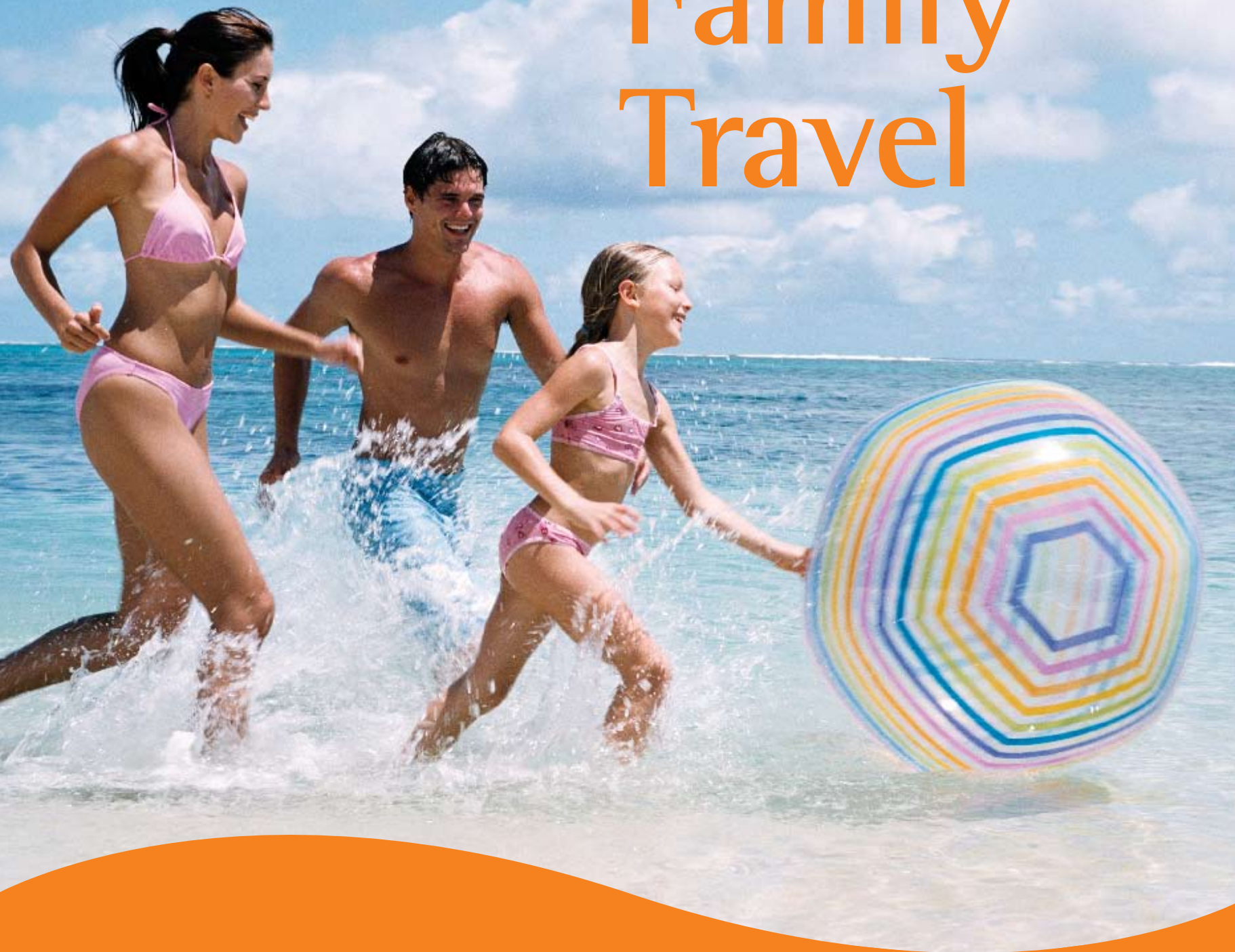


Family Travel



The location may be exotic and relaxing, but when vacations are spent in close quarters with children (especially teenagers), sometimes paradise is lost.

However, the travel industry has found several ways to kick up the adventure a notch. Get your moody teen on a whitewater rafting trip in Costa Rica

that features thrilling rapids or on a zip-line tour through the treetops. Or how would your teen like the prospect of going to a nightclub with other teens on your next cruise?

High-end travelers who want both quality kids' programs and ultimate luxury for themselves can also rejoice this season with exciting new activities for all.



“Luxury” and “Family Travel” Need Not Be Mutually Exclusive

Carnival Cruise Lines and Disney Cruises both offer age-restricted clubs for teens. Carnival’s “Club 02” offers 15- to 17-year-olds dance floors, DJs, plush sofas, large-screen plasma TVs and “Coke-tail” lounges that serve up non-alcoholic specialty drinks.

“The Stack” on Disney Magic and “Aloft” on Disney Wonder are open all day and half the night, providing kids ages 13 to 17 animation classes, as well as cameras and costumes so they can produce a movie of their trip.

Club Med has embraced separate teen areas as well. The company’s Passworld clubs are now found in 12 of the French chain’s 80 resorts. Splitting the teen demographic into tweens (11–13) and teens (14–17), activities may include sound-mixing classes, jewelry making or graffiti art, bungee jumping or roller disco.

“We’re seeing a lot of moms and dads in dual-working households and they’re road warriors,” says Sally Black, founder of VacationKids.com, a full-service online travel agency dedicated to family travel. “They’re used to staying at places like The Four Seasons for business trips. When they’re going on vacation, up until recently, there weren’t too many places offering five- and six-star luxury and child care.”

At the Dreams Cancun Resort & Spa, while parents are off enjoying an early morning workout, kids 3 to 12 can indulge in the Explorer’s Club, which Black calls one of the best kids’ camps she’s seen in her many years of testing resorts. This brightly colored space has a splash pool and fountain with a rubber no-slip floor, a rock-climbing wall and a sand pit, as well as its own theater, video arcade and snack bar. For children under 3 a private nanny can be arranged.

Last year, Dreams and Sunscape Resorts & Spas started offering a “no single supplement” for travel from May 1 through June 31. The special deal allows singles to pay for themselves and to take one child for free, saving an average of \$150 per night.

While many resorts split up kids and parents for much of the day, Thomson Family Vacations’ Jim Kackley, a specialist in family trips to exotic locales, says their adventure clientele actually prefer time together. It’s about quality bonding time — especially when it’s a once-in-a-lifetime trip like climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

Club Med

Club Med understands that kids get moody sometimes.

For tweens and teens — the toughest demographic in family travel circles — the resort chain offers a separate space and activities that actually pique their interest.

Club Med Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic started it all by rolling out The Ramp in 2005. The Ramp is many things: a skateboarding slope; a deck on top with seating and a giant hammock; and — soaring above — a sail-like canopy that doubles as a movie screen. And perhaps most

importantly, parents are banned from the (supervised) scene. In other words, it’s cool without trying too hard.

Now 12 Club Meds worldwide have created their own versions of Passworld, unique spaces and activities for ages 11 to 17. The latest is Cancun Yucatan’s Wash Station, a takeoff of a carwash and mechanic’s shop, with five retro-style Volkswagen Beetles and a dance floor spouting a fog-like spray.

With 80 resorts worldwide, clearly some are more family-friendly than others. The Sandpiper in Port St. Lucie, Fla. — the chain’s only all-inclusive resort in the United States — wins big points with parents for its numerous activities for kids of all ages.

Several of Club Med’s Latin American resorts join Sandpiper as favorite choices for families: La Caravelle in Guadeloupe, and Ixtapa and Cancun in the Yucatan. All four offer creative kid programming, including hip-hop dance fitness classes, music classes that weave together world music and activities, and circus school — where kids four and older learn juggling, walking the tightrope and swinging from the trapeze. The kicker: resorts also offer babysitting until 1 AM in the Siesta Club.

For more information, call 1-888-WEB-CLUB (932-2582) or visit www.clubmed.us.

Hersheypark

In 1907, Milton S. Hershey saw the need for picnic and pleasure grounds that employees of his central Pennsylvania chocolate factory could enjoy. Over the years the hallowed land morphed into a massive amusement park. It’s now celebrating 100 years with the opening of a splashy new attraction: The Boardwalk at Hersheypark.

Part day at the beach and part trip to the amusement pier, the area features five new water-based amusements, with eateries, games and stores galore, paying homage to the legendary boardwalks of the Northeast. The \$19.7 million addition, the biggest financial investment in park history, offers wet fun for all ages. Of course, dry fun abounds throughout the 110-acre one-price admission theme park.

With so much to do in the park, the nearby Amish country of Lancaster County, Pa. — plus two golf courses and a visit to the KISS exhibit at the nearby Hershey Museum — a trip to Chocolate Town USA warrants a few days’ stay at a Hershey resort. The Hotel Hershey is a truly grand choice with 232 guest rooms and 29 suites, the Cocoa Kid’s Club (open from Memorial Day to Labor Day) and a spa that incorporates chocolate or cocoa beans in many treatments. The Hershey Lodge, with 665 rooms, including 15 suites, is another luxury spot, offering relief from amusement rides in the form of three swimming pools, sports and chocolate-themed activities for kids.

The year-round destination is three hours from New York City, two hours from Philadelphia, one and a half hours from Baltimore, and 15 minutes from an international airport at Harrisburg.

For more information, call 1-800-HERSHEY (437-7439) or visit www.hersheypa.com.

Top: Hershey Park boardwalk, courtesy of Hershey Entertainment & Resorts Company.
Bottom: Club Med Passworld, courtesy of Club Med.

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Spotlight: ALBERTA, CANADA

With or Without the Kids, Canada Beckons

In soaring Alberta, the west, both wild and tame, rears up to meet you. One day it's the urban pleasures of Edmonton or Calgary, the next day you're hiking by a green glacial lake. Fly fishing, hot-springs bathing, dinosaur tracking — Alberta has it all.

Edmonton, Alberta's capital city, is home to the world's largest shopping and entertainment center, West Edmonton Mall. It's also Canada's Festival City, strewn with celebrations all summer long — the Heritage Festival (August 4–6), paying tribute to the city's multicultural roots; the Folk Music and Fringe Festivals (August 9–12) and the biggest hoedown of them all, the Klondike Days Exposition (July 19–28), a salute to the area's Gold Rush.

Calgary, gateway to the Rockies, splits its seams with the Calgary Stampede (July 6–15), one of North America's oldest and best rodeos. Window-shop in downtown's Stephen Avenue Mall, or rent a bike or in-line skates and skim what is possibly the longest continuous pathway in North America.

Three jewels of the Alberta Rockies: Jasper, Lake Louise and Banff

Don't miss the drive from Jasper to Lake Louise on Alberta Highway 93, better known as the Icefields Parkway, which features dramatic mountain vistas, vast walls of ice and towering waterfalls. The road's broad shoulders accommodate many bicyclists on the 143-mile ride. At Athabasca Glacier, snowcoach buses with fat tires take people up to the summit. Or sign on for a guided glacier hike, past snowy swales and deep crevasses.

One of the best ways to appreciate Lake Louise is by a 3.4-kilometer trail that winds up and away from the massive Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise. At trail's end, Six Glaciers Tea House is another eye-filling, tummy-stuffing aerie. Banff, 30 miles east of Lake Louise, is a high mountain resort town surrounded by the vast Banff National Park, with a touch of Aspen about it. Banff Avenue, towered over by soaring peaks, buzzes with curio shops and boutiques, cafés and outfitters. Take an afternoon soak in the historic Upper Hot Springs.



Fly fishing in an Alberta river.

The Klondike Trail

One of Alberta's many scenic drives is the Alberta segment of the Klondike Trail that led miners to the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush. Start in Edmonton, where many of the gold diggers were outfitted. Log time en route at the beaches of Lesser Slave Lake; McLennan, the bird capital of Canada, on the shores of Kimiwan Lake, home to thousands of shore birds and waterfowl; and Falher, the honey capital of Canada.

Alberta is also home to the Glacier-Waterton International Peace Park—the world's first. It also hosts the largest herd of free-roaming Wood Bison at the Wood Buffalo National Park. At Drumheller in south central Alberta, in the haunting Canadian Badlands, the Royal Tyrrell Museum puts you face-to-face with three dozen skeletons of real dinosaurs; or join a group at Drumheller and witness a dinosaur excavation in progress.

No small part of the Alberta experience lies in its varied and storied lodging. Consider these three historic chateau hotels — the Fairmont Banff Springs, Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise and Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge — all brought up-to-date without altering their big-beamed beauty.



Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada



Alberta Badlands

Amelia Island Plantation

A short 45-minute drive from the nearest metropolis, Amelia Island Plantation in Florida is an island oasis spread across 1,350 acres of beach, marshlands and subtropical forest.

The resort's AAA Four-Diamond facilities offer choice accommodations from 249 luxury hotel rooms to private one-, two- and three-bedroom villas. Its restaurants run from a casual seafood and family-style eatery to homemade pizza to the "tropical chic" Ocean Grill, specializing in seafood as well as prime rib, lamb, venison and duck.

Just footsteps from the sea, the Spa at Amelia Island Plantations encompasses 25 treatment rooms, a meditation garden and serene views of lagoons and moss-draped oaks. Among the extensive list of rejuvenating treatments is the spa's signature shiatsu massage — Watsu — performed while lying in warm water. (The Watsu pool is specially heated to body temperature.)



Carnival Conquest, courtesy of Carnival Cruise Lines.

Clearly just as much attention is paid to kids' programming as to adult offerings. Youth programs run year-round for tots to teens, are tailored to each age group and are led by enthusiastic counselors trained in first-aid as well as fun. "Kids Camp Amelia" — for ages 3 to 10 — sponsors an array of activities, including beach games, golf, tennis, nature clinics, field trips and water slide excursions. "Just For Kids," a themed dinner program for kids 3 to 10, features events like treasure hunts and hoedowns. "Teen Explorers," for ages 11 and up, offers activities such as bowling, movies and off-property trips. A game room is fully loaded with video game consoles, widescreen TV, foosball and billiards, among other diversions.

The island, connected by bridge to mainland Florida, is 29 miles north of the Jacksonville International Airport.

For more information, call 1-866-213-8045 or visit www.aipfl.com.

Palm Beach County

Surrounded by water and boasting 47 miles of coastline, Palm Beach County in Florida is a playground for outdoor enthusiasts. Golfers can choose from more than 160 courses, while tennis players have their pick among 1,100 courts countywide. For fashionistas, there's a store for every taste, including the elegant boutiques of Worth Avenue and the funky shops of the Clematis

Street District. And fans of extravagant architecture will have their day visiting the many oceanfront mansions.

Although renowned for catering to America's elite, Palm Beach County has a long history of entertaining everybody's grandchildren. Consider a stay at the grand yet kid-friendly The Breakers Palm Beach. The palatial Italian-style resort may date back to 1896 — resplendent with medieval tapestries, a courtyard and hand-painted ceilings — but an extensive remodeling brought modern amenities, including a world-class spa and a 6,160 sq ft, self-contained Family Entertainment Center. Among the resort's four oceanfront pools, the newest is a free-form family pool. The Coconut Crew Interactive Camp features sports, arts and crafts, and snorkeling, among myriad other activities.



Kowalsky family on a Thomson vacation to the Embera in Panama. ©Mark Kowalsky

Four separate programs are offered for children ages 3 through 17. For the youngest guests, for example, there's Boca Tots (ages 3–5), which includes butterfly hunts and homemade play dough. For teens, Boca Raton 33432 Club features teen-only cruises and dance parties as well as water and land sports.

With ocean temperatures ranging from 78 to 84 degrees in summer and 70 to 78 degrees in winter, Palm Beach County is ideal for scuba divers. Miles of reef line, crevices and ledges feature numerous wrecks worthy of exploration. Or visitors can enjoy guided tours of the coastline, including a nighttime turtle walk at the Loggerhead Club and Marine at Vero Beach. Kids will be shell shocked to discover the world-renowned shell collection housed at the Sandoway House Nature Center in Delray Beach. For surf and turf adventures, Diva Duck's Amphibious Tour is a 75-minute, fully narrated, musical journey that begins in downtown West Palm Beach and plunges into the sea along South Florida's Intracoastal Waterway.

From mid-April to mid-December, the county promotes Values Season, when hotels and attractions offer their best deals, with reduced rates and value-added packages.

For more information, visit www.palmbeachfl.com.

Pocono Mountains

With dramatic peaks, breathtaking waterfalls, lush woodlands and 170 miles of winding rivers, the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania is a year-round destination with whitewater rafting, indulgent spas, NASCAR racing, outlet and antique shopping, art exhibits and more. The region enters a new era in the fall when the new Mount Airy Resort and Casino opens its doors.

The Poconos region has been a travel destination since the early 19th century when the first boarding house was established at the Delaware Water Gap. Natural beauty and the region's proximity to major East Coast cities made it a favorite romantic retreat in the 1940s and 1950s. But it was the go-go '60s that sealed its reputation as the honeymoon capital of the world, thanks to the splashy introduction of the heart-shaped tub at Caesars Cove Haven Resort in Lakeville.

Still ripe with romance, the Pocono Mountains have evolved in recent years with the opening of several high-profile attractions. The Great Wolf Lodge in Scotrun, Pa. is the northeast's largest indoor waterpark resort, with thrilling waterslides, a lazy river, a treehouse water fort and a wave pool. The 401-suite resort has amenities for parents too, including the full-service Aveda Elements Spa. The Mountain Laurel Center, which opened in 2003 in Bushkill, attracts world-class performing artists, from Bob Dylan to the Boston Pops.

Outdoor recreation has always been the draw. But now the Pocono Mountains offer more than 35 golf courses as well as resorts with on-site spas that incorporate their rustic surroundings. The Lodge at Woodloch is the newest example of ultimate luxury. The resort features organic food at its gourmet restaurant, a championship golf course and a spa offering moisturizing massages with lotus flower and rebalancing wraps of warm citrus and seaweed, among other relaxing, rejuvenating



Scuba club diver, courtesy of Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau

treats. The region's small towns are becoming destinations in their own right. Milford, along the Delaware River, hosts musical events and a fall film festival. Honesdale, the "Birthplace of the American Railroad," is a mecca for parents of Thomas the Tank Engine-obsessed children with its many themed railroad tours.

For more information, call 1-800-POCONOS (762-6667) or visit www.800poconos.com.

Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel

California dreaming is easy to do while relaxing on plush pillow-top bedding at the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel. But who needs dreaming when — steps away — the Pacific Ocean and the famous muscle beach and fitness paths along the shoreline beckon?

The 342-room resort is the ideal resting ground while visiting Southern California sites. But it is also a destination unto itself. Just 45 minutes from Disneyland and Magic Mountain, the hotel hosts extensive activities, including beach volleyball competitions, sandcastle building lessons, family baking classes, aura and astrology reading, full-service spa treatments and customized workouts at its loaded fitness center. Loews also arranges tours of area highlights, including celebrity homes, art and architecture marvels, and the Hollywood studios. Since Santa Monica was the birthplace of surfing, the hotel naturally offers lessons on staying afloat as well as skate, surf and bike rentals. Lounging at the pool or beach, and taking in the sun, is always an easy option.

The resort is an ideal two blocks from the storied Santa Monica Pier, which features a landmark carousel, amusement park, arcade and aquarium — all located at the finish line of famous Route 66. It's also a short walk to the Third Street Promenade, known for a twice-weekly farmer's market, fine dining and shopping.

Downtown Santa Monica is located 12 miles north of Los Angeles International Airport.

For more information about the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel call (310) 458-6700 or visit www.loewshotels.com. ■

KID-FRIENDLY TRAVEL TIPS

- Plan, plan, plan. Allow the children to be involved from the start by having them pick out special luggage and letting them help pack.
- Do an airport run-through. Leave plenty of time for navigating the airport with kids.
- Take Amtrak. Fidgety kids can move about instead of kick seats. Children 2–15 are half-price and those under 2 travel free.
- Make long car rides fun by using educational games to teach the children about the states they drive through and stopping at museums and parks along the way.
- Try a vacation allowance for older kids to teach them how to budget and not to beg.
- Have fun!