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A Snob's Guide to Summer Travel With Kids

We know your standards for the ultimate family vacation are high. Lucky for you, ours are too.

BY [HEIDI MITCHELL](#) PUBLISHED: MAY 6, 2024

Three full months with your kids out of school can feel like a lot. And even though [camps](#), lifeguarding, [resume building](#), and [executive function coaching](#) can take up a decent chunk, there's still plenty to fill. Consider it a beautiful opportunity for a holiday, even if your standards for family getaways are rather high. Summer is a ripe time to get your kids off their devices and immersed in destinations that will pique their interests, be they educational (but fun!), adrenaline-fueled, by the sea, or high up in the mountains. In other words, summer vacation can provide a lot more than just sand in your toes—it can deliver meaningful memories, a great bonding experience, and even a nice geotag brag (or two) to inspire a little envy among your friends. Everybody wins. So choose the adventure that best suits you—and go!

The Educational Trip

It sounds boring, until you tell them they're going to see giraffes in their natural habitat—and will get to brag about it to all their friends.

KENYA



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Maasai Mara.

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**Perfect for: little kids*

Unlike the vast Serengeti, the Maasai Mara is small enough that you are practically guaranteed to snap all the top sightings in a few nights' stay. Unpack into an interconnected tented suite specially configured for families at [Angama Mara](#), then learn the art of keeping quiet as animals parade below in the Great Rift Valley. Days can begin with a hot air balloon ride or a game drive through the savannah to spy the Big Five (lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, buffalo) and end with parents at a sundowner and the littles in the Beading Studio. Maasai naturalists take everyone out on walking safaris, where they teach about medicinal plants on the escarpment and explain the relationship between the Maasai people and the wildlife that surrounds them. Come in July during the Great Migration, the largest land-based movement of animals (in this case, wildebeest and zebra) on the planet. Your kids will never see *The Lion King* with the same eyes again.

PERU



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Machu Picchu.

**Perfect for: big kids*

Fly from the country's capital of Lima to the Sacred Valley's capital of Cusco, where you can ride on Paso horses through the Andean valley's lush pathways. Dine at a working farm, called [Hacienda Huayocari](#), which has been run by the same family for 100 years, then spend the night at [Belmond Palacio Nazarenas](#), the 17th-century monastery-turned-hotel. Lazy tweens can take the luxe Hiram Bingham train all the way up to nearly 8,000 feet, or test their strength by disembarking at Km 104 and hiking up to enter Machu Picchu through the Gate of the Sun, just as the Incas did. Marvel at the citadel built into the steep slopes of the Andes, to this day their techniques and origin unknown. Then sleep above the clouds at [Sanctuary Lodge](#), the Belmond property up there, and enter the 15th-century UNESCO World Heritage Site before the crowds, with mostly only llamas in your company. Back in Cusco, tour the baroque churches and stay warm with hot

chicha drinks, made from local corn. Can't be bothered to book this all yourself? **Blue Parallel** can orchestrate the whole shebang, from flights to park permits.

The Adventure Trip

Adrenaline-pumping thrills to test their boundaries and spike their dopamine (in a good way).

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ICELAND



DEPLAR FARM

Helicopter tours are on the menu at Deplar Farm.

****Perfect for: little kids***

Tossed into the North Atlantic just one degree below the Arctic Circle, this volcanic island of just 387,000 inhabitants feels like the best of far-flung New Zealand and the most exciting of snow-swept British Columbia. It's also Scotland, Norway, Yellowstone, and Alaska, and all just a five-hour flight from the East Coast. The capital has been experiencing volcanic activity lately, so you may have to skip the best red-eye cure: A dip in the **Blue Lagoon**, a natural geothermal hot spring set conveniently between Reykjavik's two airports and open at 8am. Either way, hop a flight to Akureyri, the second-most populous city in the country, and prepare to be awed by the vast mountain landscape of **Deplar Farm**. The grass-roofed wooden structure belies the luxury you'll find within, including meals of local lamb and just-caught salmon prepared by Michelin-trained chefs. Included in every stay in summer is surfing, whale watching, fat-tire bike riding, hiking glaciers, lake fishing, and a peek at the single geothermal borehole that gives power to all 2700 residents of the Fljót Valley. Headed back toward the international airport, take the kids on a drive around the Golden Circle, a 190-mile loop of road that connects the geyser

that literally gave all others their name (yes, it's called Geysir) with Thingvellir National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the location of the Mid-Atlantic Rift (in which you can snorkel in dry suits), and the stunningly beautiful, 100-foot-tall Gullfoss waterfall.

COSTA RICA



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One of Costa Rica's many exotic inhabitants.

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**Perfect for: big kids*

You couldn't possibly hit all the high-octane attractions in Costa Rica — the howler monkeys barking from the treetops of Tortuguero National Park, white-water rafting down the Pacuare River, zip-lining or horseback riding near the Arenal volcano, tapir- and ocelot-spotting on the Osa Peninsula—but if you pick two destinations in this bicoastal isthmus country, you'll sneak a lot in. Park yourself first on the Osa Peninsula's [Cielo Lodge](#), a six-suite eco-lodge spread across 380 acres where guides will take you hiking through the rainforest to rushing waterfalls ripe for the jumping, get you catching waves on the second-longest left-hand break in the world, and frog-walking by moonlight. Then head up to [Nayara Gardens](#), where the newly built Arenal Casitas come with private walled gardens and plunge pools surrounded by rain forest. From there, it's an easy trek to go horseback riding at Arenal, ziplining in the cloud forest, and testing fate on an inflatable that takes you down class IV rapids. No kid comes home from Costa Rica without scheming a plan to return.

ALASKA



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Denali National Park.

**Perfect for: all ages*

Haters will hate, but there's honestly no better way to tour the highlights of the largest state in the union than via cruise. To see it all, sign up for one of [Oceania's](#) Seattle-to-Seattle routes, each of which comes with an Alaska Explorer Youth Program that lets kids ages 5-12 head out with high-energy counselors and learn a little more about the 49th state. But kids of all ages will start and end in Seattle, then cruise to ports like Ketchikan (ziplining!), Juneau (Mendenhall Glacier canoeing!), Sitka (sea kayaking and wave running!), and Victoria, British Columbia (bike tours!), but you can expand on this excursion by adding a pre- or post-cruise stay in Denali National Park, all stress-free and orchestrated by Oceania and including a four-hour scenic train ride into the interior and a hike to Denali's Primrose Ridge with a naturalist who will explore the 10,000-years-long history of this Native American landscape. This is Alaska done right, trust us.

The Beach Trip

Heading out on a beach holiday doesn't have to mean dumping the children in camp and working your way through the latest Plum Sykes novel.

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HAWAII



AUBERGE RESORTS COLLECTION

Lei-making at Mauna Lani.

****Perfect for: all ages***

West coasters have a straight shot to the Big Island, which offers about as far-flung a culture as you can find without needing to update your passport. There are tons to do outdoors—from surfing to exploring Volcanoes National Park to hiking through a lava tube—that will introduce your kids to the outer limits of Mother Nature’s wild imagination. The challenge will be picking a home base. There’s **Mauna Kea Beach Hotel**, which was originally built in 1965 by Laurance S. Rockefeller, and is the property that really put this destination on the map. Set on the Kohala Coast, the resort offers activities like lawn games and lei-making, an authentic luau with hula dancers, plus direct access to white-sand Kauna'oa Bay, where you can swim with the manta rays. Alternatively, snag a suite at the grand **Mauna Lani**, now part of the Auberge Resorts Collection, set in the middle of King Kamehameha’s royal fish ponds. Whichever you choose, carve out some time to learn to surf in Kona, visit a black sand beach like Punalu‘u, indulge in some shave ice at **Ululani's**, and just soak in all that untouched beauty. Now that's aloha.

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MALLORCA



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Cala Portals Vells.

**Perfect for: little kids*

It may be one of the most visited islands of Spain, but Americans typically never make it to this Balearic Island (though that's changing with United Airlines' new direct flights to Palma de Mallorca from JFK). There are plenty of family-friendly hotels on the sparkling beaches, but come summer they will likely be flooded with tourists. So instead book one of the new Garden Suites at [Castell Son Claret](#), a 19th-century castle-turned-hotel with just 43 rooms, all set on 326 acres. Awaken to unimpeded views of the UNESCO-protected Tramuntana mountain range and a soundtrack of the braying sheep who will be neighbors for your stay. The Moorish architecture and glam jet-set design (not to mention the restaurant, [Sa Clastra](#), run

by native son Jordi Canto) will dazzle parents, while the pool (and those sheep) will keep the kids busy. Because the retreat is located in the middle of the island, it's an easy trek to one of the 20 hiking routes that wind through the terraced hills of the Tramuntanas (don't skip the adorable town of Valldemossa, ideal for that holiday card photo!), or down to beloved beaches like sandy Palmanova and the hidden cove of Cala Portals Vells. Don't miss that 13th-century cathedral in Palma, or the chance to indulge in chef Santi Taura's prix fixe menu at [Dins](#) (we suggest hiring a sitter for this one).

ST. BARTS



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Villa Unik.

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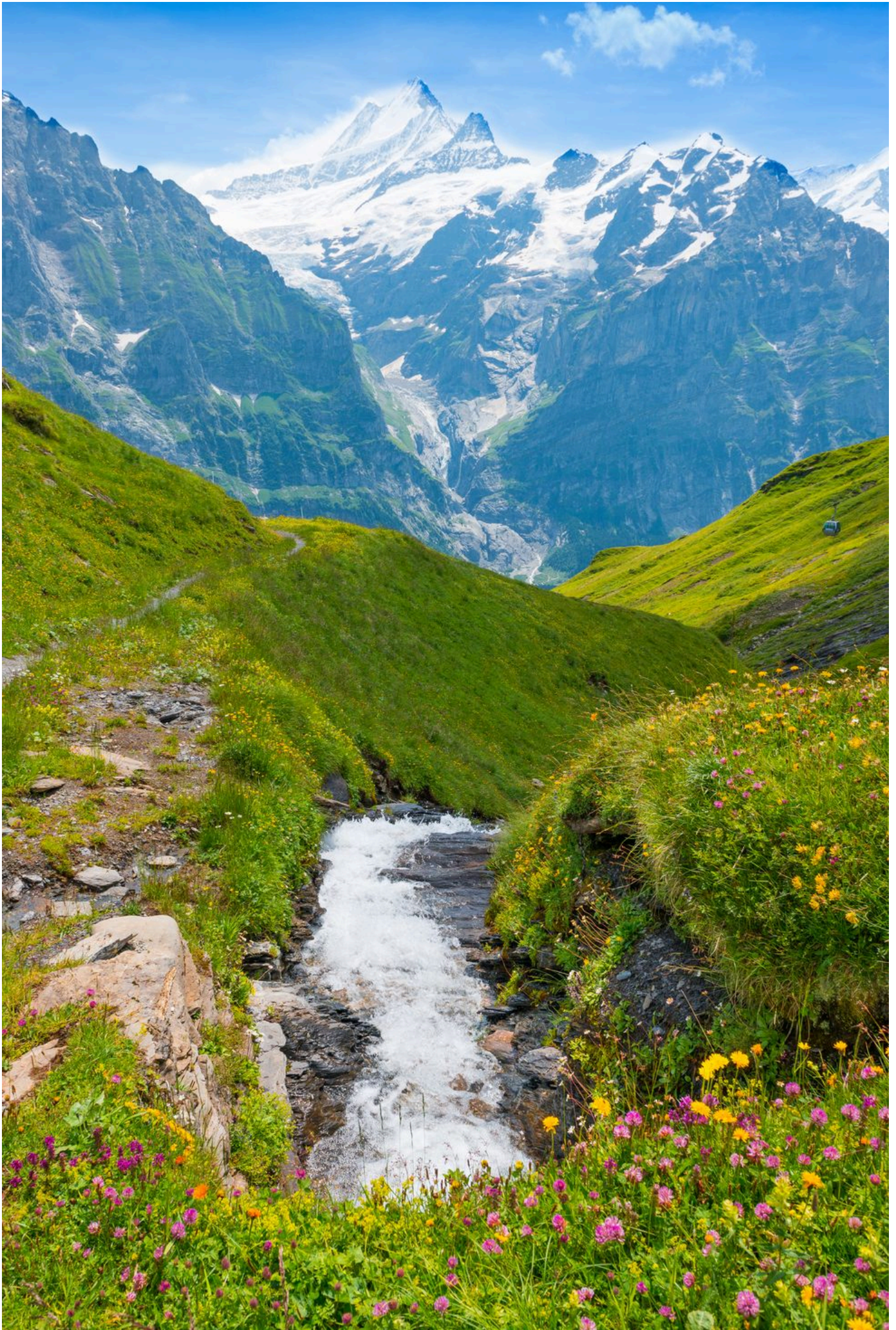
**Perfect for: big kids*

This tiny islet in the Caribbean was first colonized by the Huguenots, and it still retains a très sophisticated French vibe. Little kids will love the gentle white-sand beaches, but this is a place for dining and shopping, too, so families with tweens and older are the best audience for this refined destination. Pack the D'Ascoli caftans and Vilebrequin trunks and book a villa through [Le Barth Villa Rental](#), which gives you access to all the facilities—including the new kids club and the spa—at [Le Barthelemy Hotel & Spa](#). (Our pick: the 10-bedroom [Villa Unik](#), designed by Philippe Starck.) Or go traditional and stay at the casual-chic [Le Sereno](#), whose beachfront villas overlook the pristine Grand Cul de Sac sands. Book ahead for classic dining spots like the upscale [Bonito](#) and [Hotel Eden Rock](#)'s Jean-Georges restaurant, but don't skip local favorites either, like the laid-back [Ti' Corail](#). Indulge in life's simple pleasures, like perusing the fresh produce at Marché or the Gustavia fish market. Then splurge on mother-daughter outfits at [Clic](#) and swimsuits at [Delfina](#) for your journey to Anse du Gouverneur beach. The shells (and the memories) are gratis.

The Nature Trip

Two foolproof ways to inspire genuine awe in even the most jaded tween.

SWITZERLAND



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This is summer in Switzerland.

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****Perfect for: little kids***

Words can barely capture the magic of summertime in the Swiss Alps. There's the chocolate and cheese, of course, but the infinite shades of green that blanket the mountains and pines, the jagged edges of the mountains that scrape the sky, and the intimate connection to the environment that locals have (and happily share) will turn even the most jaded outdoors adventurer into a Swissophile. Experience it all at [**Tschuggen Grand Hotel**](#), an exceedingly modern retreat on the edges of the mountains that's accessed by a private train only a child could dream up. (Seriously.) Summer is a season for biking and hiking, and even small limbs can make the trek to the Bergkirchli, a church from 1492, or make the sunrise climb to spot bears and birds. Imagine long, leisurely days that begin with a frigid mountain-lake swim and end with a delicious hot tub and—for Mom and Dad—a muscle-melting massage at the 54,000-square-foot Bergoase Spa, set beneath glass-

and-steel “sails” that twinkle in the mountain light. A south-facing Junior Suite with a sun loggia is the ultimate spot for that much-deserved cup of hot cocoa.

MONTANA



STUART THURLKILL

The Resort at Paws Up.

**Perfect for: all ages*

Horseback riding, fly fishing, archery, oh my! Montana’s state tagline is “Get Lost,” and it’s possible to actually lose yourself in one of the nation’s largest—and least populated—states, but it can be hard to narrow down precisely how. So park yourself for a week at the [Resort at Paws Up](#), just outside the town of Greenough, and you’ll gain access to 37,000 acres and all the amenities of a traditional dude ranch, but at a seriously luxe level. Choose a kitted out two-bedroom glamping tent on the banks of the Blackfoot River or one of the mountain homes, and have the concierge orchestrate the Wild West week of your dreams, with activities ranging

from survival training and pony rides for little kids to cattle herding and chuck wagon dinners for the older ones. Confident kids can also pave their own path on an ATV adventure or take aim at the shooting range, or just learn the patience it takes to catch trout with an expert. Don't be surprised if your city rats long to be country mice once they've trotted on a trail in the shadow of those spectacular Bitterroot Mountains. This just may become the start of an annual tradition.

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