



Courtesy The Resort at Paws Up

THE BESTS

The 18 Best Family Summer Vacations to Take

*Whether you're looking for a city getaway or an outdoor adventure, here's where to go.
Bonus: Your kids will have fun, too.*

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When you've only got **18 guaranteed summers together**, figuring out the big family summer trip can be daunting. After all, no one wants to get it wrong and squander precious time, or worse, make the older kids think you can't pull off a cool vacation. We found the best family summer vacation ideas for every type of traveler, parent, and child—at any age. Jamaica and Paris for infants? That's a surprising yes. Tweens and teens in Disney-fied Orlando, a Colorado mountain town, or a Costa Rican rainforest? All three, of course. Read on for all your options.

Paris, France

Best for: Ages 0–18

Why we love it: For big families with kids of all ages, [the City of Lights](#) makes for a great first international trip. Sure, there's the must-do list—climbing to the top of the [Eiffel Tower](#), taking a relaxing boat ride on the [Seine](#), and strolling the [Louvre](#)—but there are also plenty of under-the-radar family-friendly sojourns, like visiting the Sunday pet market on the Ile de la Cité or stopping by the puppet shows at Jardin du Luxembourg. When it comes to meals, sign up for a [family cooking class](#) and then eat your own French creation. Alternatively, head to the Marche Bastille, one of the biggest markets in Paris, and let the kids pick out some cheese, fruit, and meats for a family picnic. *C'est la vie.*

Where to stay: Le Royal Monceau, Raffles Paris, another [Readers' Choice Award winner](#), where city art tours can be tailored to any age by a personal art concierge, Parisian movie nights for just your fam happen in the hotel's private theater, and even newborn babies can go to the spa with a therapeutic bath treatment that replicates the in-womb experience.

Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Best for: Ages 2–10

Why we love it: Set your sights on Cape Cod for lobster rolls and ice cream (try Ice Cream Café in Orleans), beaches from the bay to the Atlantic, Cape Cod Baseball League games, whale watching cruises, and the new Wydah Pirate Museum. If you'd like to keep summer still somewhat educational, check out [Chatham Bars Inn](#) with its great mix of kids' programming, plus an exciting opportunity for your family to shadow the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy as they tag great whites along the coast, all of which you see from the safety of a guest vessel.

Where to stay: For a classic family vacation, rent a seaside Shingle Style house or get the best of both worlds with a private residence tucked among the pink and purple hydrangeas at the waterfront [Wequassett Resort and Golf Club](#), a family-friendly resort with a pool you'll never want to leave.

Bluefields Bay, Jamaica. Getty

Bluefields Bay, Jamaica

Best for: Infants up to age 3, and parents who wouldn't dream of a trip without them yet.

Why we love it: In August, a new highway promises to get you from Montego Bay to remote, relaxed, and little-known Bluefields Bay, an oceanfront escape that ticks all the right boxes for young families craving a low-key Caribbean vacation. Parents dying for a friends trip can have that, too, at all-inclusive [Bluefields Bay Villas](#), where six oceanside villas come complete with airport transfers, a pool, gourmet meals, butler and laundry service, cribs and high chairs, beach toys, and knockout piña coladas.

Where to stay: Choose the two-story, four-bedroom Hermitage villa for easy beach access and a superb pool deck with sweeping sunset views.

San Diego, California

Best for: Ages 2-12

Why we love it: Beaches and vacations go hand-in-hand, and one of the best places to soak your feet in the sand while still having plenty of activities to keep the kids busy is [San Diego](#). The city offers 70 miles of pristine sandy coastline with year-round warm temperatures. If you have little kids, [La Jolla Shores](#) is a good beach, since it has small, slow waves; for older kids, try surf lessons in the gold-

flecked waters (it's naturally occurring pyrite, AKA "fools gold") fronting [Hotel Del Coronado](#), and if you're on the lookout for seals and sea lions, head to Shell Beach. Of course, you can't go to San Diego without hitting one of the best zoos in the world. [The San Diego Zoo](#) has its stars—the giant pandas—but it's also home to koalas and 4,000 other animals representing 800 species. Special experiences fill up quickly, so make sure to book online for those. Still want more? San Diego offers whale watching and [Legoland](#) is nearby as well.

Where to stay: Readers' Choice Awards winner [Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa](#), with family yoga every Sunday morning, oceanfront hikes at nearby Torrey Pines, and a new beach butler package with chairs, a picnic, and transportation.

Orlando, Florida

Best for: Ages 3-15

Why we love it: Yep, it's hot, but lighter crowds and well-cooled lines at the parks (think fans, shade, and misters) keep things tolerable. All of the hotels have pools and offer deals from late August to September, when Orlando slides into shoulder season. And this summer, new rides like [Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure](#) at Universal's Islands of Adventure (opening June 13) and [Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge land](#) at Disney's Hollywood Studios (opening August 29) are beckoning teens, making it an especially great time to visit for families trying to please a range of ages.

Where to stay: The trendy, minimalist [Surfside Inn and Suites at Universal Orlando](#), another hit with teens, and at surprisingly budget-friendly rates from \$85.

Michigan's West Coast

Best for: Ages 4-10

Why we love it: Pack the beach umbrella and head off on a road trip along Michigan's West Coast, which will win over the family with its ocean-like [lake views](#). The route is dotted with Americana beach towns with all the trimmings—ice cream shops, breweries, lighthouses—so outline your itinerary with well-timed stops. In New Buffalo, fuel up at the Stray Dog and try sandboarding lessons with [Third Coast Surf](#); spread out in Saugatuck at pretty Oval Beach and the new 18-room [Hotel Saugatuck](#); visit Grand Haven for the [Coast Guard Festival](#) from July 28 to August 6; and hop on the scenic M22 highway to atmospheric Glen Arbor, gateway to [Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore](#). Once you recover from Sleeping Bear's stunning views over Lake Michigan, check out the Maritime Museum, run down Dune Climb, and comb Good Harbor beach for fossilized Petoskey stones.

Where to stay: Stop in coastal South Haven for a midwestern glamping experience at [The Fields](#), opening June 15 with upscale tents set on a working 30-acre blueberry farm.

Resort at Paws Up, Montana. Courtesy The Resort at Paws Up

Montana Ranches

Best for: Ages 6-12

Why we love it: Montana has no equal come summer, and the state's **best ranches** are basically the ultimate summer camp experience for families. **Readers' Choice Awards winner** Resort at Paws Up offers near-endless programming across 37,000 acres: river floats and fly fishing, electric fat-tire biking through trails, ATV tours, horseback rides, spa treatments for all ages, long table events with award-winning chefs, and, new this summer, a three-mile hike led by the resort's resident Bouvier des Flandres pooch, Fenway. Want to tie in a visit to Yellowstone National Park? All-inclusive, laid-back **Lone Mountain Ranch** in Big Sky country offers tours of the park (just 18 miles away) plus a rich equestrian program, guided exploration with naturalists, and its **Outdoor Youth Adventures Program** for ages 4-12 that includes a ropes course, rodeo games, archery, and canoeing.

Where to stay: Along a river—whether in a modern, comfortable cabin fronting the creek-like river fork that flows through Lone Mountain Ranch or above the Blackfoot River at Paws Up's Cliffside Camp, where the rushing waters double as the best nighttime noise machine.

Chicago, Illinois

Best for: Ages 5 to 14

Why we love it: If you're looking for a big city with plenty to see and do (and reachable by plenty of flights) this Midwestern gem fits the bill. Located on the shores of Lake Michigan, the Windy City is chock-full of family activities, buzzy restaurants, and exciting hotels. Rent a kayak from REI's new **Lincoln Park outpost** on the Chicago River, stroll the city's booming River Walk, take in an open-air concert at Millennium Park next to the famous Chicago Bean, get lost in the fascinating **Museum of**

Science and Industry, or embark on a fast-paced scavenger hunt (ideal for tweens) with **Watson Adventures** at the **Art Institute of Chicago**. Definitely try Giordano's famous Chicago-style pizza, but do a more authentic dive into Chicago's incredible food scene with options like **Lillie's Q** barbecue in Wicker Park, **Jojo's Milk Bar** in River North, **Funkenhausen** in Ukrainian Village, and **Furious Spoon** ramen bar in the Loop area's **Revival Food Hall** (where pickier eaters in your group also have options). Insider tip: Get the Chicago CityPASS to see a lot of iconic sights at a heavily discounted rate.

Where to stay: So many options, from the budget-cool **Wheelhouse** near Wrigley Field to the luxury, everything-you-can-dream-of **Peninsula Chicago**.

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Best for: Ages 6-16

Why we love it: An all-seasons nirvana for adventurous families, Colorado shines bright in summer with action-packed activities at every turn. Zero in on Colorado Springs and **Readers' Choice Awards winner The Broadmoor**, an all-encompassing, 5,000-acre basecamp. There's tons to do, but don't miss falconry lessons, golf, fly fishing camp, ranch cattle drives, and an incredible canyon zip line tour above Seven Falls. Beyond the resort, raft the Arkansas river with **River Runners** and float under the highest suspension bridge in North America, **Royal Gorge Bridge**, part of a massive park where thrill-seeking kids will want to try the bungee-like sky coaster. There's also **guided cycling tours** down Pikes Peak Highway, rock climbing in **Garden of the Gods Park**, and even full-moon tours at the **Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center**.

Where to stay: Options at the Broadmoor include luxury hotel rooms and cottages, but do add on a mountain-top escape and the chance to hit pause as a family at its all-inclusive, 3,000 feet higher Cloud Camp.

Galápagos Safari Camp, Santa Cruz Island. Courtesy Galapagos safari camp

Galápagos, Ecuador

Best for: Ages 6-14

Why we love it: The most popular way to experience the volcanic archipelago is by boat and *the* boat to be on this summer is Celebrity Cruises' *Flora*, a new luxury 100-person mega yacht launching this July. *Flora's* outward-facing design—floor-to-ceiling windows everywhere—puts the Galápagos's rare geology and wildlife front and center, while an onboard lab offers opportunities to explore more, and private cabanas make family naps way less of a drag. Even better, the ship's top deck can be transformed into double beds for a total of four guests, complete with a campfire-themed dinner and drinks, a naturalist-led stargazing session, and breakfast in bed at sunrise. Not a fan of cruising or rigorous schedules? Check out [Galapagos Safari Camp](#) on Santa Cruz Island, where days can be as flexible and tailored as you wish with private activities including surf lessons, art classes with a local artist, and a new full-day boating excursions with the option to fish and snorkel.

Where to stay: *Flora* has all-suite accommodations, but for families wanting more space, its two glass-wrapped Penthouse suites claim to be the biggest in the Galápagos at 1288 square feet.

Washington, D.C.

Best for: Ages 7–14

Why we love it: Family-friendly cultural offerings, like the new [International Spy Museum](#) at L'Enfant Plaza opening this month, are always a draw, but come for the 4th of July to revel in a full day of traditional festivities, which naturally, our nation's capital takes very seriously. Start with the morning parade (classic high school marching bands, Uncle Sam on stilts, and beauty queens in convertible cars), followed by an afternoon up-close with the Constitution at the National Archives, and an early evening concert on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol with the National Symphony Orchestra. Don't miss the elaborate nighttime firework display over the monuments—mirrored by the Reflecting Pools. And if you want to miss the crowds, there's even a full dress rehearsal with the same orchestra on July 3. The best part? It's all free.

Where to stay: Opened last month after a major refresh, the [Hilton Washington, DC National Mall](#) puts you within easy walking distance to the new spy museum, a [Bike and Roll](#) tour and rental depot, and the riverside [Wharf](#) with its 20-plus dining options.

Alaska

Best for: Ages 8–16

Why we love it: The best way to see [Alaska](#) may well be by cruise. If you're traveling with the younger set, [Carnival Cruise Line](#) not only has great ports of call and excursions, but the ships also have plenty of kid-friendly options on board. Stops include Ketchikan, Skagway, Juneau, and Sitka, where you can do everything from dog sledding and helicopter flightseeing to glacier hiking and canoeing and kayaking the fjords. Plus, it's not uncommon to see whales, bears and moose; both kids and adults will learn plenty from the on-board naturalist who explains the region's rich natural habitat chock full of animal and marine life.

Where to stay: If not on a cruise ship, fly far inland for a stay in the old mining town of McCarthy at the historic [Ma Johnson's Hotel](#), right in the middle of mountainous, glacier-packed Wrangell-St. Elias, the biggest national park in North America.

Bryce Canyon, Utah. Getty

Utah's National Parks

Best for: Ages 10–16

Why we love it: Sure, you can pick just one National Park, but in Southern Utah you can do five all within a short drive. Marvel at over 2,000 natural arches at the aptly named Arches or dusty orange-pink hoodoos at Bryce, visit Utah's first National Park, Zion, or witness the otherworldly geographical phenomena of Canyonlands and Capital Reef, where a monocline—a geographical wonder that results in a wrinkle in the earth—extends almost 100 miles.

Where to stay: Use the town of Moab as your home base for reliable restaurant and lodging options, including [Sorrel River Ranch](#). For a more adventurous way to explore the parks, book a packaged hiking and camping trip, and let an outfitter handle all the planning.

Quebec, Canada

Best for: Ages 8–16

Why we love it: This mainly French-speaking province offers families a taste of Europe that's close to home, plus its own fun mix of Quebecois culture, Canadian wilderness, and incredible summer festivals. Start in metropolitan Montreal, where highlights include the legendary Montreal Jazz Fest, Osheaga Music Festival, Montreal Cirque festival, and Festival des Arts de la Rue, the largest street

theater event in North America with hundreds of performances for every age. In Quebec City, the [Wendake International Pow Pow](#) offers a glimpse of First Nations culture, while the [New France Festival](#) celebrates the 1806 arrival of the first Europeans on American soil with parades and street entertainment in full costume. Head west to Abitibi-Témiscamingue for the June opening of Canada's newest national park, [Parc National d'Opémicican](#), where you can canoe and hike amid towering pines and cliffs.

Where to stay: Overnight in Parc Omega in Outaouais, where gray and Arctic wolves roam, from the comfort of a [guarded cabin](#) equipped with an observation lookout.

Scotland

Best for: Ages 10-16

Why we love it: Take your family road trip up a notch in Scotland, where you can combine dramatic landscapes in the Highlands with bustling cities. Harry Potter fans should start in Edinburgh, where J.K. Rowling wrote her first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Visit the Elephant House café where she wrote, wander Greyfriars Kirkyard cemetery in search of the tomb of Thomas Riddle, and book [The Balmoral](#), [A Rocco Forte Hotel's](#) J.K. Rowling Suite, where the author signed the walls of the room on completion of the *Deathly Hallows*. Check out the crown jewels at hilltop Edinburgh Castle before driving up to Perthshire; from there, the scenery keeps getting better. Stop in Glencoe for babbling brooks and pink-hued skies, Inverness to scan the surface of Loch Ness for its namesake monster, and coastal Aberdeenshire to explore its 300 castles.

Where to stay: The [Gleneagles Hotel](#) in Perthshire, which offers activities like falconry and archery, and has three championship golf courses.

Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, Costa Rica. Getty

Costa Rica

Best for: Ages 7-16

Why we love it: As big all-inclusives keep popping up on the popular Papagayo Peninsula, it's intimate, eco-focused properties like those in the laid-back-lux [Cayuga Collection](#) that best reveal Costa Rica's ongoing conservation efforts and natural beauty—something that's especially vibrant in the [green summer season](#). Use [Senda Monteverde](#), opened in December, as your base to explore the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve up close: expect zip line tours through the canopy, guided climbs outside (and inside) the trunks of giant trees, and wildlife spotting from hanging treetop suspension bridges. In the sleepy Pacific beach town of Playa Guiones at [Harmony Hotel](#), connect with the ocean through family surf lessons and, in late summer, nesting sea turtle excursions. Far south at [Lapa Rios](#), on the wild Ose Peninsula, guests can take part in thrilling waterfall and night hikes, soccer games with kids at the local school, back-of-the-house sustainability tours, and a new five-night, naturalist guide training program for ages 14 and up.

Where to stay: Families can spread out in modern two-bedroom suites at Senda Monteverde and in three-bedroom villas at Harmony Hotel.

Vancouver & Vancouver Island, British Columbia

Best for: Ages 10-18

Why we love it: Can't decide between the city and the great outdoors for your next family vacation? Go for both in [Vancouver](#), a diverse real-deal metropolis that's also surrounded by coastal wilderness. Vancouver exudes a spirit of adventure, so encourage the kids to be bold. Start with the city's exciting food scene that spans everything from Asian street food at the Richmond Night Market to hot donuts at the Granville Market to nitrogen-chilled ice-cream and splurge-worthy sushi in Yaletown (try Minami for the latter). Ride bikes in beautiful Stanley Park past real totem poles or hike trails on Grouse Mountain, where you can visit a grizzly bear refuge. Push the envelope further with a quick floatplane jaunt to the rugged coastlines and temperate forests of Vancouver Island, where you can surf in Tofino or go bear watching with a First Nations guide.

Where to stay: The [Fairmont Waterfront](#) lays out Van City with views over the harbor and mountains; there's also a rooftop pool and "Bee Hotel," where kids can learn about elevated bee highways. For a splurge, [Nimmo Bay Resort](#) in the Great Bear Rainforest is the place for guided coastal safari tours, heli-fishing and intertidal cabins right on the water.

Botswana, South Africa

Best for: Ages 14-18

Why we love it: Flush with some of Africa's best wildlife diversity, void of tourism overloads, and renowned for its exclusive lodging, [Botswana](#) offers a dreamy trifecta for [once-in-a-lifetime family safaris](#). Botswana also stands in stark contrast to neighboring countries with its hard line against poaching (it banned hunting in 2014) and forward-thinking conservation efforts, making it a great place to show kids conservation in action. Zero in on the vast, lush swath of the [Okavango Delta](#) encompassed by the Moremi Game Reserve, where the recent reintroduction of rhinos makes the region home to all of Africa's Big Five: elephants, lions, leopards, Cape buffalo, and rhinos.

Where to stay: After days on safari at Sanctuary Chief's Camp, spread out in roomy pavilions, watch animals wander by from your own private plunge pool, and learn first-hand about protecting an endangered species when you follow a ranger to a safe haven for translocated rhinos

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