

From skiing to farm stays, luxury family-travel offerings are more wide-ranging than ever.



Kids in Tow

Never before has traveling with the family seemed so sophisticated—and sophistication seemed like such child's play. BY ALEXANDRA HALL

WERE TOLSTOY ALIVE TODAY, HE MIGHT AMEND HIS STATEMENT that all happy families are alike. Instead, he might say that some are happy because all family members love the same sport; for others, it's because they enjoy similar foods. And for some, it's because they're living in the golden age of family travel. No longer do parents sacrifice high-end settings and services to be with their children; rather, kids get perks of their own. Savvy destinations have devised plenty of inspired family-friendly options, from children's yoga programs to sophisticated sundae bars. To make the most of them, heed the following tips.

SEEK A BALANCE OF FORMALITY AND FUN

Foie gras-seeking parents and fry-eating kids need not dine separately: many resorts have opened dedicated family rooms that feel like four-star restaurants. Case in point: Lure, at the **Winnetu Oceanside Resort** on Martha's Vineyard (31 Dunes Rd., Edgartown, Mass.; 866-335-1133), where Mom and Dad can dig into osetra caviar while their children choose from their very own kiddie-height buffet, with 3-D menus and an ice cream bar. This kind of laid-back luxury pervades the rest of the resort too: there's a life-sized

outdoor chess set, and antique cars shuttle children around. For help finding properties this accommodating, contact **Small World Travel** (2201 Enfield Rd., Austin, Tex.; 512-495-9495), an agency that caters to families and multigenerational groups.

NOT ALL SUITES ARE CREATED EQUAL

The best provide two things: flexibility of space and kid-specific services. Some hotels have even retrofitted rooms just for families. One of these is London's **Stafford Hotel** (suites from \$893; St. James's Place; 011-44-20-7493-0111; thestaffordhotel.co.uk), whose two-bedroom apartments contain plenty of areas in which to set up the free cribs and roll-away beds. For hotels that don't offer family suites, be sure to make advance requests, and ask the right questions: Does the room have space for a crib? Can the electrical outlets be covered before check-in? And most important for foiling hunger pangs: does room service offer a children's menu?

FLY RIGHT

Some airlines are light-years ahead of the pack when it comes to keeping kids happy. **JetBlue Airways** (jetblue.com) provides im-

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pressively prompt stroller-delivery service. **Virgin Atlantic** (virginatlantic.com) and **British Airways** (britishairways.com) offer bassinets, baby food and bulkhead seats that by policy go to families first. To prevent having your baby's bottle inspected in the security line, fill it with dry formula and request water on board.

GET PICKY ABOUT KIDS' PROGRAMS

Look for ones that are broken down according to age group, have at most four children to each counselor, offer indoor and outdoor fun and include familiar activities for kids who need time to adjust to new environments. Witness the excellent Kids for All Seasons programs at many **Four Seasons** resorts (800-819-5053; fourseasons.com). At Provence at Terre Blanche (double rooms from \$600), it happens to be treasure hunts and games of *pétanque*. Have rebellious adolescents? The teen center at Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo (double rooms from \$425) is outfitted with Xbox, a pool table, iPod stations and a concierge who sets up hikes and surfing trips.

MAKE EVERYTHING AS HANDS-ON AS POSSIBLE

century inn rolled into one. Kids learn the standard stuff (like how to make cheese) while receiving a larger lesson in sustainable agriculture. For an equally outdoorsy and wider-ranging menu of activities, try the **Topnotch Resort and Spa** (4000 Mountain Rd.; 888-460-5567; topnotchresort.com), in Stowe, Vermont, where cross-country skiing, horseback riding and hiking guarantee you'll be entertained all year-round.

WHEN IN DOUBT, RENT

Private residences can provide hotel-level service, plus worlds more family amenities. **Frenchmans Lookout**, on Tortola, in the British Virgin Islands (villa from \$15,000 a week; 866-940-0020; frenchmanslookout.com), comes with a playground, a crib, a playpen and bins of toys, as well as a trophy kitchen, gym and staff masseuses, cooks and babysitters. Perched high above Sir Francis Drake Channel, the two-story houses afford 360-degree views

From left: The **GrandLuxe Express** rolling through the **American Southwest**; riding at **Topnotch Resort and Spa**; a sun-dappled porch at **Frenchmans Lookout**, on Tortola.

Farm stays present the perfect opportunity for kids to get dirty. **Shelburne Farms** (double rooms from \$150 with shared bath, no heat or air-conditioning, open May through October; 1611 Harbor Rd., Shelburne, Vt.; 802-985-8498; shelburnefarms.org) is a working farm, environmental-education center and stately 19th-

hat could give a skydiver vertigo, but the wraparound porches are railed for tykes' safety. Most family-friendly villas of this caliber spell out every last amenity; even so, it often helps to draw up both a kids' and a parents' wish list to present to a booking agent.

THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS

Trekking the globe with your kids can be luxurious—and easy—thanks to travel companies and resources like these.

For the best places to stay in Europe, check out **Ciao Bambino!** The Web site reviews kid-friendly spots in Italy, France, England and Spain. ciaobambino.com.

From lap-sized craft kits to travel journals, **Madallie** has ingenious products for keeping boredom at bay. 877-462-3255; madallie.com.

Every parent can use a few tips for flying with kids. Find them

at **Good Little Traveler** alongside books for children about airplanes, airports and taking trips. goodlittletraveler.com.

Tired of hauling luggage on family vacations? Use **Babies Travel Lite**. It'll bundle and ship everything from diapers to beach toys so all will be there on your arrival. 888-450-5483; babiestravellite.com.

If there isn't a crackerjack staff in place at your destination, bring your own. **A Choice Nanny** can find a fully vetted temporary pro to make the trip with you. 212-246-5437; achoice nanny.com.

SOMETIMES THE JOURNEY REALLY IS AN END IN ITSELF

On **GrandLuxe Rail Journeys** (800-320-4206; grandluxerail.com), restored trains shoot past some of the country's most gorgeous scenery before pulling into cities and national parks. These trips are ideal for children aged six and over, who tend to have more patience for sitting around (a journey of four days or less is best). Alternatively, the vessels of **Crystal Cruises** (888-722-0021; crystalcruises.com) have ample room for running around. Between the game rooms, kiddie pools, movie theater and dance lessons, children will hardly have time to get an "Are we there yet?" in edgewise.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS, GO SEE THE MOUSE

These days, even Disney World has gone high-end. At the **Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort** (double rooms from \$219; 1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd., Lake Buena Vista, Fla.; 888-828-8850; swanandolphin.com), suites have wet bars and high-speed Internet access. Spend hours at the enormous playground and three-acre grotto pool, then dine on tuna tartare at chef Todd English's sleek but boisterous Bluezoo restaurant. (Rest assured it also serves fries.) ✕



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