

**Ep #132: Greece and Croatia with Kids:
Megan's Points and Miles Strategy**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Ep #132: Greece and Croatia with Kids: Megan's Points and Miles Strategy

Alex: When people hear Greece and Croatia, they may think adults-only trip, but Megan recently visited with her family of 5 and her girls loved it. Listen in as she shares how they did it with the help of points and miles.

Welcome to *Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad*. 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.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. Tackling Greece and Croatia with a family of 5 is no simple task. Today, our Director of Operations, Megan, is back on the podcast to tell us all about her family's spring break trip and how they leveraged credit card points and miles for some major savings along the way. So Megan, let's kick it off with how you even came up with the idea to go to Greece and Croatia and then how you got there.

Megan: All right. So, Greece has always been my number one bucket list destination. Ever since Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants came out like 20 years ago.

Alex: Same. That's what got me too.

Megan: Yeah, I was like, I'm going to go to Santorini. I want to go see those blue domes. And, uh, Croatia, my great-grandfather came to the US from Croatia. So that was actually my first like trip ever on an airplane at 18 years old. We went with a cultural dance group that I was in as a kid and I, this the last like 20 years, I was like, I have to get back there. And then when Tim was like, "Yeah, let's go," which he doesn't agree to often, I was so ready to just be like, "Yes, let's just

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kind of recreate kind of some of the highlights that I remember and show it to him and the girls."

Alex: First of all, I didn't know that your first time on an airplane was when you were 18, and it was an international flight. Like...

Megan: Yeah, and I was sent by myself. My parents didn't go with us. Family friends, I went with them and roomed with their daughter who was like 25 at the time.

Alex: Oh my gosh, that's amazing.

Megan: It was a big thing. I was, like we just road tripped everywhere as kids. So this was a really big deal and a really kind of like one of those like core memories of this was a big deal as a like teenager and kind of my first international trip experience.

Jess: That's awesome.

Alex: Awesome. So how did, oh, no, you were going to talk about how you chose it. You know, a lot of times people don't think of Greece as, I'm going to take the kids. It's more typically, especially Santorini, kind of a romantic destination. How did you end up deciding to bring the kids?

Megan: Yeah, so this question comes up in our Facebook group a lot. Like literally four posts this morning were something along the lines of, "My kids are 3 and 5. Where should we go next summer?" And honestly, we, like most, well I do all the trip planning, but I pick where I want to go and kind of consult everybody else. So I'm like, "I want to go here. What do you think?" And the kids of course are going to say yes to anything. They don't know any different. Like they just want to experience it and spend the time. And quite honestly, anywhere we go as a family where we're not running to three different places at after school to all these different activities is a win for all of us.

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So, I don't put a lot of, like if somebody says like, "Oh, that's a great adults-only place." I'm like, well, there's families there. There's parks there, there's playgrounds there. There's kid-friendly things and it really just go where you want to go and the kids will be happy.

Jess: I do have a question about that though because I have not been to Croatia, but I have been to Santorini twice, and I distinctly remember the first time I went to Santorini, I was like, "I would never bring Molly here because there are so many steps and the cobblestone streets." I was like, "I would never bring a kid in a stroller here." So is there any limit to like age? Because your kids are a little older. Like Molly's almost 12. I think now I would take her to Santorini. But like, would you have taken your girls to Santorini when they were like 2 or 3?

Megan: If I only had one or two kids, yes. Three, three kids, that kind of changes things a little bit where you kind of need to rely on a stroller or you need to rely on a baby carrier. But I would think we ditched the stroller around like 4 and ever since then, I think my kids would have been totally fine here. My sister's taking her 4-month-old and 2-year-old to Europe next week and I'm like, "Go for it." Like, you'll have fun. You'll be fine. You'll figure it out. People live everywhere. There are diapers everywhere. There are playgrounds and families, no matter where you go. So...

Alex: That's what I always think too. It's like, well, if kids live there, then it's probably a kid-friendly destination. There's going to be kid things you'll find. I do agree that there's some places that can be a little more difficult. Like I wouldn't want to take a stroller through Santorini either with the crowds of people and like stairs and stuff. But like you said, like we've been out of the stroller phase for a while now too. Like my youngest, he's almost 5. So I'd be like, "Okay, like we could do that." I wouldn't say it's my first pick, but we could do it.

Jess: I think your, I think it also depends on your child's personality because yes, children live in these destinations, but they're used to it. My little American child who's used to driving everywhere complains so much that her feet hurt when

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we're like walking and climbing. And so I think it also depends on your kid. Megan, I think your kids are probably used to you running them ragged and they're like, "This is great."

Megan: Yeah, like they're, they're used to walking. We walk miles and miles and barely any complaints. So we are very lucky in that.

Alex: That's the thing. You got to train them when they're young.

Jess: Yeah, I need to just train.

Megan: That's part of it. Like we used to live right outside New York City and we would go to New York City and walk and walk and like we would never take the subway. We would just come in on Penn Station and just walk all the way up to Central Park and all the way back and our kids, that's just all they knew. And that's what it is.

Jess: All right, I'll travel to Greece with your kids, but maybe not mine. All right, so tell us how you got, you flew into Greece, correct? So tell us how you got, and just as a reminder, Megan is based in the Rochester area and this was a spring break trip. Was it mid-April timeframe?

Megan: It was the week before Easter.

Alex: Okay.

Megan: Yeah, so we flew out of Toronto, which is like a 2.5, 3-hour drive for us and we find so much more award availability out of there for flights with like one or two stops because if we flew out of our airport, we'd have like three plus stops probably. So we flew on Air France and we flew in economy and these flights were booked before the recent devaluation. So we paid 85,000 points total and 508 dollars for two adults and three kids under 12. And just as a reminder, Flying Blue has that 25% discount for children ages 2 to 11. So Rose is going to be 11 in January, so we are really trying to take advantage of this. But that same flight

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now, if I was, I was to book it at those saver fares, it'd be 106,250 points, which still is a really, really great deal.

Jess: Yeah, that's amazing.

Megan: There were no options to upgrade at check-in. I always look. Our last flight when we flew to Scotland, we were able to upgrade to premium economy on KLM. Air France had no options. It was a full flight. We had a high school like tour group and they were literally half the plane.

Alex: Oh wow.

Megan: But before we boarded, there's a KLM Crown Lounge at Toronto Airport and your priority pass that you can get with your Amex Platinum or your Capital One Venture X, you can get into there for free with that priority pass. So Tim and I each have access. I'd put two guests on mine and he put one guest on his. So all 5 of us can get into that lounge.

Alex: That's awesome.

Megan: Yeah. And then another tip for Air France and KLM, they both have kids meals that you can order ahead of time. So when you book your flights, you can just go in and select like your meal options. Like if you were vegetarian or vegan or whatever, you would just do the same thing and select the kids meals. And they also have these really cute little like kid activity kits. So KLM has one that has like little tic-tac-toe and sleep masks in it. And then the Air France one had these little wooden figurines. It had people and like a little track and an airplane and then like a little pencil and paper kit. And my kids just, it's just the tiniest little thing, but it makes it so special.

Alex: Well, and it's nice because it's like you're in economy and they like offer, you know, the kids meal and the little activity kits for the kids. It's like a it's a really nice touch and I don't really get why they don't do that here with the US airlines.

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Megan: Yeah, especially on those long international flights. It's just something...

Alex: Yeah, we flew Delta home from London and we got Jack diddly squat.

Jess: Southwest to Hawaii doesn't even guarantee plugs on your plane. So like you can't even charge your phone.

Alex: Yeah.

Megan: For sure. Yeah, but it's KLM and Air France, I, I just love their airlines. Their flight attendants are so lovely. They really give some extra attention to the kids and it's we just have had such a great experience on all their flights. So we flew from Toronto to Paris and we had a 2-hour layover there. We had a little bit of a rough time because when the kids are exhausted and they didn't sleep well on the plane, they're all like nauseous. So we had a little rough time that first like hour of getting everybody kind of like some water and some snacks and we got some croissants to like some bread for their bellies.

Alex: Oh no.

Megan: So our, we had to go through immigration security again. Thankfully, we travel carry-on only and we were able to just go straight to immigration and they actually had a special line for families. They were like, "You have the kids, go there, go there." And there was like one person in front of us, which was super nice. It really made it go quick. And so we had to go back through security and then we had to go to the terminal 2F. It's kind of like a, a separate terminal where the smaller airlines like fly out of.

And then from there we took a 3-hour flight from Paris to Athens. And this was all on the same original ticket for that same points price. And we landed in Athens at 2:00 PM and then we had, we booked, I booked a separate tickets on Aegean Air from Athens to Santorini. So this was all the same day. So we flew

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out like Thursday night, landed Friday morning in Paris, flew to Athens like Friday afternoon and then Friday evening we flew from Athens to Santorini.

Jess: That is such a long day. This is making me tired.

Megan: It's all worth it in the end, trust me.

Jess: See, this is what I mean though. Like if this were me, I would have spent the night in Athens at the Sofitel across from the airport and flown to Santorini the next morning, but Megan has no chill and Megan is like, "No, we're doing it. We're doing it. We're going hard."

Megan: Can't. When you only have a like a weeklong spring break, there is no time to waste.

Jess: All right. So whether, you know, regardless of your travel style, you're going to find something for you here on the Travel Mom Squad team.

Alex: Yes.

Megan: And then at the, so at the Athens Airport, since we had carry-on luggage, we didn't have to leave the airport to go to the carousel to get our baggage. So we literally just stayed in the airport and we just went straight up to the Gold Air Handling VIP lounge. And this lounge was probably one of the best airport lounges I have ever been to and it was also included with our priority pass. The food was so good. It was so fresh and they had unlimited options. Like anything you can think of. It was, I would highly recommend if you have a couple hours at the Athens Airport, definitely go check it out.

So like I said, we flew from Athens to Santorini on Aegean Air. This is, Aegean Air is part of the Star Alliance. So you can book it on United for about 8,000 points and 5 dollars and 60 cents a person. But I realized a couple weeks before our trip that I hadn't booked our flights from Athens to Santorini. So I had to pay cash and there were tons of award availability the week before and after us, but

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since it was Easter week and likely everybody was on spring break travel, there was just no option on the points. But they do have a family rate and I booked this round trip on cash and it was about 150 dollars a person maybe.

But since we didn't have any bags to check, but they would also give, this family rate would give you a discount on the checked luggage. It gives a 40% discount on the kids tickets ages 2 to 11, free seat selection and boarding group one. And it was cheaper than just booking regular tickets. So if you're booking through Aegean Air, look for that child, that family, um, rate because it was, it was really great.

Jess: That's really good to know.

Megan: Yeah. Uh, um, so we stayed at an Airbnb in Santorini. Um, I found it just on the Airbnb website and it was amazing. So our Airbnb host arranged for a driver to meet us at the airport. It was 45 euros per for the whole family. Just we just paid directly to him. And then he drove us from the airport to la and there a porter met us at the car and he like helped carry our bags and show us to where the Airbnb was because the roads are all pedestrian and it's kind of windy and you could easily get lost if you didn't know where you were going. So it was it was really, really nice to have a driver to get us there and then the porter to walk us and get us the keys and show us like how the apartment was set up and everything.

And so this was our crazy travel day. It was like 18 hours and I'm so glad we did it though because then we had like two days in Santorini where we just did nothing. I had nothing planned. We were just going to wander around and just enjoy the view. And our Airbnb had a balcony. Like the view of the blue domes that everybody like fights for positioning to get to, our Airbnb, we walked out on the top balcony and that was our view. Just right out of the apartment. And it was not even that expensive. We paid about 375 dollars a night and I saw in peak summer, it was about 600 dollars a night, but I would still pay that.

Jess: Yeah.

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Megan: It was a traditional cave house. It slept up to six people, had a full kitchen, two bathrooms, a washer. All the beds were on the main floor, but the only downside I would say is if you have little kids or people with mobility issues, to get upstairs to the really great balcony, it was practically a ladder. Like the stairs were so steep that we had to like use hands and feet to climb up them.

Alex: So maybe not great for toddlers, but it sounds like.

Megan: No, you can block that off and then you go up there after you put the kids to bed.

Jess: That's a, hey, that's a great idea. No, I think that those prices are totally reasonable, especially given being right in the middle of Ia, which is tends to be the most expensive place to stay.

Megan: Exactly. It and the Airbnb was, it wasn't like old, but it's traditional. So all the walls are kind of like plaster and even the bathroom was kind of like made out of plaster and it had like a arch over the shower. And so like I'm 6 feet tall, so like I was kind of like trying to get in the shower. Like, but I would still stay there again even with that. And so since this was April, it was shoulder season, our driver had mentioned it was quieter than he typically, um, sees, but he thinks that was because they had the earthquakes earlier this year. And it was Easter week and Orthodox and, um, our, like our Easter fall on the same Sunday. So that only happens every couple of years. So he thinks it was just people were getting ready for the holiday and weren't really traveling. Um, but we loved it.

The weather was 65 and sunny every day and it was so quiet and we walked, like we got to our apartment, dropped our bags and then we just walked everywhere. The kids love seeing the animals, like the mules and the cats and the dogs, like there's so many stray cats and we just like followed them all. We just like walking down the street just following where they're going to see. And it was just so calm and quiet and it just felt so special, especially without the crowds.

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And then on our checkout day, the porter met us at the Airbnb, walked us back to our driver that our Airbnb, that our Airbnb host, um, set up for us and we got back to the airport with plenty of time. And we flew, um, back to Athens on Aegean Air and that was, that original ticket I booked was round trip and it's only 25 minutes in the air. So it's like you're up, you're down, you're there. It was so nice. We were there by 12:30. So one problem we ran into is so we landed back in Athens and we come out and we're like, "Okay, how are we going to get to our hotel?" And I'm looking around and every single taxi is a sedan that fits four people. And I'm like, "Well, we have five people. How is this going to work?"

And in typical me, I start like kind of slightly internally panicking. I'm like, "This is going to suck. Like, how are we going to do this?" And Tim's like, "Let me figure this out." Like he's in the military. He's like calm and all. As soon as I start like stressing, he starts like going back down to like more calm. And he was like, "Let me go talk to some people. We'll figure it out." And he walks up to a taxi and it's like this older man who's probably in his like late 70s. And Tim's like, "We have five people with the kids. Can you take us to our hotel?" And he was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, get in." And it's just like his regular sedan car. And we're like, "Okay."

So me and the girls sit in the back, Tim sat at the front. The car, that the car smells like cigars. Like it's reminded me of my grandpa. Like, and I was like, "This guy, I trust him. He's going to get us there." And he begins to tell us that the rules, if we get into an accident, his insurance is not going to cover us because the rules say you can only have four people in your car and we have five. And we're just like, "Okay, whatever." Like it's too late. We're already in your car.

Alex: Yeah. Let's just go.

Megan: Oh my gosh. And then he proceeds to drive like twice the speed limit the whole way, cut across like four lanes on the highway. And I'm like grabbing. I'm like, "Oh my gosh." But he got us there safe. Everything was fine. It wasn't a big

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deal at all in the end, but it was just so funny because I was like, I don't know why I didn't think how we were going to get from the airport to our hotel and I just assumed there would be like van taxis.

Alex: Yeah, I would have done the same thing because it's like when, and I know you've had the same experience when you went to Amsterdam, like we were able to get vans. Like just outside of the airport. Like I think we did ours through Uber, but they had like bigger cars you could get.

Megan: Yeah, and Uber was not an option. When you went onto Uber, it literally just gave you taxi options. There were no actual Ubers. So I don't know if it doesn't work in Athens, but on the day that we were there, there were no options on Uber.

Alex: Yeah, I know it used to work in the past, but and maybe it just gave me a taxi option because we used it. It was just Mitch and I. So, well.

Jess: Yeah.

Megan: Oh, so we stayed at a smaller boutique hotel. I've shared before that I, my first point of trying to find a hotel for five of us is I go on booking.com and I just search like family suites, family rooms. I put in two adults, three kids and our dates and kind of just like scroll through the options and try to find something that has good reviews. And I found this really cute little family run hotel called Sweet Home Hotel. I booked it through booking.com and got 8% cash back on my Rakuten. Breakfast was included and we had a family room. So it was like the penthouse and it had a king bed and they had three single beds set up with a bathroom and then like a little like dining area. And it I, I thought it was really great. The price was very reasonable. It was about 350 dollars for the night, I think.

Because the other option I looked at was the Grand Hyatt Athens and after Alex had said it's kind of removed from the city and we would have needed two

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rooms there and it was just getting too complicated where I was like, we only have like a day and a half here. Like I, I don't want to be wasting time.

Jess: Yeah, and we had to take an Uber around from there and so you would have been in that same position of like, "How do we get back to our hotel?"

Megan: Yeah. But so this hotel, we dropped our bags and we just headed out sightseeing and it was a 14-minute walk to the Acropolis. I didn't buy tickets ahead of time because I was worried, I didn't want to be stressed for like making a specific time. But if you were traveling in summer, you want to have those time tickets because it does sell out and it gets very busy. Um, but since we were there in April, we showed up at 3:40 and our tickets were for 4:00 PM. So we waited 20 minutes. The girls just kind of like ran around and played on the rocks and until our timed entry opened up. Um, and it was 30 euros an adult, but kids were free. So like I thought 100%, this is like one of those places you just kind of have to. If you're going to Athens, you have to go to the Acropolis.

Alex: Totally.

Jess: And one hack I have for that, and I think Alex, you did this when you and Mitch went, but if you're going, I was there in early September, but it was still when it was like pretty hot outside. And so we bought tickets for the last entry of the day. And then it was cooler, but also it was less crowded. And so I rec, I highly recommend that if that is an option for you too.

Megan: Yeah, that would be great because I was walking around just thinking, I can't imagine being here in summertime. Because there is no shade. There is no like break.

Jess: No shade at all.

Megan: And we spent about 1.5 to 2 hours here and Rose is a huge like big Greek mythology buff and so she was like our own little tour guide. She corrected me like five times. I was like, "Oh, there's that." She's like, "No, no, no,

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no." And we love the National Geographic podcast, Greekin' Out. It is such a fun kid-friendly way to learn about Greek mythology and the storytelling is really great. And when we're on road trips, that's always the girls like first request. Um, so highly recommend if you're going to Greece to check out that podcast.

And so from there we headed over to the Acropolis Museum and that was also great. Um, again, another, another thing of like, sometimes you just have to like have a little team meeting with your kids of like, so we had a long couple of days, long couple travel days and now we're in the like the big city in Greece and everybody was kind of hot and tired and we're getting to this museum and they actually got one, one of the workers came over and asked them to be quiet. And I was like, "We weren't being that loud, but I like that was right." So we kind of like had to pull everybody in to be like, "Okay, let's reset. Everybody calm down. Let's take a deep breath. There are other people here. We want to be respectful to them too. Like we're not the only ones here enjoying this." So that happened right in like the lobby, we were barely even in the museum and I was like, "Oh my gosh, of course."

Alex: That's the realities of traveling with kids sometimes.

Megan: Yes. Yes. But they did have a great kid-friendly section upstairs where they had like computers and games and like a big Lego set of that looked like the Acropolis and it was, it was that definitely kid friendly, but yes, obviously like let's try to keep our kids quiet in the museum. And so I wish we had one or two more days in Athens, but the way we are heading to Croatia next and the way it worked out with the flights, this was our only option. Like we the flight left on Monday and that was the only direct flight that week into Dubrovnik. So I was really torn of trying to push our dates earlier, but we had school and all that stuff. So I wish we had probably like 1.5 to 2.5 days in Athens instead of basically like 24 hours.

Jess: Mhmm.

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Megan: So from Athens, we flew Aegean Air again to Dubrovnik, Croatia and we paid 80 dollars a person with that same family rate again and the flight was about 1.5 hours. And we landed in Dubrovnik and like 2:00 and we had like the strangest rental car experience I've ever had. So I booked a small Toyota Corolla hatchback through National rental car because with my Amex Platinum, you get the elevated status. And I was like, I have always had really great experience with them.

And so I booked this tiny little like hatchback station wagon car because I was like, "Oh, we have five bags. Like we can fit in any size car at this point. Our kids aren't that big. Like they all three of them sit in the back." And it was about 300 dollars for 5 days. We walk out of the airport over to the rental car place and there's nobody there. And we're like, "Okay, where is everybody?" Like there's no sign. The door's open. You can walk in and it's just like a booth. And so we stand there like 10 minutes later, like three guys come walking up in the parking lot and they're all like smoking cigarettes. And we're like, "Oh, okay, I guess they were on break. Like no big deal, like whatever."

And they bring out our rental car and I'm getting the girls, we take those bubble bum booster seats for Eleanor and Amelia. Rose is now big enough, she doesn't need one. And so I'm getting their booster seat set up. I'm getting the bags in the trunk and Tim's talking to the kid and he is walking through showing him the paperwork. And he's going around showing him all the scratches on the car. And Tim hands me the paperwork and you know how they have like the little picture of the car with the X's of all like the dents and stuff. There were so many X's on the picture, you couldn't tell that it was a car.

Jess: Oh my gosh. So were you like, "Well, we don't have to worry about scratching it because..."

Megan: And I was like, "Okay, whatever." I walk and I walk around and I'm like, "Okay, the tires look good." I'm like, "Check the oil. Like make sure there's oil in there." And then Tim gets in and there's a quarter of a tank of gas. It's not full. And so he asks the kid and he's just like, "Is this supposed to be this empty?"

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And the kid's like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, just turn it in like that." And we're like, "Okay, so the next person also gets like an empty car."

Alex: And you're like, "Are you going to charge me though because I didn't fill it up?"

Megan: And like it was so strange and it ended up being totally fine, but I'm at we did have a moment of panic first where I was like, "Okay, this is like really kind of screwed up. Like I don't know what I'm doing." Like I'm a little stressed out, but.

Alex: You're like, "This is not, this doesn't feel very legit."

Megan: Yeah. And it was like right at the airport. So that's why it was so crazy. And so the, luckily the gas station was like 10 minutes down the road. It was like downhill. So I was like, "Okay, well if we have to coast there, we'll coast there, like whatever." So we get gas. I clean the, oh, the other thing, the outside of the car was like covered in pollen. So we could barely even see out the windshield. So I had to clean the wind windows off while Tim pumping gas.

And so then it was about from the airport to old town Dubrovnik's about 25 minutes and it was really, really easy. I just put it into Google Maps. Um, no big, it was no, no big deal getting there. Um, we had an Airbnb here too. This is another one that slept up to six and it had free parking, which was amazing. It had a full kitchen, two bathrooms, a huge like gated garden, which was great because the girls at this point just needed somewhere to just run around and play. And it was only a 5-minute walk to the main gate to the old town. And the price was about 225 dollars a night. So again, like Airbnb, you could put this on your Capital One Venture X and erase the purchase.

Alex: Well, like you're just not going to find, like if you have to get a hotel, you're getting two rooms.

Megan: Exactly. Exactly. And right away.

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Alex: Like, so to get 225 for your whole family of 6 is amazing.

Megan: Yeah. And the location was so good.

Jess: We will link all of the Airbnbs that Megan, the hotels and the Airbnbs that Megan stayed at in the show notes. So you don't need to be like writing this down. You can just go to the show notes and we will have everything linked there. But yeah, these prices, these prices are great for a family of 5. And I like that you don't use points for everything. And you're like, "We're going to use points for what makes sense." And when it makes sense to stay in a vacation rental or a hotel with a family suite, then we're going to do that. So it doesn't have to be, you know, none of us use points for everything. Um, I think people get it in their head that like if their trip is not 100% free, they're doing it wrong, which is not the case at all.

Megan: Yeah. And I have two hotels later that we did use points on just because they were like screaming deals. But if you had those like venture miles, you could erase your purchase. Um, we are new to Capital One. I just got my first venture X last week. So I will eventually probably use those points for something like this. But again, 225 dollars a night and you're right in the old town the week before Easter for spring break. I would more than happily pay that to fit up to six people in one hotel room.

But there is a Hilton hotel, the Hilton Imperial Dubrovnik, and that is bookable on points. We could see it from the old town main gate. And it was right next to like the little grocery store that we went to buy snacks in. So if you, if we did need two rooms and we were just adults or you have Hilton points or whatever to use, it is a really great option. The location is amazing and you can walk everywhere from there.

So we spent a couple days in Dubrovnik. We walked the wall up at the, you can go like up onto, it's a walled city and you can walk up on the wall. We did that with the girls. We saw people with little kids doing it, like toddlers, people had

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babies and baby carriers. The stairs are pretty steep to get up, but once you're up there, it's contained. Like the walls are up like since I'm so tall, they're up to like pretty much my chest. So there was no worries about kids falling off the wall or like being crazy, but the views were amazing and it's just really cool unique experience that you really can only do here. We spent a lot of time just wandering around.

You can go down to the port, you can go, if you're a Game of Thrones fan, there are tons of Game of Thrones like sites to see here. Um, the stairs where like Cersei at the, it's like one of the most famous scenes from Game of Thrones. Like people were lining up to get their pictures there and there was a guy playing the accordion, playing the theme song from Game of Thrones. So it this, if that is your thing, you will find lots of things here. But what's even with kids, there are lots of stairs. It's like up and down, you walk all over. It's all kind of like these back alleyways. We had really great food. The food was so easy. We had no problem finding just like plain chicken and French fries almost anywhere in Greece or Croatia.

Alex: Honestly, my mom and I were talking about this just on our last trip. Greece, well, Croatia, like I wasn't expecting that, but it was one of our favorite food of any country we've been to. Like the food in Croatia was so good, so much like good fresh fish. And in Greece has really good food too. I like really like both of those for food.

Megan: Yeah. And like what I was looking forward to is Ćevapi. They're like these little like sausage, um, like meat and you get served with like fresh onion and French fries and like lettuce and tomato. And it's something that like my family grew up eating and I was like, "I cannot wait to go and eat this."

Alex: Yes.

Megan: And so like that was really great and to like introduce the girls to a lot of that stuff that like I don't make that stuff on a regular basis. So it was just really, really cool and special. And so from Dubrovnik, we kind of road tripped. So we

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had our rental car and from there we drove north and our next stop was going to be Split, but on the way we kind of like zigzagged our way up and we went to Mostar, Bosnia. And this was about 2.5 hours north from Dubrovnik and I almost cancelled this part of our trip at the last minute because I was reading online and people had me all freaked out and they were like, "The border crossing is so strict. You have to have special insurance. They're going to search your car."

And I was like, "Oh my gosh, is this even worth it?" And I was like, "No, we're doing this. This was on the plans. I'm not changing it. I really want to go here." And we crossed at Neum and that's like one of the border crossings and we had zero issues. We were stopped for less than 2 minutes. We like when we pull up to like a border crossing, we like put the back window down, Tim puts his driver window down so like because they want to see how many kids are in the back.

We have all, I have all the passports like open to our passport pages so they can easily like flip through them and scan them. And the guy literally looked at every single one, scanned every single one, stamped them and was like, "Have a nice day." And that was it. And I was like, "I am so glad I didn't cancel this." They didn't even ask for any type of special insurance or anything that I was reading online that you that said you had to have. So it was great. I totally recommend it. It was way easier and way less stressful than I made it out to be in my head.

Alex: Good, good.

Megan: Yeah. But this was such a unique city. So this, so Mostar is kind of like a mix of Eastern and Western cultures. It's kind of a big melting pot for that area. And so there are like the Croats are Catholics and the Serbians are Orthodox and a lot of Bosnians are Muslims. So it and this is kind of like a place where they all have like cohabitated for a very long time. And so Bosnia is not part of the European Union. Um, so I was a little worried about, I was like, "Do we have to get money out? Is this going to be a cash heavy society? Like I'm not sure." They took euros everywhere. Like no, nobody even questioned it. They're so

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close to the borders of the other countries that do take euros that they probably don't even think twice.

And so I looked up ahead of time and found a parking, like parking lot. And so I put it into Google Maps and I was like, "Okay, we're going to go here and this is where we're going to park and we're just going to walk to the old town." And we go and park and there's a guy standing there and it has a big P on his like sandwich board sign like spray painted and he's wearing an orange vest and I was like, "All right, that looks legit enough." Like, so we park and they, it was like 10 euros for the whole day or 5 euros for 3 hours. So we just did 10 euros because I was like, I don't want to stress getting back in 3 hours, like whatever.

So he has us park in a very specific way. It is a very small parking lot and they have people park like both sides of it. And so we park our car and we take the, we took the keys with us. So I was like, "It'll be fine." So we go to the old town, we walk all around. The star of the show here is Stari Most and that is their old bridge. And it is kind of like a, the way it's built is one of like the highest arches of a man-made bridge or something like that. So it's really, really unique to see.

And one of the cool things is they have these people who are bridge divers and it's kind of like a rite of passage for the young men who live here and they walk along the bridge and down underneath and they collect money and their people are giving them tips and hats. And at one point somebody was like, "Well, he's up there. Like, who are you? Like, why are you collecting the money?" And they're like, "We all work together. Like we're all, like this is our thing." And they dive off of this bridge after they collect like a certain amount of money. And so we got to see this a couple times and it was just, like it was just so cool and unique because I'm like, "This is crazy." Like, who would do this? And this is we're at the top of the bridge and the wind is like whipping and we're like, "Oh my god, like is, like there is no way that this is safe."

Alex: So you did not dive off the bridge, Megan?

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Megan: No, we did not. But we did watch the professionals do it. And um, the other thing that was really cool is, um, we, so the Muslim call of prayer happens five times a day, um, during their like prayer times and it is recited by, I hope I don't say this right, a Muezzin and broadcasted from the minarets. And so we were standing on top of the bridge around like 12:30, 1:00 and we start to hear the call of prayer and I was like, "This is so cool." Like, what a cool and unique experience. And we're pointing out and we could see like five minaret towers from where we were standing. And Tim looked at me and he was like, "The first time I heard this was when I was in Iraq in 2005, like serving in the Marines." And then when we met in college, we met in Arabic class. So I was like, "This is such a full circle moment for us."

Alex: Wow, cool.

Megan: And I was like, "This is so cool." And I, like this is what travel does like for you. Like it is just such an amazing thing to be able to experience this with your kids and your spouse and all that. I'm just like, it's, it was just so amazing. I just love it and I will like never forget that. We took a little video of the moment and the girls are just standing there listening and I was like, "This is, I just love this."

Jess: That's like the, okay, this is why we fly 18 hours and go through all of this is for these full circle moments where we can like have these bonding experiences as a family.

Megan: Yes. Yes. And that's like just 100% it. And it's just no distractions and it's just your family being together in a place where you're all kind of uncomfortable and you're all trying to like figure out what's being said to you and what's on the menu and like, I just love that like that feeling of like stretching you on the inside of like, "Okay, this is making me a better person."

Alex: For sure. I love that.

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Megan: And so we just spent the afternoon there. We spent a couple hours and then we went, um, from Mostar back up to Split, which is like further north on the coast of Croatia. And the roads looked like American highways. They were perfectly paved. Um, Croatia joined the European Union about, I think 2013 and then they switched the Euro in 2023. Um, and since then, the European Union has been helping them update like every highway connecting the tourist spots are all brand new like asphalt highways.

Um, so we left Bosnia and entered back into Croatia. That was also super easy. We had two passport checks. So we had one leaving Bosnia, then like that little like in between space and then going into Croatia, they checked our passports again. And the only thing they asked, they were like, "You don't have any alcohol or cigarettes?" And we're like, "No." So I guess people probably go to Bosnia to buy them. Maybe they're cheaper there, I'm not sure. But that was the only question we were asked and they stamped our passports and sent us on our way. And so we arrived in Split around 5:00 PM and we had two nights in Split and we booked a Mr. and Mrs. Smith Hotel. And I could not believe the deal on this because they are not in the Hyatt award chart. They are, um, the other, what am I saying?

Jess: They like have dynamic pricing.

Megan: Yeah, they have dynamic pricing. Yes, they have dynamic pricing. Um, so this was the Brig Boutique Hotel in Split Hotel in Split, Croatia. We paid 17,750 points per night per room. And breakfast was included and parking was 20 euros a night and that was like right there. But I could not believe the deal in this hotel. I was like, "Okay, I'm just going to use points because that totally makes sense." The cash price wasn't crazy. It was probably like 2 or 300 dollars, but for some reason the points price was so good.

So we paid 35,500 points for each room for the two nights. And the location, we walked everywhere. We parked the car and didn't use it again till we left. Um, and it's right next to the beach. So if you are going in summertime, this hotel,

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literally you walk out the front door, turn left and the ocean, like the water is right there. So if you are like beach people, this is the place to stay.

Alex: Sounds like the place for Alex and Pam.

Megan: Yeah, we did walk down to the beach, but it was cold and kind of rainy, so it was not that enjoyable. Um, but the breakfast also was amazing. The breakfast was so good. They had made to order eggs and then they had all this fresh food. And then Prosecco was included, so that you could like make mimosas. They had a coffee machine and then they had a juice machine that was, I've never seen a juice machine before. This was very cool for the kids. And it was like you just push a button and it gave you, so like apple cranberry and then it had plain water and sparkling water. Um, and it was just so great. And we only have explorer status and didn't send any emails ahead of time like asking for anything. Like we just showed up and each of our rooms had a bottle of wine and snacks. And I was like, "This is such a deal."

Alex: That is such a good deal.

Megan: Yeah. And it had like a little handwritten note of like welcoming our family and hope you enjoy your trip and it was, this hotel felt much fancier than we are, but it was still really, really great. Um, we had, each room sleeps up to two adults and one child under 12. So they gave us a roll away in one of our rooms for free. There was no charge. Um, but there were no connecting rooms. So we were kind of like on the corner of the third floor and our, so our doors were like right next to each other, but Tim took one kid and I took two kids in my room and it was totally fine.

And again in Split, like we really had no real plans here besides like I wanted to go to Diocletian's Palace, which is like the sight to see here and we wandered around. And since it was right before Easter, everybody was out at the markets and they had butcher shops. Like we literally seen this guy pushing a shopping cart with like newspaper in it and we're looking and then it's like a pig's foot was sticking out. Like we went and bought his pig for his pig roast that he was going

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to have on Easter at the market. And I was like, "You don't see this where we live. Like this is so cool."

And they had like the cutest little like Easter, like a little part of the park had like big giant Easter eggs that were painted and you could get your pictures with them and they had signs up for like Happy Easter and it was, it was really, really cute and, um, it was right on the water and again, like the food was really good. There was more of a, um, Italian influence here. So there was a lot of like Italian foods, um, and the seafood. Like you just cannot get better seafood, I don't think. I all the places we've travelled to, I think Croatia really kills it on the seafood.

Alex: I'm with ya.

Jess: Y'all are really selling me on Croatia just from the food alone.

Alex: You know what, Megan? I was so sad. I forgot to tell you about this pizza place. And I'm going to put a link to it in the show notes because I can't remember it off the top of my head, but I just sent it to somebody in a DM the other day. And it's like in Split, like totally walkable and they had this like dessert pizza that had like white chocolate and raspberries, maybe regular chocolate too and pistachios. I mean, we, we got them to go. We got it like every day while we were there and it's so good. So I was really like, "Shoot, I forgot to tell Megan about that." But it looks like you did good. You found some great food as well.

Megan: Yeah, we did. Except for the girls freaked out because my, one of my meals had, it was like a traditional food. I wish I could run it down. Um, and it came with like prawns and it had like the eyes, like it was like full-sized prawns. And Rose, Rose was like, "I can't, I can't even look at your plate. Like, can we just get rid of this?" While she's eating her like plain chicken and French fries.

Alex: Oh my gosh. That's so funny.

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Megan: But so from Split, we headed, we just kept going. So like Split's on the western coast and then Zagreb is where we were flying home, which is the capital. So that was like further like northeast. So we left the hotel after breakfast and headed towards Zadar, which is also on the coast. There is a brand new Hyatt Regency here. This is where I was trying to stay, but they opened up like a week or two after we were going to be there.

So if you don't want to stay in Split, Zadar, it would be another great option and it's kind of like across the water and somebody actually shared in the Facebook group that they had recently stayed here and you can pay like a little like rowboat person to bring you because it's across the river from the old town and the rowboat will take you across from the Hyatt Regency over to the old town for like a couple euros. And I was like, "What a cool experience."

Alex: I'm trying to look. Do you know what, um, category it is?

Megan: Oh, I should have made a note. I think it's either category four or five. It's not super high, I don't think.

Alex: Because I remember seeing the review. Yeah, it's a category four.

Megan: Yeah. So you could use the certificates here.

Alex: You could use. It looks beautiful and I remember seeing that review in the Facebook group and it was very positive.

Megan: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's brand new. How could, how can you be with a brand new hotel? But so, but the real reason we went to Zadar is because it has the only continuous sea organ in the world. And I was like, "This, if that's the only one, then we're going to go see it." It's like one of those like roadside attractions where I was like, "Nope, we're going to go do this."

Jess: Alex, did you go see the only continuous sea organ?

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Alex: We didn't, we didn't go here. We only did Dubrovnik, Split and Hvar. So we didn't make it there.

Megan: But there are two others. There's one in San Francisco and there's one in the UK, but they only work at high tide. This one works all day long and it was very cool. It's kind of built into the concrete walkway and it's like as the water, the waves like come in, it pushes the air through and makes like the organ sounds. Um, so it doesn't play anything like specific, but it was very unique and very cool to just kind of sit there and listen and try to figure out how, we're like, "How is this working?"

The other thing that I always kind of stress about with a rental car is parking. There were so, it was jam packed because everybody was there for Easter at the markets. But there were, was parking all over the old town and it was really hard. We had to circle multiple times and finally found a spot. And we're like, "Yes, like this is a great spot. It was an actual spot." We pull in, we're gone for like an hour and a half and we got a ticket. And it was like, And of course, it's not in English, it's in Croatian.

So we're using Google Translate on our phone trying to figure out how do we pay this ticket. I'm like, "Well, worst case, we'll find like the town hall." But then I'm like, "Okay, well Easter's like tomorrow. Like how am I going to..." Like, what if they're not open? So we figured out, I was able to just pay from my phone. It was 19 euros. And I was like, "Well, parking was probably going to be a couple euros anyway, so I wasn't that bad."

Alex: Yeah, you're like, "It's worth, it was worth it to not drive around longer."

Megan: Yeah. But like there's another like proof of like, things are not perfect when you're traveling and like stuff is going to go wrong and but it's not the end of the world. You will just like take a breath and figure it out and it was fine. So from Zadar, we just stopped there for a couple hours and then we continued about 1.5 hours north to Plitvice Lakes National Park. And to me, this is probably one of, if not the most beautiful place I've ever visited.

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It is a National Park. It is, there's no railings. There's water rapids everywhere and you kind of walk on these like wooden platforms. We saw this one family with a little kid. They were letting the kid, it's just a toddler, like 2 or 3, stepping off the boat and he almost fell between the boat and the docks. Like, please watch your kids. Please hold their hands. Like, and they also brought a scooter. I was like, "People, this is not the place for a scooter."

Alex: No, we went there too, Megan, and it is definitely not the place. And we were there in May and it was a little more crowded, but I know in the summer it gets so, so crowded. So I don't know if you want to, you probably would want to like plan your time like the earliest of the day, I would imagine would be better because it's going to be busy. We went from Split and we like hired a driver to drive us up, like in a van. So it was me, my mom, and my sisters and he drove us up in a van and stayed there the whole day with us, like just waited for us. And when we were ready to go, he drove us back to Split. So if you're not going, you know, to Zadar, then you can still make it work. It's just a little bit longer of a drive.

Megan: Yeah. And we got there like later in the day.

Alex: But it's worth it. I'm with you. It's a must. Like it is, it's incredible.

Megan: Like the water is like the most like greenish blue aqua. It's and it's because of like the way the moss is under the water that makes it gives it this color. Um, and they have a really great water, like huge waterfall. It's like the biggest one in Croatia. Um, but I, it would be really tricky with toddlers and I would definitely have my kids in toddler backpacks and because even people, like you're supposed to kind of go like the same direction. Like everybody's kind of like walking the same direction, but there were a lot of people coming back the other way and I'm like, "No, like this walkway is only like 3 feet wide. Like why are you coming at me right now?"

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Um, but we, I would easily plan at least 3 to 4 hours, but probably longer in summertime. We took the F route and when we got there, we asked like, "Well, how long would this take?" And she was like, "At least 3 hours." And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, it's already like 2:00, 3:00." I'm like, "We don't have time. Like I don't have time to do 3 hours." But, but we really had to go the whole route to see everything. And so it was like a 5-minute boat ride, then you wait again, and then it's like a 15-minute boat ride, and then it's a few miles of walking on these like wooden planks with stairs. And then you walk up a giant hill at the end and a shuttle takes you back to the entrance.

Alex: Yeah, I mean, you definitely like we were like, you want to wear comfortable shoes. You're going to be doing a lot of walking. Like we had a little bit of hiking. I don't know what route we took, but it's like we were walking through the forest.

Megan: Yeah, at times. We didn't have, we kind of like, this was what she recommended for families. She was like, "Our families usually do this one." And I was like, "That's what we're doing." And we did it in about 2 hours even though she said it would take about 3, but we hustled. Like I was like, "Let's go. We're not stopping." Like, we don't have time. It's going to get dark. And so we got the shuttle back to the entrance. We ate at the little cafeteria there. It was, they were so cute. Like they were so happy to have families there and like the ladies, like it was just, reminded me just like my grandma, like these old bubbas just like, "Here's your food. Are you, do you have enough?" They, it's a cafeteria and they're like, "Well, can we give you more?" And I'm like, "No, we don't need more. Like it's okay."

So then we got back in the rental car and we drove 2 hours to Zagreb, which is the capital and we didn't arrive till like 7:00 PM. So we didn't have any time to do anything in Zagreb. This is the capital of the country. We would have to come back and do that again. And it's just we, we just ran out of time and we wanted to be back for Easter and Tim really likes to get home back on like a Saturday so we have a day to recover before we go back to like work and school and all that stuff.

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Um, so this was, uh, Friday night that we got back, got to Zagreb and we booked the Canopy by Hilton Zagreb City Center Hotel. And a standard two double bedroom sleeps up to four, which is great, but obviously we still needed two rooms. And it was only 20,000 Hilton points per night. But since there was recently a 25% transfer bonus from Amex to Hilton and Amex transfers to Hilton 1 to 2, I only paid 8,000 points a night. Which is a steal.

Alex: Yeah. That's a steal. Yeah.

Jess: That's a steal. But even at 20, I mean, even at 20,000 points a night, it's 10,000 Amex points.

Megan: And I would say the location is really great. You're in this, you are in the city center. Um, they comped our parking. I'm not sure if that's always the case. I have Hilton Gold status from my Amex Platinum, so I'm not sure if that was what it was. And if we hadn't left the crack of dawn, I would have had breakfast for two. Um, so that would have been included, but we didn't have, we left at literally at like 3, 4:00 in the morning. Um, but the parking was right next to the hotel, super easy, location was wonderful. I would definitely come back and stay here again, especially for that price. Like that was a great deal, especially when you need two rooms or if you have a family of 4 and you can sleep in one room, like that would just be awesome.

So our flight the next morning was 6:00 AM. It was a Saturday, the day before Easter and this is kind of like, I actually had this flight home booked before I had anything else booked. And it was business class on KLM and I paid the 212,500 miles and 1450 dollars for all five flights total. And that again was before the devaluation. So it was the 50,000 for adult and 37, um, 500 for a kid. But I actually had booked this flight home and I was like, "Okay, well now let's work backwards." And I was like, "Wow, we go fly into Greece and then do this and then fly into Dubrovnik and just road trip our way out." And it, that's just how it all happened because I was like, "This is a really great deal and especially right, right on our spring break, it was so perfect. I couldn't pass it up."

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Jess: When you find five business class seats, you got it at standard pricing. You got to just lock it in.

Alex: Yeah. We've done that too where it's like you'll find a really good flight home from somewhere and it's like, "All right, I guess we're building a trip around this flight home." We'll figure the rest out because like Jess said, like when you find a good deal. And I'm sure the, those business class flights made that like whatever, 3 or 4:00 AM wake up call a little easier because you're like, "Oh, it's fine. We get to fly business class."

Megan: We literally kept saying that. I'm like, "Everybody just hold it together. It'll be so much better once we get on the airplane."

Jess: And that's usually not the case. You're usually dreading a flight home. Yeah. So.

Megan: So our flight was 6:00 AM and we flew from Zagreb to Amsterdam on KLM and that was just the European business class so the middle seats were blocked. I will say I did have one complaint was that the flight attendant kept talking to Tim and he would be like, "Mr. Candelo, Mr. Candelo." And then he like wouldn't say anything to me and I'm like, "Excuse me, I booked this whole trip."

Alex: Yeah, you're like, "He doesn't know. You are talking to the wrong person." No, I have that same pet peeve, Megan, when they'll be like at a hotel restaurant and they'll hand him the check. I'm like, "He's not paying for this. It's my Hyatt card that's on this account. Like hand it to me."

Megan: Yeah. I mean, that's like kind of a minor thing, but like I'm sitting there with Eleanor and Rose were in front of me. Amelia is sitting with me. I'm getting everybody settled and I was like, "It would have been nice to be addressed by name and not while Tim's sitting by himself across the aisle just relaxing."

Alex: Oh my gosh. Um, Oh man.

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Megan: So the other thing people always question about is like what to do with your rental car because we had to drop it off super early like before they were open. Um, so we drove to the airport, just followed the signs literally rental car in English, followed the signs, pulled in, found the one that was R. So it was like National rental car and they had like parking spots with the different names on them. Um, we picked a spot that said National rental car and then they just had drop boxes for the keys. So it was super easy. There was no worry of like, there was no people you had to look for. There you didn't have to worry about that it was like 4:00 in the morning. It was no big deal.

Alex: Well, and based on how you received the car, it didn't really seem like they were going to be too thorough with their inspection when you brought it back.

Megan: I know. And they probably returned it with more gas than we got it with. Um, so we dropped the, dropped off the rental car, headed into the airport and then they had a priority security line for business class tickets. So on my KLM ticket, it said there was like priority, um, security. So we just like showed them our boarding passes and went straight through. Uh, the airport was pretty hopping for that early in the morning. There were a lot of flights going out. All the restaurants were open. They kind of opened right at like 5:00 AM. It was like an hour before our flight that we could like get in to the actual like seated area with all the restaurants and stuff. Um, super easy.

So we took that flight to Amsterdam, then we had access to the Crown Lounge, which is their like flagship lounge in Amsterdam, which we've been in a couple times now. It is really great. Even if we didn't have business class tickets, I would consider probably paying for it, especially if you have like a long layover. We had about 3.5 hours. Um, so we got in there, we like hung out for a little bit and then we had our flights home and it was really great. The flight attendants were wonderful. We got five more Delft Blue houses, which is the real, real perk of flying KLM.

Alex: Man, you have 10 now?

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Megan: We have 10 now and they're all on my window sill in the kitchen.

Alex: I've only got four. I'm never going to catch up.

Megan: And I found, I did download the KLM houses app to mark all the ones that we have and the flight attendants were so lovely of like, the girls would, the girls were worried about picking one, they didn't want to get one we already have. So I was like, "Pick which one you want and then I'll check. Like don't like ask because there's 106 of them. So I'm I'm not going to read you 100 options when we only have five. Like just pick one and then we'll check." And it all worked out. They were really excited. The one Rose picked ended up being the Anne Frank house. So she thought that was really special.

Alex: Oh, that's real cool.

Megan: And it like again like KLM, I just loved it. We had a wonderful experience. Flight attendants were lovely. The food was really good. It was great.

Alex: That's awesome, Megan. Well, we always love hearing about your family trips and this one has me itching to take my boys especial. I don't know if we're ready for Greece yet with all of them, but Croatia, I totally feel like we could totally do that. And I, when did I go? I don't know. It was like 2022 maybe. Maybe '23. I think 2022. And I am just like all of that just bringing all of those memories back. I'm like, "Oh, I want to go back and see it all and take my family next time." So anyway, if you enjoyed today's episode, we'd appreciate it so much if you'd leave us a review and share it with a friend. Thanks so much for your support.

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