compatible companions.

1. Sit down together before you leave home with your fellow travelers and work out all the ground rules. Be thorough, so there will be no misunderstandings.
2. Where will you stop each night? Before you depart, get out the maps and be sure to agree on the motel, campground or other overnight facilities where you'll stay.

3. Agree on times of pit stops for gasoline, bathroom visits and mid-trip meals. When we do long road trips, the general rule is to stop every three hours. Of course, if kids and other travelers need more frequent pit stops, they'll need to be accommodated.
4. Who pays for what and who drives? It's usual that the travelers who are riding in the car pay the driver's fuel costs. When appropriate, passengers should volunteer to take over some driving shifts.
5. Today there's no need for one person in the car to blare out loud music that could offend others' ears. Take along enough electronic sound and sight doodads and noise-cancelling earphones to satisfy everyone's entertainment tastes or need for silence during the journey.
6. There should be a pre-trip agreement about smoking. Unless everyone on the trip is a smoker, there should be no smoking at all in the vehicle. Smokers can use pit stop times to indulge in their habit.
7. Once at your destination and checked in at the hotel or other facility, make specific times for getting together for meals and other events, and stick to schedules. Today, with everyone carrying cell phones, schedules are easier to keep or change, but each person on the trip should be considerate of others' plans.
8. Settle all arguments by calling quick and effective meetings. It may be beneficial to appoint in advance one of the travelers as the arbitrator, so damaged relationships can be repaired as soon as possible. No one wants to slouch through a vacation avoiding hostile eyes.
9. If the group eats many meals together in hotel and on-the-road restaurants, ask for separate checks. Nothing causes resentment more than when everyone else gets \$10 dinners, while one person runs up \$50 for booze and meal, and then says, "Let's split the check."
10. Drinking for the driver should be moderate, and absolutely none at all during all times while on the road. If it becomes a problem, be sure there is another driver to take over if necessary. Better still, if you know the driver has a drinking problem, don't go on the trip at all. We were struck speechless at such unnecessary anger. The clerk seemed to weather the storm and clicked keys on her computer. She hushed the complainers by saying she had two rooms available, not in the main hotel, but in a cabin area a few minutes' hike away. We were all tired, and our neighbors seemed to quiet down a bit.

Of course, they didn't like the rustic style of the cabin rooms, but reluctantly agreed to stay one night. I'd like to say that was the extent of the problems, but they were only starting. When we asked if they'd join us at breakfast in the hotel dining room, they agreed to 9 am. They didn't show, and we ordered our meal at 9:30. They showed up at 10 and were angry that we didn't wait for them.