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A FEW UNIQUELY STYLISH SUMMER VACATION IDEAS FOR THE FAMILY

“Traveling in the company of those we love is home in motion”

- Leigh Hunt

The hungry, squirrely, burnt grass, tiki-shack, floating campsite, motel 7 dead end highway joints all advertise that they are family friendly. They want kids to stay in their parent's room for free. They want anyone to stay in their rooms. So they do lots of advertising and they promote lots of deals and the kids don't mind when they get there because they're only sleeping in the room anyway during long bouts of beaching and finding familiar places for lunch and dinner after a Grand Slam breakfast at Denny's.

The teens don't care how nice the room is because they think that the idea of going on vacation with the family is a bogus idea anyway. If truth be known, they would prefer a Harley and an expense account and “see ya later”.

That's why I don't worry very much about whether or not the kids will have a good time on vacation. Now this is a terrible thing to admit in a family newspaper in a family town. But I don't worry about the kids because I know that they're going to have a great time during their summer vacation unless they're between thirteen and eighteen, in which case anything is bound to just “suck”. I do worry about their parents, who, during the difficult process of planning a family vacation, usually bend so far backwards to please the kids that their own enjoyment of the vacation is placed in serious jeopardy.

Today, I'd like to present a wish list of rather upscale vacations that cater to Mom and Dad but also provide some excellent opportunities for the most memorable family vacation ever.

Has the Family Done the Grand Canyon Yet?

For those of us fortunate enough to have visited the Grand Canyon during our youth, the memory lingers. Tauck Tours has an eight-day tour called Canyonlands that is ideal for families. This tour puts an emphasis on “soft” adventure, with opportunities to raft on the Colorado River, flightsee over Lake Powell, hike Zion National Park, and, of course, an exploration of the Grand Canyon. Tauck uses some of the best available accommodations and includes “order anything off the menu” restaurant dining.

The Disney Institute Travel Photography Expedition

The new Disney Institute is a relaxed resort environment filled with hands-on and life-enriching daily programs. The Institute is a prototype of a new kind of family vacation experience designed to teach skills in a relaxing and fun-filled way.

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One of the more intriguing upcoming programs is the Travel Photography expedition offered twice this August. The three-night expedition will include accommodations, in-field professional instruction and critique from some of the best-known photo journalists working today, evening presentations, as well as your choice of two additional Disney learning courses. The price is \$789 per person exclusive of airfare.

“The Hotel” on Kauai has an excellent Kids Program

I refer, of course, to the lovely Princeville perched along the coast of Hanalei Bay Beach. This luxurious hotel offers its well-regarded “Keiki Aloha” program to kids aged five to twelve. There is a charge for this supervised round of fun daytime activities in the winter – but it’s all free in the summer. And you’re free to scuba, windsurf, snorkel, or snuggle. Stay four nights – and the 5th night is free.

You’ve Got To Be Crazy to go to Arizona in the Summer

Crazy like a fox. The fabulous Phoenician, Scottsdale’s five-star beauty, has rates under \$200 a night in the summer with full suites going for \$315. There is world-class golf and the renowned Center for Well Being, one of the Southwest’s premier spas. The teen program is particularly strong during the summer, featuring golf and tennis clinics, water basketball shoot-outs, and jeep rallies in the desert.

This is an opportunity to vacation like the Rich and Famous while taking advantage of pricing that is half what it would normally be in the winter months. And as Angela pointed out to me as we hiked through the desert one July day in Scottsdale, “it’s such a nice dry heat”.

The Ultimate Family Backroad Adventure

An excellent tour operator called Off the Beaten Path, has developed a unique family adventure that is centered in Montana’s lush Bitterroot Valley area. You will be given a Range Rover for a six-day joy ride through the wild side of Southeastern Montana. Accommodations and meals are included in the \$4,395 per person price, as are a number of daily activities including rafting, fly fishing, jet boating and horseback riding.

One of my Favorite Family Getaways in Canada

It doesn’t get much better than the Nimmo Bay Resort in British Columbia. This rustic, yet deluxe, waterfront hideaway is reserved for no more than 12 guests at a time. It is the perfect destination for the active family, offering heli-hiking, heli-fishing, beach combing, splunking, river rafting, and even whale watching. The four-day program is priced at \$3295 per person.

Maui and the Big Island for Kids

There is a way to please both Mom and Dad, and the kids during any number of days in Hawaii. One of the best family programs is the “Kids for all Seasons” series of activities offered by the Four Seasons Resort on Maui and the new, Hualalai on the Big Island. Open to children between five and twelve, this program is complimentary and features diversions such as crab soccer,

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lizard hunts, and building volcanoes that actually erupt. Won't it be fun when the kids come home with their newfound skills and practice these activities in the family room?

The Four Seasons is doing some innovation work in the field of family vacation planning. Kids find milk and cookies waiting for them in their room. Their name may be spelled out in sponger along the side of the bathtub. And the "kids cuisine" menus in the resort restaurants all feature cartoon-decorated plates.

A similar program is also available at the Four Seasons Nevis, continually voted the Caribbean's overall best resort.

Hotel Bargaining with Kids?

Abercrombie and Kent's weeklong European hotel barges have been described as "slow boats with China". Now, this wonderful vacation option is open to children during specially scheduled summer "family-only" departures in July and August.

Imagine giving your child Alsace, the Loire Valley, or the Thames this summer. You will travel aboard a slowly moving boat that makes frequent stops, is always in sight of land, carries bicycles for use of guests, and allows for exploring quaint villages while tied up in port. Walking paths are usually found alongside the waterway and families can easily walk from one lock to another.

Two Hotels that, surprisingly Welcome Children

There are several destinations and hotels that you would not think are at all interested in attracting families with children. Let me tell you about two specific hotels that do try to cater to families in outstanding summer vacation locations:

The Lygon Arms is a 16th century coaching inn located in a picturesque Cotswold village in Worcestershire, England. It offers a special \$215 midweek room rate and welcomes children with a genuine sense of British hospitality. Dozens of fairy-tale British villages dot the surrounding countryside, perfect for exploring by car or on foot. It's not a bad way to bring a bit of Shakespeare alive for teens.

Another unusual recommendation is the Hotel Martinez in, of all places, Cannes on the French Riviera. The Martinez family package allows for kids under 12 to stay free. The Children's program includes organized games on the hotel's private beach. A stay here can easily be combined with a few days in Paris. Why didn't my parents think of that when I was a teenager?

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