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**Traveler**



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FAMILY TRAVEL

# 23 Family Summer Vacation Ideas, From Costa Rica Eco-Lodges to Alaska National Parks

*Whether city, the sea, or the great wildernesses beyond, these are the ultimate family adventures.*

BY NINA KOKOTAS HAHN

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Some of the best summer family vacation ideas are less about where you're going and more about the experience you hope to have together. Want to bring history lessons to life on a cultural mega-trip? Try Paris, Rome, or [New York](#). Ready for your first international adventure together? [Costa Rica](#) is a great place to start. Or, is it the great outdoors that brings your squad closer? Set off for the [beaches of Michigan or California](#), or mountain getaways at the doorstep of some of the [country's best national parks](#). And even new parents dying for a proper vacation can find a dreamy [Los Cabos resort](#) with everything they need. Here are our best summer family vacation ideas, along with where your family should stay in each place—all of which are designed to deliver exactly the kind of adventure your family has been waiting for.

*All listings featured in this story are independently selected by our editors. However, when you book something through our retail links, we may earn an affiliate commission. This article has been updated with new information since its original publish date.*



Cayucos, one of the beach towns on California Central Coast

Getty

# Central Coast, California

**Best for:** A low-key California beach vacation

**Why we love it:** Located midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, the beach towns of California's Central Coast—Cayucos, Cambria, Avila Beach, and more—offer a rare and seemingly secluded small-town experience right on the Pacific. Stay in Cayucos for easy access to a great beach with colorful tide pools, plus Ocean Avenue's locally-owned shops and restaurants (don't miss [Brown Butter Cookie Company](#) and an outrageously tasty, gluten-free breakfast at [Hidden Kitchen](#)).

Ready for coastal wildlife adventures? Ten of the 100 best spots in the state for spotting whales are here along the [Whale Trail](#) (see the last of the Gray Whales in May and humpbacks from August to September). San Simeon's [Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Rookery](#) bills itself as the only elephant seal rookery in the world that's free and open to the public every day of the year, and otters galore are a hit while kayaking in the Morro Bay Estuary. Little ones love the Pismo Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove, while teens can imagine California living on a tour of Cal Poly and the college town of San Luis Obispo. For a totally unique guided experience that takes beach combing next level, set out on a seaweed foraging adventure with [Marley Family Seaweeds](#), where you'll learn to identify, sustainably harvest, and cook up your own fresh ramen, right on the beach.

**Where to stay:** Just a few blocks from the beach, the new [Pacific Motel](#) in Cayucos is simple, stylish, and loaded with all the right stuff: hip beach vibes, Parachute linens and robes, complimentary Linus bikes, coffee in the morning, and fire pits and pong pong by night.



The Broadmoor offers falconry lessons, cattle drives, and ziplining on its 5,000 acres.

The Broadmoor

# Colorado Springs, Colorado

**Best for:** Families that love mountain adventures

**Why we love it:** An all-seasons nirvana for outdoor fans, Colorado shines bright in summer with action-packed activities at every turn. Zero in on Colorado Springs and [The Broadmoor](#), an all-encompassing, 5,000-acre basecamp. There's tons to do, but don't miss falconry lessons, golf, fly fishing, ranch cattle drives, and a breathtaking 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, plus the chance to hit pause as a family at its all-inclusive Cloud Camp 3,000-feet higher, atop Cheyenne Mountain.



Rock House Grace Bay is steps from the ocean, and fresh off a renovation that made it to our Hot List 2023.

Rock House Grace Bay

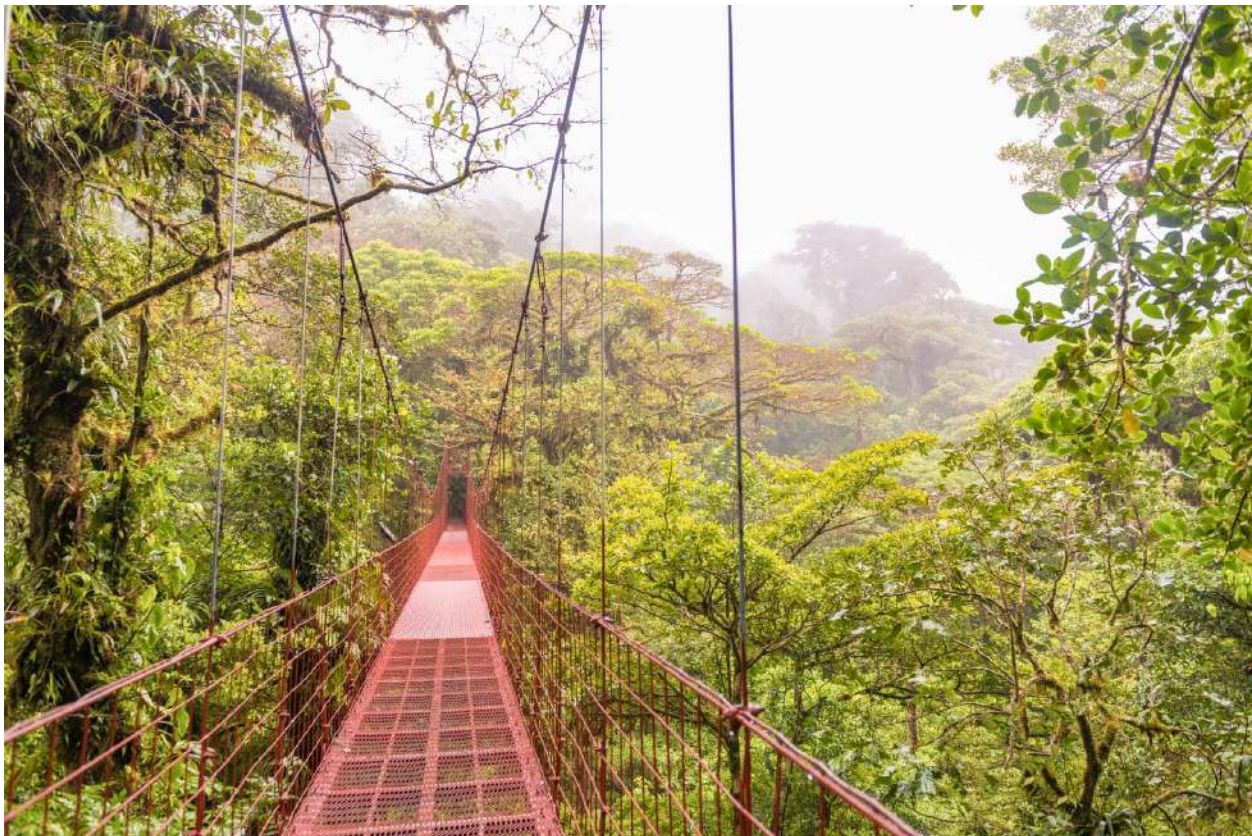
## Turks & Caicos

**Best for:** A huge assortment of family-friendly beach adventures

**Why we love it:** The shores of Providenciales' Grace Bay in Turks & Caicos have long been a draw for beach aficionados seeking a sophisticated Caribbean Islands vacation. For families, the beaches are like a theme park

set amid some of the most pristine waters in the world. These waters are also super gentle, so start with a swim or a paddleboard right from the beach, or head out with [Big Blue Collective](#) for a sustainably-focused snorkeling excursion. Older kids dig jet ski rentals, wakeboarding and cliff jumping, or adventures to the La Famille Express Shipwreck off the coast of Long Bay Beach. Take a boat trip to see the rock iguanas at Little Water Cay or even a horseback ride that feels a bit like a swim with [Provo Ponies](#). Back on land, tag on another unexpected animal adventure at [Potcake Place](#), a local dog rescue where you can take a pup for a walk—or even back home.

**Where to stay:** [Grace Bay Club](#) has everything you could need in prime location, with beach club service right at the beach and a robust kids club with distinct offerings for all ages, including a teen program with water sport activities, sunset reggae parties and bonfires, and a scuba program. At sleek [Rock House](#), which [made our Hot List for 2023](#), discover incredible snorkeling just steps from the beach.



Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve offers wildlife spotting from treetop suspension bridges.

# Costa Rica

**Best for:** Your first international family adventure

**Why we love it:** In stark contrast to the big brand all-inclusive hotels near popular Arenal and Nayara, intimate, eco-focused properties like those in the laid-back [Cayuga Collection](#) get you off the beaten path to reveal [Costa Rica's local communities](#) and natural beauty—something that's especially vibrant in the [green summer season](#). Ideal for families with young children on up, the [Arenas Del Mar](#) hotel in Manuel Antonio is both in the rainforest, directly on a fabulous beach with two pools, and puts Manuel Antonio National Park at your door. Get closer to the clouds at [Senda Monteverde](#), a perfect base for exploring the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve: enjoy zip-line tours through a thrilling canopy, guided climbs outside (and inside) the trunks of giant trees, and wildlife spotting from treetop suspension bridges. Especially great for families who want to explore a hip local town, [Hotel Aguas Claras](#) in lively Puerto Viejo offers residential-style casitas and a picturesque beach on the vibrant Caribbean coast. Bonus: The hotels all include [Spanish lessons](#) and back-of-the-house sustainability tours among their regular free programming.

**Where to stay:** Families can spread out in modern two-bedroom suites at [Senda Monteverde](#), oceanfront suites at [Arenas Del Mar](#), and the private two-story, five-room Casa Floralia house just steps from the beach at [Aguas Claras](#).



Yosemite Falls is the perfect backdrop for family hikes, swimming, and picnics.

Getty

# Yosemite, California

**Best for:** Jaw-dropping scenery and national park adventure

**Why we love it:** It's not just that the roads offer a sort of national park autobahn experience for the lucky parent who drives, the spectacularly dizzying views of scenery of Half Dome and El Capitan and more for those who don't, but that there are endless ways to explore the unique environments of [Yosemite National Park](#). Here, family playtime looks like waterfall hikes in the valley, easy scrambles on big-fun Pothole Dome, swims at picnics at Dog Lake, mesmerizing meanders through the giant sequoias of Tuolumne Grove,



and challenging day hikes deep into the woods and up to the top of 9,931-foot Clouds Rest. Believe us, there's a ton more (and this [Yosemite Guide](#) details the best of them).

**Where to stay:** Nab a tent cabin at [Curry Village](#) in Yosemite Valley, inside the park, or head out to the gateway town of Mariposa for a stay at [Autocamp](#), which offers fully equipped tents, cabins, and airstreams with private campfires. We're also fans of [these Airbnb cottage and A-frame home rentals](#) outside of the park.



Chatham Bars Inn partners with the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy for tours of great-white shark receivers (or shark-watching stations) and shark centers (museums).

Chatham Bars Inn

## Cape Cod, Massachusetts

**Best for:** Water-loving, Shark Week-watching families

**Why we love it:** Set your sights on [Cape Cod](#) for waves and beaches from the bay to the Atlantic, plus lobster rolls, ice cream (try [Ice Cream Cafe](#) in Orleans), whale-watching cruises, and culture fixes spanning everything from Cape Cod Baseball League games to the [Whydah Pirate Museum](#). If you're looking for something educational and wildly exciting, check out the [Atlantic White Shark Conservancy](#). You can visit their shark centers, take a cruise on a receiver tour or even embark on a private charter, watching as the research organization tags great whites along the coast.

**Where to stay:** The [Chatham Bars Inn](#), which partners with the AWSC on the great white receiver tours. For a classic family vacation, stay in shingle-style cottage or residence at waterfront [Wequassett Resort and Golf Club](#), a family-friendly resort with a robust children's center, pirate-themed splash park, and a pool deck you'll never want to leave.



Lovers Beach on the Sea of Cortez in Los Cabos, Mexico

Heather Paul/Getty

# Los Cabos, Mexico

**Best for:** New parents

**Why we love it:** Los Cabos is loaded with [family beach vacation options](#), but none quite as on point for the way it gifts new parents with baby in tow a full recharge than the [Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos Pedregal](#). Spanning 24 acres at the southern tip of Mexico's Baja California Peninsula, picture a low-key, high luxe experience that's entirely self contained (no need to schlep anywhere else), tucked into a secluded stretch of beachfront, and balanced with the right offerings, including top-notch dining.

Days are a breeze with morning yoga under a beach palapa, swims at the beachfront family pool, naps and lunches under a private cabana, and trading off for massages and treatments at Luna y Mar spa. The dining is incredible, and alfresco family-friendly options abound, but do take advantage of the all-ages babysitting service for a series of authentic Mexican culinary adventures, including an exceptionally well-curated agave study for tequila diehards, a nine-course taco tasting in a private kitchen, and live music and moonlit views over the Pacific Ocean at cliffside El Farallon.

**Where to stay:** Splurge on an ocean-view, two-bedroom casita with a full kitchen, outdoor terraces, a plunge pool, and butler service—everything you need to keep the vacation vibes rolling, even when you're back at the room with baby.



Beyond Machu Picchu, escape the crowds at nearby Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel's 12-acres of biodiverse cloud forest.

Getty

# Peru

**Best for:** Deep cultural immersion in South America

**Why we love it:** For families with older kids ready to step up their international travels, Peru is the place for [off-the-beaten path adventures alongside must-do Machu Picchu](#). The journey by Vistadome train to the last town of Aguas Calientes and up by bus to the ancient citadel at 8,000 feet is an experience unto itself. Once inside Machu Picchu, explore archaeological sites and hike trails to mountain peaks wrapped in clouds. But don't just do Machu Picchu. Plan a stay in rarely visited Arequipa at 7,661 feet, wandering its colonial-era streets and plaza, touring the fascinating Santa Catalina Monastery, and dining at [Chica](#) on Peruvian rocoto relleno (peppers stuffed with meat and cheese). In

Lima, take a family-friendly market tour and cooking lesson in the home of local [chef Giancarlo Ibarquengoitia](#). Let the guides at [Peru Empire by Andean Experience](#) show you around Cusco and the Sacred Valley, experiencing everything from llamas and ancient Peruvian textile making at [Centro de Textile](#) to the crowd-free Pisac ruins that rival Machu Picchu with countless staggering terraces. In the Sacred Valley, [Abercrombie & Kent](#) also leads private visits to one of its philanthropy projects, the Village of the Flowers, where you're welcomed into a remote village, led on an inspiring hike, and learn about important Incan traditions.

**Where to stay:** An ancient monastery turned luxury hotel, 11-room [Cirqa](#) is reason alone to visit Arequipa. Let the kids have their own room and hang space while you draw a bath in the center of your own storied room with high-vaulted ceilings. In Machu Picchu, escape the crowds at [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel](#), set in 12-acres of biodiverse cloud forest and walkable to Aguas Calientes. Another off-the-beaten-path treasure, the stylish nine-room [Atemporal bed and breakfast](#) in Lima's Miraflores district offers generous room configurations and an exquisite garden—an ideal place to unwind after days exploring the city.



The Art Institute of Chicago hosts a private scavenger hunt for kids through Watson Adventures.

Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago

# Chicago, Illinois

**Best for:** Families with savvy gourmands and culture hounds

**Why we love it:** If you're looking for a big city with plenty to see, do, and eat, this Midwestern gem on the shores of Lake Michigan fits the bill. Tick off any number of stellar cultural activities: get lost in the [Museum of Science and Industry](#), embark on a river cruise or rent from [Chicago Electric Boat Company](#) and do it yourself, take in an open-air concert at Millennium Park next to the shiny Chicago Bean, and challenge yourselves to a private scavenger hunt at the [Art Institute of Chicago](#) with [Watson Adventures](#). The Windy City is also a blast for a kid-friendly, star-studded foodie crawl that goes beyond deep-dish pizza (which [Giordano's](#) is great for, by the way). Start with

Chinese at fun [Duck Duck Goat](#) by James Beard-winning Stephanie Izard, the first woman to win the show. Hit the Sunday farmers market in Logan Square then try modern Greek cuisine at [Andros Taverna](#), with a huge, kid-friendly patio that opens right up to Logan Square Park. There's also authentic Italian everywhere from divey [La Scarola](#) to fancy Gibson Italia overlooking the Chicago River, more noodles at [HaiSous Vietnamese Kitchen](#) in Pilsen and [Furious Spoon](#) ramen in Lakeview. Gemini has a "zero proof" cocktail menu just steps from Lincoln Park Zoo, and fantastic milkshakes are at [Jojo's Milk Bar](#) in River North.

**Where to stay:** In the Gold Coast just steps from Michigan Avenue, the newly renovated [Waldorf Astoria Chicago](#) offers a high-rise respite set in a secluded courtyard with well-appointed residential style units with balconies and a full-service spa with treatments like an ice cream mani and pedi for your budding spa goer. For an [Airbnb](#) meets hotel experience, try Lincoln Park's [Neighborhood Hotel](#), a comfortable basecamp with kitchenettes and apartment-style accommodations.



Hotel del Coronado, Curio Collection by Hilton, now has new beach house options with indoor-outdoor lounge areas and fire pits.

Courtesy Hotel del Coronado, Curio Collection by Hilton

# San Diego, California

**Best for:** A full-tilt California beach vacation

**Why we love it:** [San Diego](#) is one of the best places in California to stick your feet in the sand while simultaneously having access to top-shelf urban adventures. Boasting year-round warm temperatures, the city offers 70 miles of dreamy coastline with options for everyone, but some that are especially great for families. At La Jolla Shores, tide pools and small, slow waves are great for little kids, while older ones will go bananas for surf lessons with [Surf Diva](#). Wildlife lovers will want to see the seals and sea lions at Shell Beach. Of course, you can't miss a visit to the [San Diego Zoo](#), one of the best in the world with its giant pandas and safari park experience.

Among [Balboa Park](#)'s many museums, the new [Comic Con Museum](#) is a massive hit for all ages with playful pop culture exhibits and programs where kids can bring their favorite characters to life. And let's talk about dining, because you've got it all for all ages, too. Stroller the littles through Little Italy's Farmer's Market, nosh tacos on the outdoor patio at [Puesto La Jolla](#) or above the bay at trendy [Coasterra](#), or splurge with teens on Asian-inspired cuisine in art-deco environs at [Animae](#). Speaking of teens, take them to a theater performance they won't forget at the [La Jolla Playhouse](#), which has been the starting grounds for more than a few Broadway plays and musicals.

**Where to stay:** If being oceanfront is a must, grab a one to three-bedroom unit at the Shore House at The Del, [Hotel Del Coronado](#)'s new beach house hotel, each with indoor-outdoor lounge areas and fire pits. For something central to everything, the modern [Pendry San Diego](#) positions you in the Gaslamp Quarter central to restaurants and shopping. Its winning feature: a fabulous rooftop with a pool, ample lounge spaces, lively music, and a secluded oasis of a spa.





Washington Square Park in Manhattan is just one scenic stop on an action-packed summer trip to New York with the kids.

Getty

# New York, New York

**Best for:** Every kid's bucket-list big city vacation

**Why we love it:** There is no bigger winner or more important right of passage for any child than a summer trip to the action-packed culture metropolis that is New York City. Top-notch museums and spaces span the Brooklyn Museum's [incredible ancient Egyptian artifact collection](#), the [American Museum of Natural History's](#) Halls of Gems and Minerals, the [New York Botanical Garden's](#) 12-acre children's adventure garden, and the incredible [Whitney Museum of American Art](#), where you can catch the latest in American art as part of the [Whitney Biennial](#) survey. Near the Whitney, walk playful Little Island park and along the High Line, and definitely stop at the [Van](#)

[Leeuwen ice cream](#) truck near the High Line [Standard Hotel](#). Take another walk down to lower Manhattan for the surprise of fascinating gravestones at [Trinity Church Graveyard](#). Alexander Hamilton and other historic legends are buried here. For families with teens and tweens, don't miss a visit to the [9/11 Memorial](#) and World Trade Center. Make your way to the stunning Oculus train station designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava—it sounds crazy, but lay on the ground and you can watch the aperture open.

**Where to stay:** [Pendry Manhattan West](#) has an open-air terrace, flagship 35,000-square-foot Peloton Studios in its retail space, and a solid location just steps from Hudson Yards, [Moynihan Train Station](#), and the High Line (it's just a 30-minute walk to the Whitney from here).



Universal Studios' Jurassic World VelociCoaster is the steepest beyond-vertical drop in the theme park—packed state.

Roberto Gonzalenz/Courtesy Universal

# Orlando, Florida

**Best for:** Daredevils and unsuspecting teens and tweens

**Why we love it:** “I’m bored”—said no child ever on a summer vacation to Orlando’s many theme parks, especially not the thrill seekers in your crew. Where to start? Go hard right out of the gate at [Universal’s Islands of Adventure](#), where the Jurassic World VelociCoaster catapults you 70 mph on Florida’s fastest and tallest launch coaster. There’s also Ice Breaker, [SeaWorld Orlando](#)’s launch coaster, to send you down a 93-foot-tall plummet on the steepest beyond-vertical drop in the state. [Icon Park on International Drive](#) also operates the world’s tallest slingshot ride, at 300 feet. Simmer it all down on the Mickey and Minnie’s Runaway railway at Hollywood Studios, Disney’s first-ever Mickey ride. Yep, it’s summer and it’s hot, but lighter crowds and well-cooled lines at the parks (think fans, shade, and misters) do keep things tolerable.

**Where to stay:** Universal Orlando Resort’s [Dockside Inn and Suites](#) is a fresh budget-friendly option, while the splurge-worthy [Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World](#) pairs well-appointed suites with easy access to the park. Days here can start with a character breakfast and a five-minute motor coach ride to the Magic Kingdom and Epcot; or can just as easily be filled loafing around the resort’s own 18-hole golf course, spa, and five-acre water park with slides, a splash zone, lazy river, and an adults-only pool.



Rome is a living museum that will thrill kids and adults alike.

Christopher Czermak/Unsplash

# Rome, Italy

**Best for:** A big European summer vacation

**Why we love it:** There is possibly no other place in [Europe](#) like the Eternal City with such a massive breadth of wildly ancient historic sites smack dab in the middle of a modern city where pasta is king. Welcome to Rome, the place to covet carbonara, splurge at multi-story Bottega Veneta, wind through the jaw-dropping halls of the endless Vatican Museums, and stand stupefied at ancient wonders like the Pantheon and Circus Maximus (Julius Caesar's ancient chariot racing stadium), all with a gelato in hand and every-day city traffic at your heels. Do all of the above plus the Colosseum, a guided market visit, and cooking class with [Trustever Tastes](#) in hip Trastevere, and a whacky night tour of the city in vintage cars.

**Where to stay:** On a quiet street that’s magically still in the heart of the city, [Sofitel Rome Villa Borghese](#) offers a laid-back boutique feel in a 19th-century palazzo, with a rooftop restaurant and fresco-painted ceilings in each room (cue the Michelangelo prep talk). It’s also walkable to Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps, and just around the corner from Borghese Gardens, the Roman equivalent of New York’s Central Park, complete with a zoo—and the perfect place to rent an e-bike and explore. There’s a lot more for families: the hotel can arrange everything from tea parties in the gardens and a tour of top gelato spots to a gladiator school experience and horseback ride down the ancient Appian Way.



Spot brown bears in Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, the biggest national park in North America—larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite, and even Switzerland combined.

Teresa Kopec/Getty

# Alaska

**Best for:** Bucket-list-motivated families

**Why we love it:** Volcanic and glacier-clad [Wrangell-St. Elias National Park](#) is somewhat off the tourist radar. But at 13.2 million acres, and home to four mountain ranges including the 18,008-foot Mount St. Elias, it's the biggest national park in North America—larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite, and even Switzerland combined. It also offers families a chance to go off-the-grid in largely untouched wilderness. Getting here is part of the adventure, and best accomplished by a gobsmacking flight over the park's snowcapped peaks; from Chitina to McCarthy. A true frontier town at the edge of Alaska's wilderness, pedestrian-only McCarthy is a fun living-history experience of mining backstories and lively local establishments. Hike right off McCarthy's main dirt road and deep into the Alaskan bush, high into [Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark](#), for a look at 20th-century copper mining (you won't believe the staggering heights here). Or take crampon-booted glacier hikes with [St. Elias Alpine Guides](#) to ice-cold streams that are the best water source you'll ever find.

**Where to stay:** Historic [Ma Johnson's Hotel](#), a former miner's boarding house right in the middle of McCarthy, preserved as it was with shared bathrooms and no outlets in the rooms (embrace the adventure).



Capitol Reef's iconic byway makes it perhaps the most scenic of the state's Mighty Five national parks.

Getty

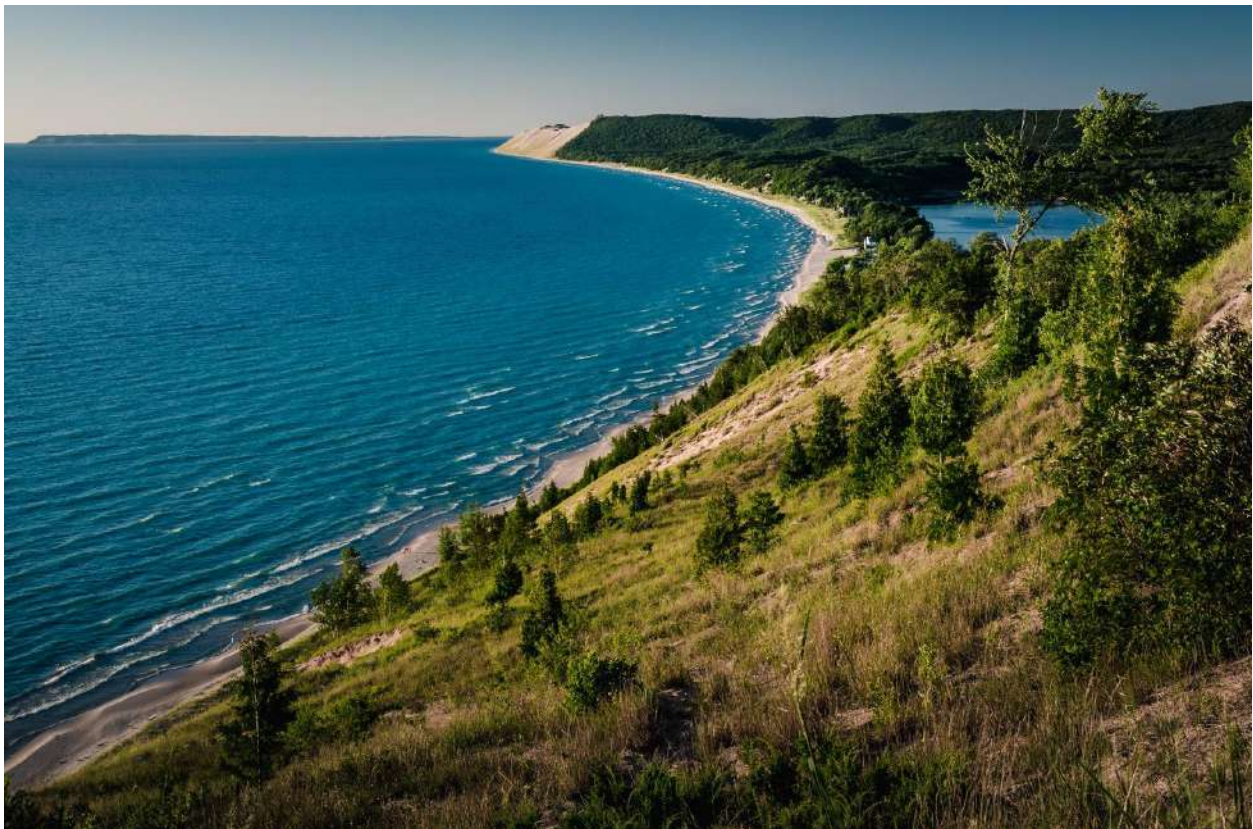
# Capitol Reef National Park, Utah

**Best for:** Active families and budding geologists

**Why we love it:** Southern Utah is home to the state's Mighty Five national parks. The least-visited one—only because it's a little harder to get to—is easily one of its best. Capitol Reef National Park's defining geological phenomenon is essentially a wrinkle in the earth's crust that lifted and folded over some 50 to 70 million years ago. Today, the towering "Waterpocket Fold" is made up of 19 different layers of rock formations and extends for nearly 100 miles. Hike through its rugged, spectacular mashups of colored rock, spying ancient American Indian petroglyphs, winding through iconic slot canyons, and scrambling to the top of jaw-dropping formations like Cassidy Arch—where the

infamous Butch Cassidy was known to hideout with his posse. Kick your family hike up a notch on an expertly guided canyoneering experience with [Capitol Reef Adventure Company](#). Canyoneering is the technical descent into a slot canyon; after hiking an off-the-beaten path trail to the top of slot canyons like Pete's Dragon, you'll descend on fully supported rappels that reveal the beauty of these spaces in a totally new way. No matter the adventure in the park, you'll also be surrounded by some of the most spectacular rocks on the planet, including black basalt, glass-like gypsum, and selenite crystal.

**Where to stay:** Primely situated in Torrey, Utah, and just minutes from Capitol Reef, [Cougar Ridge](#) is an excellent home base with comfortable luxury casitas that include two spacious bedrooms and bathrooms, a well-equipped kitchenette, a deck with a Traeger [grill](#), and plenty of room to spread out in.



Kids will love Sleeping Bear Dunes' stunning Lake Michigan views and combing Good Harbor beach for fossilized stones.

Posnov/Getty



# Michigan's west coast

**Best for:** Road-tripping families

**Why we love it:** Pack the beach umbrella and head off on a road trip along Michigan's west coast, which will win the family over with its ocean-like [lake views](#). The route is dotted with Americana beach towns with all the trimmings—ice cream shops, breweries, [lighthouses](#)—to outline your itinerary with well-timed stops. In New Buffalo, try sand-boarding lessons with [Third Coast Surf](#); spread out in Saugatuck at pretty Oval Beach, then nosh on locally-sourced homestyle dishes in the courtyard at [Pennyroyal Café & Provisions](#); visit Grand Haven for the [Coast Guard Festival](#) from late July to August; and hop on the scenic M22 highway to atmospheric Glen Arbor, the gateway to [Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore](#). Once you recover from Sleeping Bear's stunning Lake Michigan views, check out the Maritime Museum, run down Dune Climb, and comb Good Harbor beach for fossilized stones.

**Where to stay:** Want a private house with a pool, beach, and hot tub? Sky is not out of the question with [Bluefish Vacation Rentals](#), where you'll find a serious range of vacation homes from cottages to sweeping beachfront perches, just a couple hours from Chicago in southwest Michigan. Further up the coast in South Haven, go for a midwestern [glamping experience](#) that's also dog-friendly at [The Fields of Michigan](#). Set on a working 30-acre blueberry farm, this is the place for upscale tents poised around an idyllic pond, complimentary breakfast and bike rentals (ideal for getting to the beach), and a spa tent with forest-inspired treatments.



Galápagos Safari Camp's private activities include surf lessons, art classes with a local artist, and full-day boating excursions.

Courtesy Galapagos safari camp

## The Galápagos, Ecuador

**Best for:** Wildlife fanatics

**Why we love it:** The volcanic Galápagos Islands, home to an abundance of unafraid and gentle wildlife, and are a perfect place to introduce kids to such wonders of the world. The most popular way to experience the archipelago is by boat, and though there are a few posh options for 100-plus passengers, like Silversea Origins and [Celebrity Cruises' Flora](#), a more relaxed and intimate option for families is a small adventure yacht with [Abercrombie & Kent](#). Not a fan of cruising? Immersive land-based options exist—along with Galápagos

famed giant tortoises—in the Highlands of Santa Cruz Island. At [Galapagos Safari Camp](#), days can be as flexible or tailored as you wish, with private activities that include surf lessons, art classes with a local artist, and full-day boating excursions. You'll feel like you stepped into a fairytale where tortoises amble out of ponds and into an organic coffee farm at [Montemar](#) eco luxury villas, a modern vision of sustainability and harmony with the natural world. Set on 43 acres of private land, Montemar was designed by husband-and-wife team Roberto Plaza, a naturalist guide in Galápagos since 1994, and Reyna Oleas, a passionate conservationist. They've also raised their own family here and know a thing or two about plotting meaningful family adventures.

**Where to stay:** [Flora](#) has all-suite accommodations, but families who want more space can book one of two glass-wrapped, 1,288-square foot Penthouse suites. At Galápagos Safari Camp, the Family Suite is ideal for up to six, while Montemar's [Villa Tortuga](#) accommodates larger families of up to eight; expansive outdoor decks are winning at both.



Gleneagles Hotel offers activities like falconry and archery, and has three championship golf courses.

Courtesy Gleneagles

# Scotland

**Best for:** Fans of kings, queens, and Harry Potter

**Why we love it:** Take your family road trip on an adventure 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 frequently wrote, and wander Greyfriars Kirkyard cemetery in search of the tomb of Thomas Riddle. See royal regalia and the oldest-surviving crown jewels at the hilltop Edinburgh Castle, and drive up to Perthshire; from there, the scenery keeps getting better. Stop in Glencoe for babbling brooks and pink-hued skies, in Inverness to scan the surface of Loch Ness for its namesake monster, and in 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



Summer is the best time of year to visit Park City to avoid crowds and take advantage of the national parks on foot or via e-bike.

Roman Tiraspolsky/Getty

## Park City, Utah

**Best for:** Families who want mountain-light, summertime nirvana

**Why we love it:** Ask any local in [Park City](#) and they'll tell you: the best time of year to visit is summer. Why? The lack of national park or ski crowds, no bugs at the pleasantly dry altitude, low-season rates, and abundant outdoor activities. A designated gold-level destination by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), mountain biking is a big deal here, but families shouldn't be afraid that it's all steep and challenging: let the pros at [White Pine Touring](#) level up your crew with lessons, steer you to rail trails and paved roads, and get you set up with e-bikes to ride all the way to [Utah Olympic Park](#), where you can bobsled on a real Olympic track. The list of outdoors activities

goes on—guided rock climbing tours, fly fishing, horseback riding, and paddleboard and sailboat rentals—at the reservoir at [Jordanelle State Park](#). On historic Main Street, outdoor dining on car-free Sundays is the way to go. Summertime events not to miss here include Silly Sunday Markets, last Friday art strolls, the 4th of July parade, and Kimball Arts Festival.

**Where to stay:** Reserve a room for half of what you'd normally pay during peak winter season at the posh [St. Regis Deer Valley](#). Return from action-packed days outdoors that can be arranged by your concierge, and unwind at the pool, spa, and over a killer steak dinner at RIME restaurant.



Vancouver is a stunning metropolitan wonderland infused with First Nations culture, Asian influences, and a rich coastal wilderness.

Raimund Koch/Getty

# Vancouver and Vancouver Island, British Columbia

**Best for:** Young explorers eyeing the Pacific Northwest

**Why we love it:** Ready for an adventure of discovery in a lesser-known corner of the Pacific Northwest? [Vancouver](#) is a diverse and stunning metropolitan wonderland, infused with First Nations culture and Asian influences, and fronted by a rich coastal wilderness. Encourage the kids to step out of their comfort zones to experience it to the fullest. Start with the city's exciting food scene, which spans everything from Asian street food, like grilled octopus and raindrop cake at the [Richmond Night Market](#), to hot donuts at the Granville Market and nitrogen-chilled ice cream alongside off-the-charts sushi at [Minami](#). Ride bikes in beautiful Stanley Park past 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, the self-proclaimed “surf capital” of Canada.

**Where to stay:** The [Fairmont Waterfront](#) lays out Van City with a rooftop pool and views over the harbor and mountains. 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.



Lewa Wilderness lodge sits at the edge of the protected Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, where it feels as if you have the African bush all to yourself.

Teagan Cunniffe

## Botswana & Kenya

**Best for:** Big family celebrations (and fans of “The Lion King”)

**Why we love it:** Of Africa’s many safari destinations, Botswana and Kenya stand out for [once-in-a-lifetime family excursions](#). Flush with some of Africa’s best wildlife diversity, void of tourism overload, and renowned for exclusive lodging, [Botswana](#) is a dream for animal-loving adventurers. Zero in on a special swath of the country’s [Okavango Delta](#) at the Moremi Game Reserve, home to all of Africa’s Big Five—elephants, lions, leopards, Cape buffalo, and rhinos. The original inspiration for Disney’s “The Lion King,” East Africa’s Kenya is also home to the Big Five, plus the Great Migration, fascinating Masai culture, and the [Lewa Wildlife Conservancy](#)’s rare black rhinos and Grevy’s



zebras. [Abercrombie & Kent](#) safaris to Kenya tie it together nicely with screenings of the movie right in the bush, followed by walking safaris and African survival lessons with Maasai warriors.

**Where to stay:** In Botswana at [Sanctuary Chief's Camp](#), spread out in roomy pavilions and watch animals wander by from your own private plunge pool. [Lewa Wilderness](#) in Kenya offers six hillside cottages and three garden cottages with a spacious open living plan; each is in a private setting at the edge of the protected Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, where it feels as if you have the African bush all to yourself.



Yellowstone is just 18 miles away from Big Sky's resorts, farmers markets, and food festivals.

Getty

# Big Sky, Montana

**Best for:** Mountain towns and national park love

**Why we love it:** Montana has no equal come summer—its like the ultimate summer camp for families. This is the place to unleash your love for the mountains, Wild West, and jaunts into the country's most impressive park: [Yellowstone National Park](#). Set up home base at all-inclusive [Lone Mountain Ranch](#), where the fam can partake in tours of Yellowstone (just 18 miles away), guided hikes with naturalists, a robust equestrian program, fly fishing, and an [Outdoor Youth Adventures Program](#) (think rodeo games and archery for ages four to 12). Festivals and more await down the road, like the Wednesday Farmers Market and free Thursday concerts at Big Sky Town Center. At [Big Sky Resort](#), let the kids burn off steam on base camp activities (like bungee trampoline time and rock climbing, take a rare expedition to the top of 11,166-foot Lone Peak—Montana's highest scenic overlook), and time your visit to the new [Savor Big Sky](#) summertime food and wine fest.

**Where to stay:** Along a river—whether in a modern, comfortable cabin fronting the river that flows through [Lone Mountain Ranch](#) or at Big Sky, grab a condo at the mod Summit House, with full kitchens, plenty of space, and mountain views.



The Musée de Louvre is just the start of the culture kids can uncover in the City of Light.

Getty

## Paris, France

**Best for:** A dazzling European city vacation

**Why we love it:** There is no big international city that delivers on style, romance, history, food, and culture like Paris. The City of Lights is made for walking, so prep the gang and strike out on adventures in art and architecture. We don't mean just the [Eiffel Tower](#), [Arc de Triomph](#), and [Musée de Louvre](#) (don't miss the Mona Lisa or The Winged Victory), but also buzzy modern gems like the former art squat house known as [59 Rivoli Art Gallery](#), [Museum of Photography](#), and the wild [Centre Pompidou](#). There's also the Love Lock Bridge, weekend flea markets, and shopping galore (beeline to the Marais district). Breaks are well earned and should come in the form of macarons and pastries at Pierre Hermé Paris, crepes at Luxembourg

Gardens, and a pricey but unforgettable meal atop at historic aviation-themed L'Oiseau Blanc in the [Peninsula Paris](#). You'll feel like you've stepped back in time and the views are spectacular.

**Where to stay:** You've got options galore in Paris, but intimate, off-the-radar [Hôtel Bel Ami](#) is a favorite for its prime location off a quiet side street on the Left Bank in Saint-Germain-de-Pres, included breakfast for kids 12 and under, and winning residential-style accommodations, including new multi-room apartments with a kitchenette and terrace. Just beyond the door, find some of the best Parisian cafes and bookstores as well as Luxembourg Gardens.

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