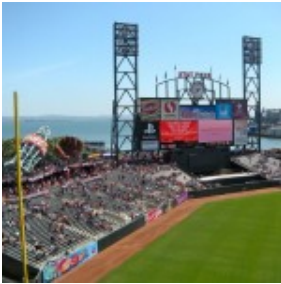


Family entertainment costs continue to rise

By Steve Rushin, Via

As a father of four, I may as well stuff all my cash in a confetti cannon and fire it into the air on arrival at the next ballpark, theme park, or movie theater my family visits, simply to expedite the inevitable process by which my wallet is drained of every last dollar for the sake of entertainment. When did family fun become so expensive? VIA's analysis of ticket prices at major theme parks between 1965 and 2011 shows an increase of more than 2,200 percent—and that even figures in the AAA discount, which has become a saving grace for card-carrying families. By comparison, since 1965 the price of gasoline has gone up 658 percent and milk is up 371 percent. Even before setting foot in most theme parks, the modern parent can feel taken for a ride.



Families still attend San Francisco Giants games despite the cost.

Photo/LTN file

And theme parks seem a bargain next to ballparks. Watching a game played by the Boston Red Sox, the Major League Baseball

team nearest to my home in New England, cost a family of four an average of \$335 for tickets, parking, food, drinks, and merchandise in 2010. This is not entirely a lament. Increases in insurance, property taxes, and consumer appetites for new attractions keep costs escalating for family entertainment providers everywhere. SeaWorld's Shamu—and her human equivalent, Red Sox slugger David Ortiz—have to eat (if perhaps not quite so well). There may be other reasons for such precipitous increases, but the theme parks aren't telling.

High prices haven't deterred consumers so far. Historically, people will pay a premium to see their major Mickeys, be they Mouse or Mantle. The Red Sox have been sold out for years. Though the global economy has melted down like a \$5 waffle cone in the trembling hand of my 5-year-old, the three theme parks we visited last year were bursting at the seams. In fact, according to the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, attendance has increased nearly every year for almost two decades.

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