



An e-book by Joe Dean

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# About the Author

Joe Dean is the owner of Quest Experiences, a treasure hunt design business that was launched in 1995 and author of the book *Epic Treasure Hunt Adventures*, currently available on Amazon. Joe received his Bachelor's degree in Art History at a California State University and has designed 100's of treasure hunts that have been literally facilitated all over the world. He's also the proud father of three sons who are now in their 20's (as of 2024). He also volunteers as a Children's Ministry coordinator for his local church, along with his wife of 29 years (2024.)



# INTRODUCTION



*Judging by my 13 year old son's face, I wasn't sure what was more difficult to for him to try...the slimy date or the alligator meat. Goaded on by his brothers, he tried to act cool and popped a second date in his mouth to prove that he wasn't phased by it. He may not have chosen the food on the table, but he knew he had to eat to keep his strength up before entering the temple just outside of Cairo. After all, adventure awaited!*

The idea and inspiration for our family's first Adventure Night came from my desperate, secret dream to whisk my family away to travel the world as only the super-rich can do. I wanted to go far beyond just site-seeing. I wanted us to EXPERIENCE each location in the most romantic

way. I wanted to take them to breakfast cafes in Paris, to ride elephants through the jungles of India and to explore ancient Aztec ruins with all of the booby traps we'd seen in the movies.

Beyond the experiences, though, I wanted to offer them so much more. As an adult, I've been privileged to have met many men and women who were well traveled, who had visited many countries and interacted with people from many different cultures. I'm not referring to those going on pleasure vacations where they spent most of their time at a westernized resort. I'm talking about those in business who've lived in other countries for a year or two at a time and the individuals who went to third world countries regularly either as part of missionary work or as a service volunteer...or simply those that traveled a lot beyond the tourist traps. The more of these individuals I personally met and spoke with, the more I was able to pick them out in the crowd at social gatherings. They just talked differently. They, I dare say, THOUGHT differently. It's difficult to fully explain, but they all shared a common revelation the more they EXPERIENCED cultures outside of their own. I learned that they all realized something very, very important. It was



what I wanted so desperately to teach my sons because I felt it was going to be crucial for them to learn in this ever shrinking world. You see, they all saw time and time again that people all over the world were HAPPY even though they ate different foods, lived in a variety of domiciles (from huts to houses), wore different clothing, celebrated holidays differently and spoke different languages (to name only a few examples.) They all realized that what might be odd to me is not odd to someone else. It was a cultural awareness that led far beyond tolerance...it led to appreciation.

In my early thirties I saw that I was way off track from ever making the kind of money needed to travel the world with my family, so I turned to Plan B. By this time I was working for myself designing large-scale themed treasure hunt adventures for corporations and private parties. I took every trick from those to launch our first Family Adventure Night back in 2002.

So, what is a Family Adventure Night (FAN)?

It's an attempt to recreate an adventure experience in exotic locales within your own home that the WHOLE family can participate in. Using effective decorating techniques, engaging in exotic meals and participating in actual adventures (as described later) each participant will feel like he/she actually went on a REAL adventure in a far away country. Over the years, I've taken my family to such far off places as India, the Congo, ancient Egypt, London, the Death Star and even Traverse Town (for those Kingdom Hearts fans) to name just a few



FANS have had quite an evolution over the following \15+ years with lots of hits and misses along the way. Looking back, now that my three sons are in their 20s, I would say that our Family Adventure Nights were the most rewarding and memorable activities that I've planned as a parent and what my sons STILL bring up when talking about their childhood. They were powerful enough to make my sons drop their video games and electronics EVERY TIME!

Although there was not a consistent format when I set them up initially (not all of them were even at night), this book will detail a workable format for you. You'll be able to set up your own Family Adventure Nights based on



your own resources, family, etc. There's a lot of room for flexibility. Feel free to make your Adventure Nights your own. It's impossible for me to include EVERYTHING in one book. I've merely collected the most workable ideas in an organized way so you can pick up where I left off and start enjoying them with your own family right now.

## **WHAT ADVENTURE NIGHTS HAVE BROUGHT TO OUR FAMILY**

Over the years, our Family's Adventure Nights have provided the following for us:

- FANs will bond your children and strengthen their relationships with each other. Unique experiences create memories and FANs are all about creating a one-of-a-kind, one-time unique experience for everyone involved. Going on the actual adventures had the largest impact on their relationships because they were always on the same team, versus playing against each other. If one succeeded, they all succeeded. It also taught them to encourage each other as a team (anyone with multiple kids understands the competition that can build up between them.)
- FANs helped my sons see that our family was special. No other family was having them. It was something special that we did as The Deans. Sometimes a friend would join us and they would make comments about how original and awesome it was, which made us feel special and closer as a family.
- FANs helped my sons to be bolder in trying new things. More than just trying new foods (wait until you see the food section!) I believe the adventures specifically helped them to approach new situations with more courage.
- FANs gave my sons a greater world view. Places like Ukraine and Japan were no longer words on a map or scenery in a movie, they became real places to visit, with real things to see once there and real people to meet. Once while watching Peter Pan one rainy night, my five year old saw Big Ben in the movie and remembered it from one of our FANs and said "Hey Dad - they're in London, England aren't

they? There's Big Ben!" Score ONE for the Family Adventure Night!

- FANs gave my sons a greater appreciation for music and art. They were not just exposed to art and music from around the world, but they learned to respect it as they NEEDED to learn it in order to complete their adventures. They also enjoyed the times when they would recognize names and art/music pieces when they were outside the home or at school.
- FANs helped my sons to better understand geography. During the adventures, they planned travel itineraries and learning geography was a part of that. They didn't set out to learn it, but ended up learning it along the way.
- FANs taught my sons the benefits of learning another language. Utilizing foreign languages is a fun and integral part of the whole FAN experience and the constant exposure helped to create a relaxed view towards the actual learning of a new language. Foreign languages weren't so 'foreign' anymore. They even became crucial when it came time to completing the adventure - they had to USE the languages to their best advantage in tight situations. Now that my sons are in their 20s, all on their own one has taken on learning Italian, another Japanese and a third several at once but enjoys French the most.
- FANs broadened my sons' overall education. For all of the reasons mentioned above, my sons retained facts and details because they weren't learned from books. They LIVED the experiences, creating stronger memories for each of them. Remembering wasn't a chore - it was fun and easy to remember at the time.
- By far, though, the best thing that FANs offered my sons, as well as for me and my wife, are the great memories. We traveled the world, the five of us, and did many, many amazing things together. We went on African Safaris, explored temples and even lived through a cave in (more on that later, as well.)

Now that my sons are all adult men I can see all of the positive (and the negative, too) impact our parenting choices had on our sons. They are all

adventurous men, not afraid to try new things and are all better problem solvers thanks to our Family Adventure Nights. And, now that they are older, I've been blessed to experience each one of them coming to me on their own as adults and expressing their gratitude for all that they learned as a person through our adventure nights.

And THAT is why I'm writing this book.

As you learn how to set up your own FANs, note that none of them require you to set up an adventure similar to what I was able to plan. I've planned several FANs that didn't involve an adventure. They were still a lot of fun. However I will say that the adventure portion was always the one part that my sons looked forward to the most and you'll find it particularly engaging for any video-game enthusiast in your house to at least take a look at that section of this book.



A Family Adventure Night HAS to include AT LEAST ONE component that is exciting, awkward or uncomfortable for EVERYONE. It's THIS key element that turns a boring family night into a Family ADVENTURE Night. I'll offer some examples later. DO NOT leave these out ESPECIALLY if you have older kids. Small children can have fun

with small things, but if you have a 6th-12th grader, these elements will be most appreciated. PLEASE, I'm speaking from experience on this one. Some elements have included (but aren't limited to) eating foods that they would not normally get anywhere near, listening to strange music (actually sitting and listening), eating in a location not normally designated as 'proper' such as in the corner of the garage, on the floor in the living room, etc.), wearing an odd piece of ethnic clothing, exploring someplace scary (haunted house style temple rooms, etc.), activities that are physically challenging, and getting wet with their clothes on. Although safety is always a priority, often times we say 'no' simply because it's uncomfortable for us more than it's unsafe for them. Learn to enjoy the adventure yourself!

I've broken down this book into the three A's of Family Adventure Nights: Atmosphere, Activities and Adventure. The Atmosphere section will give you a solid foundation on how to transport your family to these exotic



locales using tricks that will engage every sense of the body. The Activities section will help your brain engage in EXPERIENCING the locales. This might include anything from playing unique games to eating exotic foods. Finally, the Adventure section will briefly discuss the types of adventures that I would plan as part of our FANs. They were more elaborate than perhaps many would want to set up, but I hope that for some reading this they will get excited about the possibility with this section. See a link elsewhere in this book on how to order one fully designed adventure that you can plug and play (as much as possible, as far as adventures go!)

In each section you'll see WOW FACTORS detailed throughout. These ideas may take more time and preparation but will really create excitement. We don't always have the time or energy to incorporate every WOW FACTOR included in this book, but for those times when you DO, your family will love them!

Now it's time for you to create your own FAN memories!

\*\*\* PERSONAL NOTE: Now that I'm in my 50s and my sons are grown, I'm finally attempting to shift my life and work so that I can finally personally begin seeing the world via unique travel experiences. However, I will share this. Now that I'VE gone through the Family Adventure Nights, too, when I meet different individuals who are well traveled, they've shared that they are surprised to find out that I've never been out of the country. They've shared that I talk like someone who has an appreciation for other cultures in a way that one only gets from actually visiting those cultures. It looks like my sons weren't the only ones who grew in their world perspective.





Imagine being able to bring an active and exciting adventure into your own home for your **WHOLE** family to participate in?

Now imagine your children not just being exposed to but **INTERACTING** with another culture through language, geography, games and more...all within a fun Choose Your Own Adventure Style story where the action is taken off the pages and into your own home!

Download ***The Lost Treasure of Akhenaten*** and plan an exciting Egyptian archaeology themed adventure for your next Family Adventure Night!

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/1713079094/>

# ATMOSPHERE



Atmosphere? Don't you mean decorations? Well...yes and no.

Atmosphere includes decorations, but so much more.

The most effective FAN will transport your family to another place and possibly another time. This is not always a small task. If

I had enough money to buy super cool props, then I'd probably have the money to whisk my family away to REALLY visit these exotic locales. Instead, we utilized great ideas, worked smart and often times used a little (or a lot) of elbow grease.

We'll focus on the sights, sounds, textures and even smells of far off places. It's important to consider that the goal is NOT to copy what WE did, because your resources may be different. For most of our FANS, we lived in Central Ohio and I had to do a lot to create a tropical island feeling. You might live in Southern California or Florida and have access to resources that I longed to have access to for the same locale. The lesson to be learned is that you can have amazing atmosphere within your budget, accessing your own resources.

The goal in atmosphere is to create a space that will transport your family someplace else. This does NOT mean overloading the room with decorations and props, as you may be tempted to do. We can never forget the primary goal...to transport them there. There are several techniques to contribute to this including (but not limited to) the following:

- Remove the familiar. Sometimes we can't be transported because there are too many familiar things around us. Covering that TV or bookshelf with fabric or plain wrapping paper can do a lot to transform a family room into an exotic bazaar or marketplace.



- Utilize props and decorations strategically.
- Incorporate sound. Sometimes you'll want sound to be the focal point in a game or adventure. Other times, sound can be simple and effectively used to strengthen the feeling of your location.
- Use lighting or shadows.
- Move furniture to unfamiliar locations.
- Create a portal. This idea works for any FAN theme and can be extra handy if you don't have many decorations. A portal can be made once and stored for future use, making it a popular option for many. Get your hands on any materials you can (i.e. boxes, spray paint, etc.) to create an arch or anything similar in shape for your kids to walk **THROUGH** on their way to the Family Adventure Night space. Having something to walk through, with a FAN waiting for them on the other side, can really help them to 'get there' mentally.



When creating atmosphere, keep a single place in mind. Let's compare a Family Adventure Night to a theme party. Initially, they might both sound the same in approach. For example, let's compare a pirate FAN and a pirate theme party. For the theme party, use: pirate themed plates and cups, a treasure chest cake, a parrot shaped pinata, cookies shaped like gold doubloons and cool

looking treasure maps on the walls. It's perfect for a party, but will be unsuccessful to set an atmosphere, especially with older kids.

Here's why.

In a FAN, you transport your family to a specific location at a specific time. Although there are several locations for a pirate themed FAN you could choose, none includes the party ideas mentioned in the above paragraph. For example, let's say I want to take my family to an island in the Caribbean to look for lost pirate's treasure. We'd have coconuts and bananas for dessert, not cake. There would be tropical flowers and leaves on the walls as decorations. There wouldn't be any pirate themed plates or cups. We'd use pie tins or giant leaves. Pirates don't eat off pirate themed plates and eat doubloon shaped cookies.

Your area doesn't have to look exciting, it has to make it easy to imagine being there. For example, a dungeon cell doesn't sound impressive, but a few pvc pipes painted black, some loose straw, a few sound effects and darkness will transport your family to a French dungeon waiting for their turn at the Bastille.

Got the idea? Don't decorate according to the theme. Instead, create a specific space to BE in, that's as true as you can make it. It may take a few minutes to set in, but when it does, the experience is better.

## **BE RESOURCEFUL**

Being resourceful is your greatest tool. Online resources can present a lot of ideas making you think "Wow, that would be awesome, but where in the world am I going to get a two-ton elephant?" It's important to shift the thinking a little (or a lot) when it comes to creating your desired atmosphere.

First take a personal inventory. Do you have any unusual items in your garage, basement or attic that would fit into any of the themes? It might take a little digging, but time dedicated to going through a few dusty boxes in the garage can yield a wealth of items you can use for your atmosphere as well as your adventures. If you find items your children are not familiar with, **BONUS!**

Next ask friends, family and coworkers if they have any themed items you might be able to borrow. Sharing your list of themes will help them think through what they might have. I've found that once you start spreading the word about what you are doing with your family, others will get excited and enjoy contributing when and where they can. As you think about where you'd like to take your family, begin making lists of items you have or could borrow from friends and family. You may be surprised by what they dig out of their garages and basements. One person might have pieces of a suit of armor while another might have tree skirts for a luau. Sometimes it's just that one item that you can use as a centerpiece on your table that ties your entire locale/theme together!

It's worth noting that sometimes your FAN location will be dictated by your resources. If you are planning a pirate themed FAN then you might choose

between a city square, tavern, pirate deck or deserted island depending on the space that you can most effectively create.

Another trick is to utilize natural surroundings when they are most effective. We always had a meal in our FANs and going outdoors sometimes proved to be challenging...but it was perfect for other adventures. If we are hunting Bigfoot, then a camping meal in the woods at the park is perfect. Think about unique parks and locales where you live and keep note of how to use them. Also, look for rivers, lakes and friends' backyards unfamiliar to your kids. The latter allowed me to set up a cool scene in a private space, away from the public. Again, bonus points for finding places unfamiliar to your kids.

The bulk of your FANs will probably be in your home, though. You might require a purchase or two. As a FIRST response, visit your local thrift store or garage sale. You can find amazing varieties of items to fit all sorts of different themes.

## **PVC PIPES - The Best Small Investment You'll Ever Make for FANs**

It may seem scary at first, but before this paragraph is finished you'll envision the concept in all it's Family Adventure Night glory! Visit the plumbing section of your local major hardware store. There you'll find long white poles made of PVC plastic. They make joints in a wide variety of shapes that can be used like Tinker Toys (for those that are old enough to know what those are.) The poles are only a few bucks a piece and the connectors are less than that. Once you have them, you'll find you can do AMAZING things with them. Using the poles and connectors, you can create a cube to go around your table (or through your table if you have a large table) or walls for Egyptian and Aztec temples! They go up easily and come down even easier. By cutting different poles to different lengths you have a wonderful variety of options available to create any kind of structure you need - needing only to hang fabric or paper to act as 'walls.' Around the table it's great to hang decorations or fabric on. You can tape, nail or drill right into the poles, leaving your home walls untouched. Over the years I've collected quite a collection of poles that I've spray painted to match different



scenes. For your starter set, consider painting them black to go with every theme. If you are considering doing several FANs, you'll be able to re-use them over and over in a variety of formations!

## FABRIC



Fabric has become my best friend...and coupons to our arts and crafts supply stores have become my second. Utilizing those sales every chance I can on different fabrics has given me decorating options that are not only helpful, but super effective. Like the poles, the fabric can be re

used as many times as you'd like, providing it fits within the theme. Fabric can be used as swags on poles to create an Arabian marketplace, harem tent or Chinese palace. Cream tulle works great as safari mosquito netting, leafy prints make for a great jungle backdrop and regal purples are good for castle court scenes. Fabric is also handy for covering up TV's, bookcases or large furniture pieces that may break the illusion you are trying to create.

If you can sew, you have a even more options available to you. The appropriate fabric can make table runners, place mats and napkins. Long sewn banners can also look fantastic hanging vertically from the walls or from PVC poles to create a castle or palace feel.

When choosing fabric, keep in mind that you want something that is **IN** the theme and not **ABOUT** the theme. If you want an African tribal feel, don't choose fabric with lions and giraffes on it. Find tribal prints similar to what would be found within one of the African cultures.

## REDUCING THE SIZE OF THE SPACE

This idea is sometimes the most brilliant, depending on the location you are trying to create. Choose one space in your home that is large enough for your plans, and **ONLY** decorate that space. If you make it engaging enough, then no matter what the size, your kids will enjoy being there. Think of a tree house. They are typically small, but someplace a child will spend hours in on a Summer day.

## **TABLE SETTINGS**

Incorporating a meal in your FAN is highly suggested and your table setting helps the overall FAN atmosphere. As mentioned before, a few yards of fabric can make great table covers, napkins and place mats. However, consider every aspect of your table when creating your atmosphere. WILL there be plates? Will there be utensils? Will every item be served in small bowls and passed around or will you use one large dish in the center of the table? Thrift stores and garage sales are great places to find a few odds and ends that can be used for different themes. Also remember you don't HAVE to eat at the table! Try the garage, outside on the floor...anywhere! Don't 'leave' your location for your meal. Eat there, instead!

## **SOUND**

Sound is rarely considered but we use it constantly throughout the day. Sound can tell us where we are and even the time. There are a few ways to exploit this sense.

Music from a given region. Check out ethnic selections at your local library or online. Make sure that you listen to them BEFORE your FAN. There are bands that are 'inspired' by different regions of the world, but when you listen to them, they might sound out of place or time. You want something that will sound appropriate for your actual location.

Try movie soundtracks, as well. Composers make money transporting moviegoers to the locations and actions of the movie. Soundtracks create a mood. In movies, music tells us when to be nervous and when to be at peace. Check online as many libraries have reciprocal agreements with neighboring libraries, giving you access to more titles. Look for movies that may take place in your desired setting.

Finally, consider using sound effects. They could be background sounds one would hear at a specific location, like listening to a minstrel at a castle court. But often times music isn't the best choice. There are many resources online for different sound effects including casual conversation sounds (great for a Parisian sidewalk cafe), seagulls and lapping waves (great for a shipwreck, deserted island location) or moaning and clanging chains for a dungeon scene. When considering sound effects, make sure they serve as background

only. No matter how much time and energy you spend gathering sound effects, keep the volume low enough so as not to distract from your other activities, unless the sounds ARE the activity, that is.

## LIGHTING

One can actually get a college degree in theater stage lighting. For our purposes, we'll use a few ideas to get the most out of lighting techniques without spending a lot of money.

The first idea is perhaps the simplest and the most effective...the ABSENCE of light. A lack of lighting can create a more intimate space. When we can't see, we fill in the blanks with our imagination. Depending on your location, consider using darkness. Night time makes a Family Adventure Night easier.

Candles and fire. Fire is exciting. It always has been and probably always will be. Candlelight also creates a more intimate (and sometimes scary) setting. Fireplace light can also be used effectively. Safety first but...fake candles work well, also.

Colored light bulbs. I use these sparingly, but they can be super effective. You can pick up standard light bulbs with a light-blue color for polar or underwater locations. Have a temple scene or on a submarine? Use a red bulb. A cave scene? Use purple. A jungle scene? Use green. A treasure scene with a gold statue or gold coins? A yellow light bulb will make it shimmer! You can also use colored tissue paper to tint your light sources, but use them safely as tissue paper easily burns. I've used it, but it takes extra attention to be safe. Experiment after the kids are in bed. See what results you get when you put light sources in different places. Remember, you're using it for effect, not necessarily as a light source.



A few final words. The question has come up on whether or not to bring your kids in on the decorating process. For me, that's like asking your children to wrap their own birthday presents. Remember, you're creating an illusion and you don't want to break it. When decorating for a FAN, I sent



my sons upstairs and told them to not come down until everything was ready. They would typically use that time to ‘study’ for the adventure by going over their notes...even quizzing each other about their information (more on adventures later.)

Finish decorating your FAN before you start the busy portion of your cooking. You’ll want to serve your meal hot (assuming it’s a hot meal) and simultaneous cooking and decorating doesn’t work. This, of course, is especially true if you’ll be cooking the meal WITH your kids as part of your FAN.



# ACTIVITIES



So your atmosphere is in place and your family is in an Egyptian marketplace or the Australian outback (or wherever you've chosen to take them for the evening.) The next step is to have something to DO while you are there. As with the atmosphere component in the last chapter, choosing activities will either accentuate the illusion and adventure, or detract from them. This aspect of a Family Adventure Night can be the most difficult to make suggestions for because every family dynamic is different. One family with younger boys may want to do very different things than a family with only preteen daughters. Likewise, an only child may react to an activity differently than a house full of children. Consider each activity before choosing it for your FAN. Choose those activities that are daring and interesting over the traditional and 'done that' whenever possible.

The basic idea behind providing an activity is to give your kids the opportunity to interact with the environment that you've created. In the Atmosphere section, you learned to create a place. That is fun and interesting, but without something to do once they get there, the excitement will quickly wane. The more you can get your kids to think and interact with the atmosphere, the more they are going to get out of the FANs, which is why activities are so important.

As mentioned before, I usually included some type of adventure with each FAN. The adventures were designed to incorporate the activities into the actual story of the adventure (as described later.) For example, in our Egyptian adventure our children met up with a desert caravan who taught them how to bead an Egyptian necklace (an activity they actually did DURING the adventure portion.) You can choose to use none or all of the activities to ensure that your FAN is truly YOUR FAN. The adventure itself WAS our activity, however not all of them had a corresponding adventure. With those I planned stand alone activities as described below.

# GAMES

Games from just about any culture and time can be found online, from physical games that can be played outside to games of skill that can be played inside. You can also do a little research on your theme and location for possible games. For example, the ancient Egyptians played a board game called Senet that's a lot of fun!

Games to play are GREAT for your FAN activity. Games, though, can sometimes be a tricky thing depending on your family dynamic. Sometimes sibling rivalry and games can turn into bad feelings and attitudes. You'll need to judge when to put the 'dueling pair' on the same team and when to separate them. If they are competitive, being on the same team will force them to work together if they want to win. There are two ways to do this:

1. Come up with a ranking for the total number of points/distance or whatever other marker is involved in the game. They each play the game and they combine their scores/efforts. This is then measured against a preset ranking sheet to see how they did. For example if they were playing a game of basketball free throws (10 shots each), you might use "1-3 Beginner, 3-6 Junior Varsity, 7-10 Varsity, 11+ Pro!" In this way, they BOTH have to do well as a team in order to achieve that combined total of 11 or more to earn the Pro title.
2. Have each of them complete the game once. Then, they must each do it again and beat their own previous score (not their sibling's score) in order to achieve a win. In this way, more than one child can 'win' in a competition.

If you are working with a wide range of ages, try to incorporate the youngest and oldest on a team so that they have to work together to accomplish different things - giving harder tasks to the older and easier tasks to the younger.

## MEALS

This component has been the second-most exciting part of our FANs. It's a time to laugh, discover, eat and be daring within a fun and intimate space. Make sure that your eating space is full of atmosphere, more than any other place in the house. Your family will likely be there for a while (especially if you are planning on playing a game at that table later), and making it cool will provide a great experience for everyone.

Consider two aspects of your meal when you are planning. Format and food.

Format. This is HOW you are going to eat and highly depends on where you've transported your family. Are you on a deserted island? In a palace? Are you in the jungle or on a farm? These will affect different aspects of how you will eat including:

- Utensils - will you use them and if so, what kind? Forks? Spoons only? Chopsticks?
- Bowls and plates - will you use them and what kind? For a deserted island you might opt to use large banana leaves as plates (found at many ethnic markets.)
- Where will you eat? At your dining room table? On the floor? Outside? On the run (if you're hiking)?



Food. This single component will add a lot to your overall FAN. Don't think that safe is better. We all have favorite foods and preferences, but the rules change with a FAN. Over the years I've asked my sons to eat alligator meat and vegetables that even I had a difficult time swallowing. And they ate it, every time. When there's themed music, cool themed props, a fun place to eat the meal itself while they're practicing a foreign language... eating something new can be exciting and DEFINITELY a part of the fun!

How?



Rule #1 is “You don’t have to eat anything, but you do have to TRY everything!” Everyone sits at the table, scooping as little or as much as they want of EVERYTHING on the table onto their plates. Then talk about certain items to see what you think of them. “Has anyone tried the kangaroo meat yet? What did you think?” Let everyone try it without pressure especially for the tweens who won’t look silly at any price.

Rule #2 during a FAN “No seconds until everything is tried at least once.” It may take some convincing and salesmanship, but remember it’s all about the adventure!

Also be sure to include generic foods your kids WILL eat. For example during our night in Egypt, I made sure there was a lot of Middle Eastern nan bread (something everyone loved.) Have the goal to keep the adventure going. Part of the adventure is eating the regional food or going hungry. Even the pickiest of kids will eventually eat if they are hungry enough. I urge you: do not rob your kids of the fun and thrill of eating new and strange things (even if they will ONLY do it during a FAN.)

Another idea, if your budget allows, is to visit an ethnic restaurant and pick up a dish or two (even if only side dishes) that are either too difficult to make or to find the ingredients for. You can then simply cook the rice or bread item to go with it. Just make sure to take the food out of the to-go containers first!

As a side note, I will say that although my boys still have their foods that they just don’t like (and perhaps never will) they will all now eat anything that is placed before them if they have to. They’ve trained themselves and I’d like to think that the wild stuff we’ve consumed during our FANs were a huge part of that.

So, how do you choose what to serve? Youtube has an endless supply of short videos about simple exotic dishes from just about anywhere. Remember, the more adventurous you can be, the better. Visit your local international markets if you have any. You may find meats like snake and ostrich. You may also find exotic vegetables and fruits to accentuate your meal. If you REALLY want to go for it and you have the budget, you can order exotic meats from online retailers such as bear and hippo. You don’t need a lot of meat - just something to mix in with rice, pasta and others.

Another option for an adventurous meal is to limit the options and supply. In first world countries, we don't understand what it's like to be hungry. Even just one scarce meal will broaden your child's eyes to hunger issues in other countries. A tamer version would be simplifying the ingredients. Perhaps serve only potatoes. In most places of the world, people are limited to a few items they might eat each and every day.

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Chances are you will transport your family to a country where they speak a different language. Don't neglect this aspect of the FAN. Another language accentuates the atmosphere for the night. It helps you feel like you are someplace else. When we visit another country WE are the guest and learning the language is part of the whole experience. Having a foreign language activity for the night will lead your family to learn to respect other languages and cultures more. Remember, this isn't about learning a new language (at least that's not the focus of a FAN.) The goal, as pertaining to languages, is to expose your family to other ways people communicate up close and personal. By PARTICIPATING in the actual language they are doing more than being exposed, they get to see what it's like to communicate the others do. It's an eye opener for them...and maybe for many adults, as well.

There are several ways to incorporate a foreign language into your fan:

- Menu - Type out your menu and include the pronunciation. Place menus on each plate so that your family can read them for themselves. They may not be able to translate the dish, but they'll understand they every foreign item has an established name. Additionally, encourage them to USE those words during the meal, such as when they are asking for more of a certain dish. You'll find that they will enjoy using another language!
- Writings on the Walls - depending on your location, it can be fun to put different words on the walls of your location, especially if they are written in different alphabets than ours (such as the Russian Cyrillic alphabet or Japanese Kanji.) This idea is best used in commercial locations like a Parisian cafe or a restaurant in China. Provide

‘decoders’ for your children to translate the different words and phrases while they eat.

- Speaking limitations - This part is particularly fun for everyone while being one of the easiest to implement. Look up a few translations for common words that you might use during the FAN. Write these translations down, giving everyone a copy and explain that if they want to use any of those words, they’ll have to use the translated versions instead. For example, try “Yes”, “No”, “Mom”, “Thanks” and “You’re welcome.” Also, especially for tweens and teens something like “Darn” works great (making sure that the direct translation isn’t vulgar.) It will easily be the most popular and fastest memorized word on the list. Limit your word list to four or five. Any more than that and it’s difficult to remember (which is why you want the most used words while you eat.) You want to have fun, not give a school assignment.

There are numerous online resources and free translators at your disposal to translate anything and everything that you need (I.e. Google Translate, etc.) If possible, find a youtube video that shows how to speak in that language to get an idea for how to pronounce the words.

## CLOTHING



This is an interesting inclusion but one that I have rarely used. Still, it’s worth mentioning. Some cultures may dress very differently than you. Providing one item of clothing for each family member to wear as part of your FAN can add to the experience. There are simple solutions like Hawaiian shirts for a Tahitian luau. But for more exotic locations, the appropriate clothing may be unavailable. Consider simple accessories like scarves or hats. They require little fabric and simple sewing. Allow your kids to choose which item to wear and make sure everyone wears one. You may need to remind your kids that you are traveling if you start to hear complaining.

## **PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES**

FANs can help our kids live healthier lives. Although there are more opportunities for physical activity if your FAN is an outdoor experience, you can plan indoor activities, also. Endurance, strength and coordination are great focuses for active or inactive kids. Be sure to provide good reasons for completing the activity. For example, place some bananas high in a climbable tree for your kids to climb to help provide for dinner.

## **ARTS AND CRAFTS**

This element can be a lot of fun, but it can quickly get expensive. Be cautious and don't get carried away with them, unless you have the resources. If your kids don't normally enjoy arts and crafts, be sure not to call it that. Come up with a practical reason for making the items. For example, maybe the island tribe makes necklaces to ward off evil spirits and now they need to make necklaces. For the same reason, provide the needed supplies and go for it. Typically symbolic images or signs can be incorporated into any craft or art piece, no matter what culture. Keep this portion 'light' unless you have a house of creative folks who enjoy personalizing their items. When choosing an item to make, choose items either used in the FAN or to keep as a souvenir of the experience. If you'll use the items, I suggest making them earlier in the evening so they can enjoy them more. Try making them in the atmosphere space, maybe while waiting for dinner to cook.

## **Movies and Outside Entertainment**

Ok, this element seems to go against what we've said a FAN is...but I'm including it to show you even rules sometimes can be broken. Planning a unique meal and some atmosphere elements might be all you have time to prepare for. During these times, you might include a prepackaged fun activity like eating Egyptian food while sitting on the floor watching The Mummy. Maybe some Parisian food with some Parisian atmosphere, then go to a local Modern Art museum and look at French paintings. Is this breaking the rules? Yes. Sometimes it's all you have and is better than

skipping the activity completely.

A word about ages, especially the 'tween' years. That time is when a sad or annoyed look becomes a regular fixture on their faces. It's when everything is stupid and every adult is wrong. Every child experiences it differently and your best bet is to be positive and try not to put them in a position where they will look or feel silly, especially if their friends are there. Focus on exciting elements and some 'rule breaking.' Not breaking laws, but breaking some house rules like eating in the living room, staying up late or eating dessert before dinner. These ideas can help gain positive participation from this age group.

Teens can have a great time getting into a well thought out FAN. Give them \problem solving puzzles as part of the experience and they will find it more rewarding. Include a scary element and they'll love you for it!

As a final note, let's talk about the 'scary element' of a FAN. Adding something that will challenge your kids' courage is a great way to make your FAN an exciting adventure (and memory.) In every FAN I planned, I tried to incorporate one activity, however small, that involves walking or crawling in dark spaces or exploring someplace a little spooky. Although they often take more work and planning, they are typically one of the most memorable parts of the evening and are usually placed last in the order of events as a climax to the FAN.





# ADVENTURES



I debated with myself for a long time over what exactly I could include in this section. This was always the most exciting part of our FAN, but it's the one aspect that's most difficult to show someone else how to do (it would literally fill a book. I actually published a book on Amazon on how to create live adventures for individuals and

groups and it's over 120 pages!) Although I can't easily explain how to create your own, I CAN offer up some details as to the kinds of things that we did during this final portion of our Family Adventure Night. And, although it's a bit involved to describe how to create your own, I did spend a lot of time converting one of our adventures into something that's super 'plug and play' for those who want to try one out adventure without creating one themselves from scratch. It's currently available for download on Etsy – see the link at the beginning of the ebook.

Although it can be difficult to mention what goes into every adventure I planned (as they were all very different), they all had some or all of the components below - and these components were strung together by either an elaborate Choose Your Own Adventure type of story format I wrote OR a simplified role playing game campaign that I created:

- \* A definite story where they met different characters within the country/theme (I made sure to look up ethnic names for accuracy.)
- \* Very large game boards I created using giant flip chart grid paper and fat markers. These were not elaborate - they mostly looked like giant CLUE game boards. I created airports, marketplaces, palaces, etc...mostly just outlined boxes with images I printed out taped to it (for the sake of not having it look completely blank.) Each child had

their own 'token' they moved around the city with, rolling as they went. They enjoyed rolling a lot and often had races getting through the airports, etc. (And they were sometimes chased by enemy characters that I rolled for.)

- \* Use of language cards. They each had language cards that they collected across successive adventure nights. On them would be a few words and phrases from a given language - and they did NOT have all the same cards. They learned quickly that the characters they interacted with would be more helpful if they used words in the characters home language, even if it was just one word. Because they each had different words and languages, they learned to rely on each other during each interaction...and each son eventually began to specialize in certain languages making them extra useful during difficult interactions.

- \* Exciting things would happen at different times (I.e. lights going out, activating a fog machine, sudden noises from sound effects players I had, etc.)

- \* Use of foreign currency. I took the time to print out (smaller than regular sized) currency from the countries they visited. If they wanted to take a taxi, they had to pay for the taxi from the money they earned along the way, etc. Sometimes they had to haggle for a better price in some countries. They also collected treasures and were able to sell them to other characters, earning more cash. After several FANs, they each had their own stash of cash from multiple countries.

- \* Interaction with characters. Rather than just say "Do you want to take a taxi?" I would role play a character of a taxi driver offering to give them a ride (typically trying to say words in that language or at least fake the accent as best I could.) I typically pretended like my English was terrible so that they needed to fight to communicate. They then had to role play the situation and it was up to me to make it easier or harder, depending on the situation. The more they practiced with this over the years, the more comfortable they were with it and the more difficult I made it for them.

- \* Planned some sort of travel (via game boards). With the money they had, they needed to purchase train/plane tickets as well on boats

and even hot air balloons. They needed to look at different train schedules, etc. that I printed out to see which one they wanted to take...to where...and at what time and price.



\* A very strong, ongoing leveling up system. They each had a 'character sheet' (similar to playing Dungeons & Dragons.) As they progressed in the adventure, they would earn points in different cultures, geography, languages, etc. The more points they earned, the more language cards I would

give them (and other resources.) Essentially, they were each becoming experts in different parts of the world. They LOVED getting points and building up their characters. One of my sons built up his character to focus more on Asian cultures, geography, etc. He was super helpful every time that they visited China or Japan during one of the adventures. It's not a surprise that today, now in his 20's, he's been studying Japanese and plans on visiting Japan within the next few years.

\* Something PHYSICAL to do, usually at the end. This was usually the grand finale, if you will and is where they would need to climb, swim, crawl through tunnels, etc. in order to find the idol, save the secret agent, etc. Sometimes I would have a small set up in the garage (like a makeshift haunted house made from the PVC pipes mentioned above) for them to walk through, etc. This sounds MUCH more than it usually was...but they loved it just the same! It was usually dark to some degree and with exciting or scary music playing, they were thrilled to walk through it!

\*\*\* For those not familiar with a Choose Your Own Adventure story: CYOA's were a series of books that hit the bookstores in the very early 80's and instantly became popular with kids. The basic concept is to read the beginning of a story, then be faced with a choice to make as what to do next. You see, YOU are the main character in each of the stories. Which pages of the book you read will depend directly on

different choices you make along the way - choosing to turn left or right in a cave, choosing whether or not to trust someone, etc.

I know that probably sounds like a lot...and these were not things that I planned every week. Usually, we only had an adventure like that maybe half a dozen times a year at most. Other adventure nights sprinkled in between involved a meal, cool atmosphere and watching a movie or playing a game. They were ALL fun, though, and we did them on and off for many years.

## ADVENTURE JOURNALS

The Adventure Journal is a great option for aintaining memories of each FAN as you plan them. For my sons, we had one Adventure Night where we made our own Adventure journals (of course, they can also be bought.) There are any number of ways to accomplish this including the simple to the elaborate (check out some Youtube videos to see the spectrum!) At the end of each FAN, each of my sons would write out (or draw for the youngest one) different aspects of the night that they really liked, etc. Yep, a writing assignment. Years later, it proved to be a great source for memories from past FAN adventures – something that they appreciated a lot more when they got older.



## MARKETPLACE

Ah, yes, the Marketplace. This component can be considered optional, but not in my house. During the adventures, our children also had the opportunity to earn In-Adventure Money. By ‘in-adventure’ I mean money that can only be used during the adventure and has absolutely no value outside of the adventure. This ‘money’ that they earn in a variety of ways would allow them to buy in-adventure perks and other things they might want. At the edge of a table I set up the Marketplace with small pieces of paper with different items written on them, along with their cost in in adventure money. They might include items such as rope for climbing or tickets for a boat ride (in the event during the adventure they need to travel.)

However, ALSO included in the Marketplace are things to buy like “Stay up late for an extra 30 minutes” or “Get out of one chore this week”. These are also fun for them to buy, as you can imagine. The adventures are geared such that they earn more money than they will need for the adventure so that they will have extra money to spend at the marketplace at the end. Just make sure that they don’t overspend lest they need their cash for the adventure!

In the Marketplace they could also SELL items to earn more money. You see, along the way my sons collected all kinds of objects and treasures during the adventure (often just images I cut out from pieces of paper). When they wanted to sell an item, they visited the Marketplace and offered to sell different items.

As far as the availability of the Marketplace, that choice is up to you. Within the FAN adventures, there are opportunities when they can approach a Marketplace within the story, however you might choose to leave the Marketplace open for the duration of the adventure. For older children (ones that play a lot of video games or are in their teens) it’s highly advised to limit their interaction with a Marketplace until they find one in the story for two reasons. First, it helps keep the adventure illusion going. Second, it will add a degree of problem solving as they’ll need to strategize what to buy based on what they think they might need.

What you use for in-adventure money isn’t as important as long as it’s consistent. In our downloadable adventure *The Lost Treasure of Akhenaten*, we include money to print and cut that are used IN the adventure itself.

## **TROPHIES**

Trophies are completely optional, but a fun idea if you choose to incorporate them. Basically, the idea is centered around buying a small token, statue or souvenir for each adventure and giving it to your kids at the completion of each adventure. Then, allow them to place the trophy on a designated shelf in your home. As the trophy items accumulate, your kids will form a sense of pride as they look upon their shelf at the different adventures they completed during the different FANs. It’s also a great conversation piece when your guests and family members ask about the eclectic combination of



international items you have lined up on your trophy shelf!

## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

For all of you teachers, fellow homeschooling parents or parents in general who want to inject more educational aspects into the adventures, there is a way...but I mention it with caution. The adventures are very much embraced by my sons, but the excitement quickly wanes if they feel like it's a glorified homework assignment. You want to keep the excitement level high and enable them to see that the adventures are PLAY times, not WORK times.

That having been said, here's a simple way to introduce more learning into the equation. For example, give them a map of a specific part of the world that relates to the next or past FAN and have them memorize key aspects (cities, mountains, rivers) and then test them on it. Our sons earned some extra in-adventure cash for these actions.



# CLOSING

I'm really hoping that by sharing some of what we did as a family that others will be inspired to take on the concept of a Family Adventure Night for their own families. The fruit that came from the many that we had over the years is still evident in my sons' lives, even as adults. It's also some of my fondest memories I have overall the times we've spent together with the five of us.

I know that some might feel overwhelmed at all of the details that I've shared in the ebook, but I sincerely hope that you'll see the benefits of even doing just ONE of them. Sit down and have an ethnic meal together - show your kids on a world map where that type of cuisine came from. Play a little music from that culture while you eat or perhaps look up a word or two in the local language to use while you eat (words like "yes" and "no".) Just doing that will broaden your children's minds in ways that you might not initially realize. It will also help to equip them as they navigate their new, smaller world when they are adults (no doubt, their generation will live in a much smaller world than ours ever was!)

Take care, parents. Your children love and appreciate everything that you do.

Joe

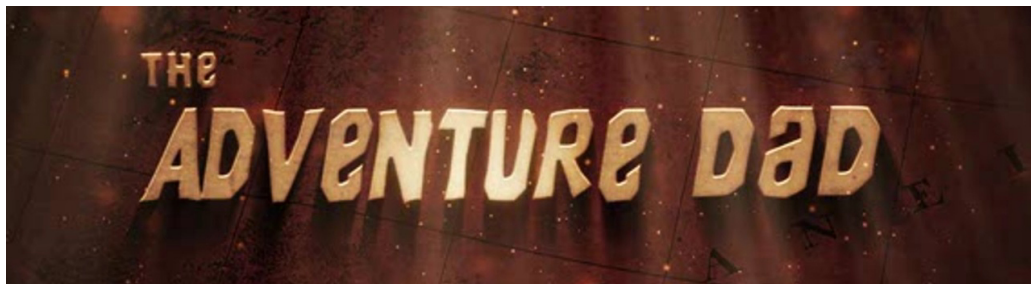




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