

T&C FAMILY TRAVEL

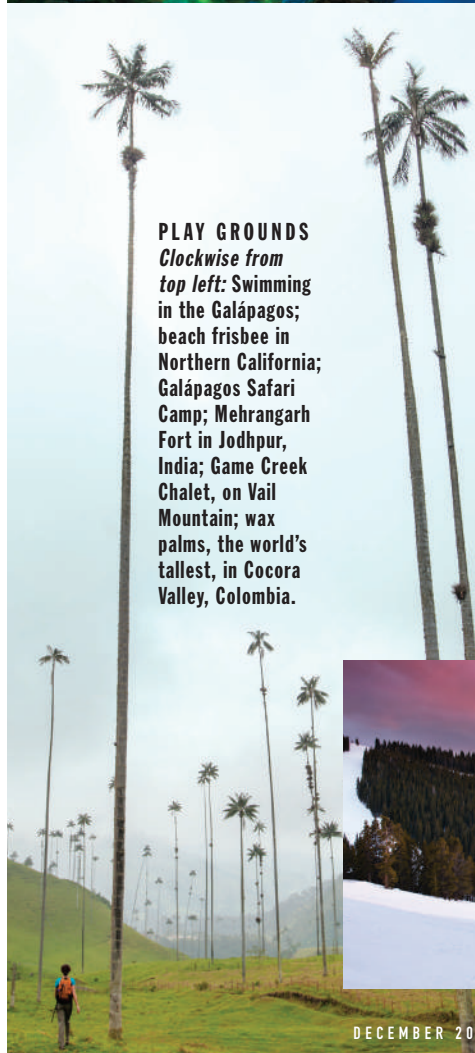
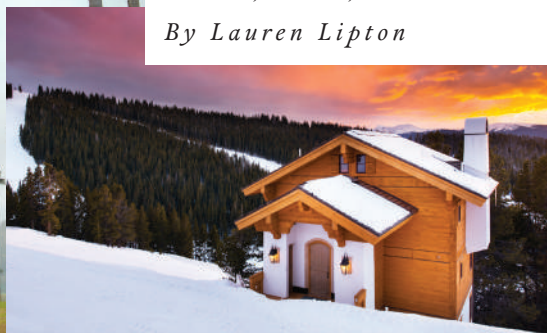
KID PROOF

There was a time when luxury travel for families would have been an oxymoron. Luxury was for adults—why spoil it with children, yours or someone else's? Not that there's anything wrong with that...on occasion. But what if you could find places that appealed to all ages and still felt like an indulgence, that were relatively easy to get to and yet not overrun by every other family on vacation, and that offered a variety of options for adventure (for them) and relaxation (for you)? We think the destinations on the next five pages (recommended by top family travel specialists) hit all those marks, offering high end, kid-friendly possibilities for every taste. We're not saying these places address every challenge facing today's families ("What did I say about texting while you ski?"), but all of them will provide once-in-a-lifetime memories—the good kind.

Our suggestions for when to go—Presidents Week, spring break, summer vacation, December holidays—are just that, and many of these locations are great year-round. A couple of them are so special and hard to book that you might even consider taking your kids out of school. Travel is, after all, its own education.

By Lauren Lipton

PLAY GROUNDS
Clockwise from top left: Swimming in the Galápagos; beach frisbee in Northern California; Galápagos Safari Camp; Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, India; Game Creek Chalet, on Vail Mountain; wax palms, the world's tallest, in Cocora Valley, Colombia.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KEN KOCHHEY/GALAPAGOS SAFARI CAMP; THOMAS WINZ/GETTY IMAGES; KEN KOCHHEY/GALAPAGOS SAFARI CAMP; RAQUEL MARIA CARBONELL PAGOLA/LIGHTROCKET/GETTY IMAGES; RIC STOVALL/VAIL RESORTS; ALEX TREADWAY/GALLERY STOCK

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FAMILY TRAVEL



FEBRUARY: PRESIDENTS WEEK

Cartagena COLOMBIA

Founded by conquistadors 500 years ago, this seaside city is a living record of swashbuckling European colonial history—Spanish galleons, monumental fortresses, and real pirates of the Caribbean. Consider it a beach vacation with a little something extra. For diversity you can add two nights each at a gorgeous hacienda in Colombia's world-renowned coffee-growing region and in the art- and museum-filled capital city of Bogotá. "Colombia is one of those places that ticks all the boxes. It offers an authentic cultural experience in a beautiful location that feels comfortable yet foreign," says Leslie Overton of Absolute Travel, who specializes in elegant itineraries she has tested on her own three kids. LOVERTON@ABSOLUTETRAVEL.COM, 212-627-1950

BEACH CULTURE
Clockwise from top left: Cartagena's volcanic mud baths; Playa Blanca; a postage stamp from 1954; Hacienda Bambusa; the Gold Museum in Bogotá.

WHERE TO STAY The Sofitel Legend Santa Clara, in Cartagena's historic walled town, "has the best pool in the city" according to Overton, a crucial amenity in the midday heat. Hacienda Bambusa, set among banana farms in the central part of Colombia, is both rustic and luxurious. The Sofitel Victoria Regia, which is in a nice-to-walk Bogotá neighborhood of restaurants and shops, has junior suites that connect to superior rooms, for family space with a living area.

WHAT TO DO Overton recommends La Popa, a mountaintop monastery a short drive from Old Town that offers spectacular views, and the Castillo San Felipe de Barajas, Spain's most impressive New World fortress, built in the 1600s to defend Cartagena from pirates. (Treasure hunts for kids, here or in the town square, can be arranged.) Hacienda Bambusa, in the country's coffee region (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), combines R&R (picnics, a lovely restaurant) with adventure (horseback riding, wildlife spotting). Or check out the bling in Bogotá: The Gold Museum has the world's biggest collection of pre-colonial coins and objects.

IF COLOMBIA DOESN'T INTEREST YOU...

Consider Hotel Nikko in San Francisco (one of the NFL's host hotels) for an ultimate football weekend, including prime tickets to Super Bowl 50, on February 7 (JIM.ZISSLER@CAA.COM, 646-453-8821). Or Playa del Carmen, on Mexico's Riviera Maya, for diving or snorkeling in magical hidden cenotes. Stay at the Belmond Maroma or the Rosewood Mayakoba resorts (MEG.AUSTIN@THE TRAVEL SOCIETY.COM, 970-763-5010).



FAMILY TRAVEL

LET IT SNOW
A chair lift at the Vail ski resort. *Right: The penthouse at Manor Vail Lodge. Below, from top: Manor Vail's heated pool; early morning at the Lodge at Vail.*



WHAT TO DO Vail's private ski instructors can teach up to six guests at a time for the resort's rate, which starts at \$650 (skiing with an instructor also gives you access to a separate lift line). Some families book an instructor for the day, then switch off morning and afternoons, with advanced skiers taking one time slot and beginners the other. After dark, take the Eagle Bahn gondola to the Adventure Ridge snow park, for tubing, ziplining, and other outdoor activities. Ski-techies can open an account at EpicMix, Vail's official website, which uses a code on each skier's lift ticket to keep track of his or her runs over the course of the day.

MARCH/APRIL: SPRING BREAK

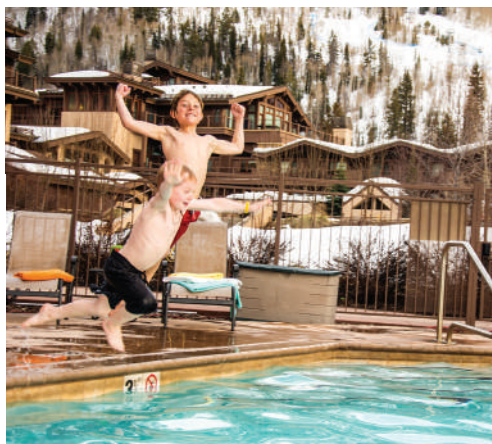
Vail COLORADO

A ski trip in spring offers thinner crowds and better value than you find during the December and February school breaks. The Vail resort, centered on a single mountain, has three main entry points of "varying degrees of family-friendliness," according to Meg Austin of the Travel Society (MEG2BOOK@GMAIL.COM, 970-763-5010). There's something here for all family members, from tentative toddlers to speed-demon teens.

WHERE TO STAY The five-bedroom mountain-top villa **Game Creek Chalet** is the ultimate in luxury and privacy—although its off-the-beaten-track location makes it unsuitable for very young children. Book a private chef and have your ski instructor meet you on top of the mountain in the early mornings. The **Lodge at Vail**, in bustling Vail Village, is in the thick of things, but there's no ski school nearby, so it's best for families with slope experience or the budget for a private instructor. Accommodations vary, but Austin recommends Condo 407 for its stunning views and a large fireplace where everyone can gather in the evening. **Manor Vail Lodge**, at the base of Golden Peak, is directly across from a children's ski school. The accommodations vary here as well, but Penthouse 378 is a two-bedroom, two-bath favorite.



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IF SKIING LEAVES YOU COLD... Consider camel trekking and an exhilarating dune buggy ride at the **Al Maha** desert resort, a lush oasis (it's literally an oasis) in the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, about an hour from Dubai itself (KAY MERRILL, ARE WE THERE YET? ADVENTURES, KAY.MERRILL@ANDAVOTRAVEL.COM, 415-945-6215). Or kayaking, horseback riding, or sandboarding at the celebrated **Jicaro Island Eco Lodge**, a sustainable property on Lake Nicaragua (in Nicaragua) with fantastic food that welcomes children ages 12 and up (LESLIE OVERTON, ABSOLUTE TRAVEL, LOVERTON@ABSOLUTETRAVEL.COM, 212-627-1950).



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FAMILY TRAVEL

BIG COUNTRY
Clockwise from left:
Yosemite Falls,
1930; the Ahwahnee
Hotel, in Yosemite
National Park; fun
at the Evergreen
Lodge; the Tunnel
Tree in the
Tuolumne Grove.

JULY/AUGUST:
SUMMER VACATION

Yosemite NATIONAL PARK

America's national parks are packed during the summer. Still, it's a glorious season to see them, and the key is to go to less visited areas, says Sam Highley of All Roads North, a specialist in luxury U.S. road trips (SAM@ALLROADSNORTH.COM, 310-402-2381). Highley's itinerary—best for families with elementary school-age children or older—begins in San Francisco, hugs the rugged Northern California coastline, with its giant redwoods, and stops in Mendocino and Sonoma, less crowded alternatives to Big Sur and Napa.

WHERE TO STAY Brewery Gulch Inn in Mendocino is a luxury B&B perched on a bluff above the ocean; its Meadowview Suite can accommodate a family of four. In Sonoma, **Beltane Ranch** is an idyllic hillside vineyard with surrounding gardens and orchards that give it an all-ages appeal. The historic **Evergreen Lodge** resort, on the seldom traveled road to the Hetch Hetchy glacial valley, includes the John Muir House: 2,500 square feet of living space and a great room with floor-to-ceiling windows. "There's no better place to soak up the invigorating nature of Yosemite," Highley says. "What's more, they have a pool and fantastic food."

WHAT TO DO In **Mendocino**: Ride a horse on remote Ten Mile Beach (Ricochet Ridge Ranch, in nearby Fort Bragg, has excellent English- and western-saddled horses). Paddle a redwood outrigger canoe on the Big River with a naturalist guide. Hike to the spectacular Russian Gulch falls. In **Sonoma**: Adults can sample the gewürztraminer at the family-run Navarro Vineyards, while children will love the animals at its sister Pennyroyal Farm. Or take a private jeep tour through the 400-acre Safari West reserve in Santa Rosa, home to giraffes, gazelles, wildebeests, and more. In **Yosemite**: Lose the crowds and beat the heat by heading to the high country with a park naturalist. Stops include the Tuolumne Grove of giant sequoias, a hike to pretty Gaylor Lakes, a swim in Tenaya Lake, and (a must): sunset cocktails at the legendary Ahwahnee Hotel.

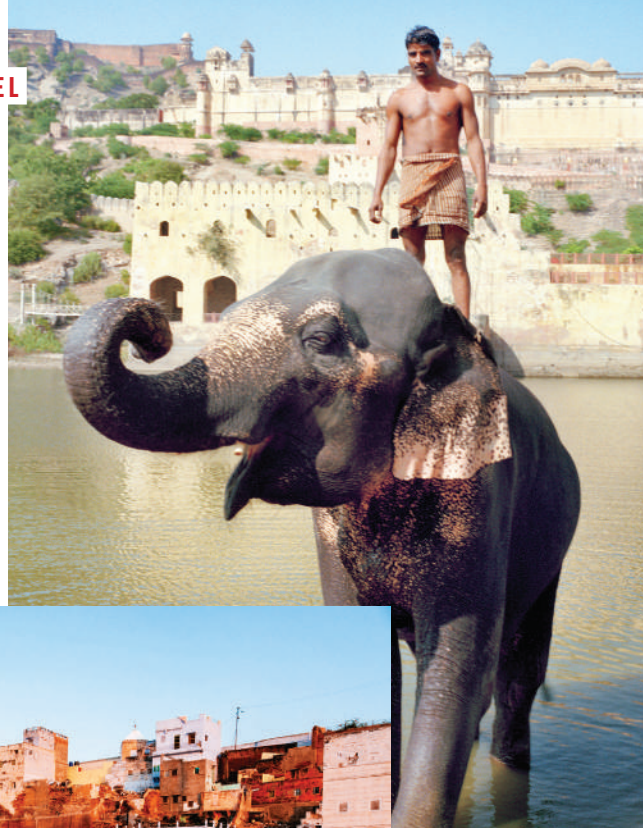
IF YOSEMITE ISN'T YOUR THING... Consider communing with friendly ponies, donkeys, and alpacas in the lush gardens of a private villa in **Maiori**, on Italy's Amalfi Coast. Take a daytrip to Pompeii, then come home for a dip in the Mediterranean and for ice cream made by the villa's private chef (MARINA GRATSOS, CARPE DIEM LUXURY TRAVEL, MARINA@CARPEDIEMTRAVEL.CO.UK). Or retreat with up to 18 family members to the chic, hill-top **Domaine des Platanes**, near Biarritz. Play some golf, go to the beach, sit by the pool—and let boisterous teens sleep in the villa's separate guest cottage (CEDRIC REVERSADE AND PAUL-MAXIME KOSKAS, UNIQUE PROPERTIES AND EVENTS, CEDRIC@UNIQUEPROPERTIESANDEVENTS.COM).



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The Tomb of Itmad-ud-Daula, Agra.
Was an Wife of the Emperor Jahangir. This Building built during the reign of Jahangir in 1628 A.D.



DECEMBER: HOLIDAY BREAK INDIA

The dynamic culture and ancient grandeur of India appeal to older children with the stamina for an action-packed journey. Kay Merrill of Are We There Yet? Family Adventures creates never-a-dull-moment trips, such as this 10-night itinerary, which begins in the capital, New Delhi, and proceeds through the state of Rajasthan. It offers interaction with local young people “who share with you stories of their life journeys,” Merrill says. KAY MERRILL, ARE WE THERE YET? FAMILY ADVENTURES, 415-945-6215, KAY.MERRILL@ANDAVOTRAVEL.COM

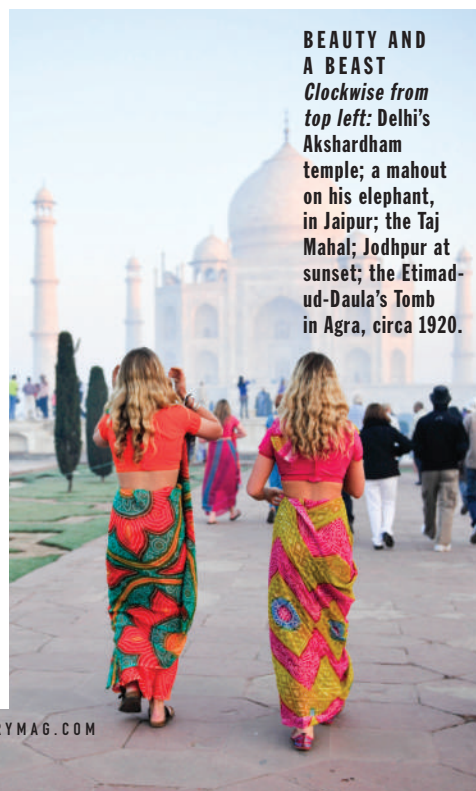
WHERE TO STAY India offers an almost infinite range of experiences and accommodations. For the full-on royal treatment, Merrill suggests beginning with three nights at the five-star **Lodhi Hotel** in New Delhi. After that, spend two nights in Agra at the **Oberoi Amarvilas** (each room has a view of the Taj Mahal); three nights in Jaipur at the **Oberoi Rajvilas**, a 32-acre resort; and two nights in a lake-view room at the **Oberoi Udaivilas** in Udaipur.

WHAT TO DO In Delhi: Take a rickshaw tour of the Old City, a labyrinthine marketplace overhung by a tangled mass of electric wires. Walk through Delhi's backstreets guided by former street children now working for the Salaam Baalak Trust, a local charity. Visit the huge, modern Akshardham Hindu temple. **In Agra:** Stop at a wildlife center that rehabilitates former performing bears, and watch the sun set over the Taj Mahal, far from the crowds in a restored royal garden. **In Jaipur:** Visit the hill fort of Amber, and spend an afternoon at Dera Amer, a private farm that is home to seven elephants. You'll spend the afternoon learning to care for them—feeding and bathing the giant creatures—and about the mahout, or handler, who controls them. **In Udaipur:** View the stunning City Palace, a blend of several architectural styles, and watch the endangered art of “painting on water,” a Hindu ritual in which colored powders are used to create temporary images on H₂O.

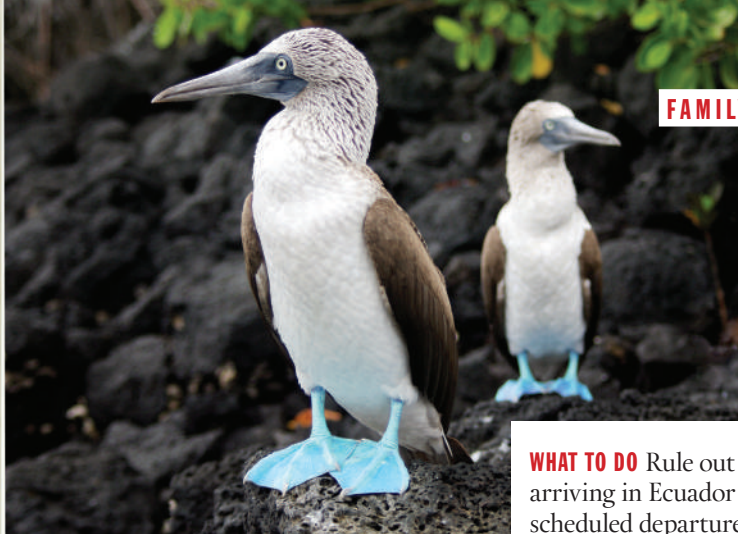
IF INDIA IS TOO EXOTIC... Consider introducing your little ones to Chelsea galleries and Manhattan museums via specially curated “Culture Kids” experiences at **Langham Place** on Fifth Avenue, a property that caters to families (LANGHAM PLACE, INFO@LANGHAMHOTELS.COM, 212-695-4005). Or meet the “real” Santa Claus during an extravagantly produced Christmas fantasy in Swedish Lapland while staying in a cozy teepee at the private **Aurora Safari Camp Lodge** (PHILIPPE BROWN, BROWN + HUDSON, PHILIPPE@BROWNNANDHUDSON.COM, 011-44-20-3358-0110).

BEAUTY AND A BEAST

Clockwise from top left: Delhi's Akshardham temple; a mahout on his elephant, in Jaipur; the Taj Mahal; Jodhpur at sunset; the Itimad-ud-Daula's Tomb in Agra, circa 1920.



FAMILY TRAVEL



**ANIMAL
ATTRACTION**
*Clockwise from far
left: Blue-footed
boobies; the main
lodge at Galápagos
Safari Camp;
scuba diving off
the islands; a
Zodiac ride at
Bartolomé Island;
a panoramic view
from Bartolomé.*

YEAR-ROUND

Galápagos ISLANDS

A luxury trip to this wonderland off the coast of Ecuador—where the fauna are utterly unafraid of humans—requires booking at least eight months in advance and being flexible about travel times; every nature lover in the world wants to come here, and visitor numbers and flow are strictly regulated. The payoff: wildlife encounters that can't be had anywhere else. “I have fallen asleep on the beach and woken up next to a snoring sea lion,” says Allie Almario of Myths and Mountains, a specialist in the area. ALLIE@MYTHSANDMOUNTAINS.COM, 800-670-6984

WHERE TO STAY For the ultimate in elegance, charter a private cruise. There are about 70 ships available in the islands; one standout is the *M/Y Grace*, an exquisite historic craft named for Princess Grace, who honeymooned aboard. The 145-foot ship comes with a staff of nine, including a cruise director and two naturalist guides. The eco-chic **Galápagos Safari Camp**, on Santa Cruz Island, can serve as a base for day charters, or you can simply stop there during a cruise; lodgings include luxury tents and a three-bedroom family suite.

WHAT TO DO Rule out missing your boat by arriving in Ecuador two days before your scheduled departure. Galápagos National Park determines where all ships can go, to give passengers maximum exposure to wildlife while minimizing the human impact on the islands. So there's no guarantee where precisely you'll end up, but if you happen to land on Bartolomé Island, you can swim in the cove with penguins, non-man-eating sharks, and green sea turtles. Other highlights: Teenagers can team up with members of a local school's science club for lessons in the Galápagos' rigorous environmental regulations, followed by a hands-on cleanup of Academy Bay. Or spend a day assisting a scientist from the Charles Darwin Station conservation group in researching wild tortoises.



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IF THE GALAPAGOS ISN'T POSSIBLE... Consider a reunion or wedding with up to 24 family members at **Musha Cay** in the Bahamas. For high-energy types, magician David Copperfield, who owns these islands, can produce spectacular experiences, such as a James Bond-style game. More laid-back visitors can take a stroll on a secluded sandbar that vanishes—no magic needed—during high tide (BECKY BROWN, KURTZ-AHLERS & ASSOCIATES, MUSHACAY@KURTZ-AHLERS.COM, 208-309-1106). Or chase the Northern Lights to the top of the Earth. Sleep in a glass igloo at **Hotel Kakslauttanen** in Finland, with a sky view (PHILIPPE BROWN, BROWN + HUDSON, PHILIPPE@BROWNBANDHUDSON.COM, 011-44-20-3358-0110).



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