



Getty

GEAR & GUIDES

How to Plan the Perfect Kid-Friendly Vacation

When it come to planning a trip with kids, age matters. Here are the tricks to a successful vacation with newborns and teens alike.

JUDY KOUTSKY

August 10, 2016

As a mom to two high energy boys, ages five and seven, I know that the enjoyment level of **a family vacation** is directly related to choosing a trip that appeals to kids at a very specific age and stage in their life. **Disney World** when kids are still terrified of a giant, smiling mouse may not end well, but if you hit the sweet spot—the age when they can deal with the lines, the crowds, the late nights of fireworks and still be in awe of the magic—it's a home-run. Whether you're taking a **stroller-bound baby** or a moody teen, here are the important things to consider when traveling with kids of different ages, and **some resorts** and destinations to keep in mind.

Newborn through age three

Traveling with babies—before they start walking—can be relatively easy thanks to their portability. However, as they get a bit older, and enter into the toddler stage, you have to worry more about nap times, temper tantrums, and picky eating habits. “Schedules will get messed up on vacation, but it’s good to try to stay as close to a regular routine as possible,” says [Darby Fox](#), a child and adolescent family therapist. “A temper tantrum can come when the toddler is over tired or hasn't eaten. It is best to pick a getaway that doesn't require quiet and confinement.”

Kids at this age usually have short attention spans, so pick a place with a lot of activity options.

“Water is easy entertainment for children of any age but it’s particularly engaging for those under three,” says Fox. A good choice if you’re traveling with kids in this age group is [Tyler Place Resort](#) in Vermont. For kids 30 months and younger they get their very own “Parent’s Helper” (babysitter), so parents can instruct the caregiver on nap-time, feeding schedules, allergies and likes/dislikes. It’s a great way to personalize your trip for the little ones, while older kids and adults can participate in their own activities. If you’re looking for a beach getaway, the [Palladium](#) resorts in Mexico are a good option. They partnered up with the much-loved *Raggs* preschool TV series, so these kid-friendly cartoon characters host themed breakfasts, dance parties, story time in the Mini Club, and lots of activities appropriate for the under-three set.

Ages three to seven

While it is true that children are like sponges at this age, it is also important to plan a combination of structured activities and free time. Most kids this age aren’t excited about cultural or historical activities, unless they can actively participate by touching, feeling or tasting. “Looking at famous art or beautiful monuments will have little impact,” says Fox. Instead look for museums with interactive exhibits to engage children. Pick a city like [Toronto](#), where kids can sleep with the sharks at the [Ripley’s Aquarium](#), see the giant pandas at the [Toronto Zoo](#), and check out the hands-on kid-friendly biodiversity exhibit at the [Royal Ontario Museum](#).

If you’re looking for a resort that offers plenty of recreational activities, pick a place like [Woodloch](#) in the Poconos. There’s a rock-climbing wall, indoor and outdoor pools, bumper cars, go-karts, kayaking in the summer, snow tubing in the winter, a petting zoo, an arts and crafts center, and indoor and outdoor playgrounds. There won't be any time for boredom to set in.

Accessible, but international, Toronto offers plenty of hands on activity for younger kids, between the ages of three and seven. Getty

Ages eight through twelve

By this age kids have developed strong interests and likes. “A family trip in which an adolescent feels as though his interest has been paid attention to by the whole family is a success for all involved,” says [Dr. Lisa Long](#), a clinical psychologist. Ask your kids what type of trip they’d like to take. If your kids are interested in horseback riding or the outdoors, try [a dude ranch](#). At [C Lazy U Ranch](#) in Colorado, kids get their own horse for the week and can develop strong relationships with their four-legged friend, other kids in the group, and the horse wrangler (who is often times a great role model for tweens). They also get some freedom away from their parents, but still in a controlled group setting.

If you’re looking for [a beach vacation](#), include educational activities that are also fun, like swimming with dolphins. At [Dolphin Discovery](#), which has locations throughout the Caribbean and Mexico, the goal is conservation and education. The kids have a great time interacting with the playful creatures while learning why it’s so important to protect their habitat.

Ages thirteen through sixteen

Teens can be really excited, really moody, or both. “Teens can become resistant to family vacations because it interrupts their social life and activities schedule,” says Fox. “The best way to avoid this is by telling your teen up front you'd like their input and participation.” A place few teens will say no to is a trip to the Island of Hawaii (commonly referred to as the Big Island). Here teens can [snorkel](#) with manta rays along the Kona coast, hike over lava flows in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, and zipline with spectacular panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean.

If you want to stick a little closer to home, [California](#) is a great option for teens. “On a family trip it is helpful to give teens more independence based on maturity and responsibility level,” says Dr. Long. Let them try their hand at surfing in Malibu or doing some (window) shopping along Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles.

[EXPLORE](#) [FAMILY TRAVEL](#)
