

FIVE STAR

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Above: The Ueberroths

REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES

INTERVIEW Hilary Doling

There are few families who have travelled as much as Casey Ueberroth's. As Senior Vice President of Marketing for luxury brand **Preferred Hotel Group**, he certainly knows travel. Here, he shares his tips and tales with *Five Star Kids* readers.

Q You live in Newport Beach, California so you're not exactly short of amazing beaches. Does your family still take beach holidays? If so, where?

Beach holidays are a must for our family. I like to say that we are 'water people' – always looking for destinations involving the ocean, lakes or pools. Last year, we went to Mauna Kea Beach Hotel in Hawaii. Often, we do weekend trips and stay at Montage Laguna Beach, which is down the road from our home. Next on our wish list is a trip out to Coeur d'Alene Resort in Idaho, which offers the perfect combination of lake activities and golf.

Q What would Cole, Ozzy and Wren's favourite type of holiday be? Would something different suit all of them? Or would they all agree?

They love pools. Destinations they would agree on are the newly opened Montage Kapalua Bay, which offers three outdoor pools, one of which is multi-tiered, and Harbour Grand Hong Kong, which offers an outdoor heated swimming pool that overlooks Victoria Harbour. They also love toy stores, so they'd like us to stay in a hotel such as The Sherry-Netherland in New York City, which basically sits on top of FAO Schwarz. So yes, if it involves a pool, toys, or a combination, they would agree.

Q Few people could be more of an expert on hotels than you. What top five things does a hotel have to do to be truly family friendly? Here is my top five list to qualify a hotel as family friendly, in this order:

1. Great pre-arrival service: Coordinating family travel is complex, so hotels should offer to help arrange key items in advance. For example, can they guarantee a room that can accommodate cribs, is dark and quiet yet close to the master bedroom? Other assistance that goes a long way is being willing to stock the room's mini fridge with soy milk and help organise babysitters.

2. Activities in close proximity: Whether it is the pool or the entrance to the kids' camp, I want my children to be able to walk to their activities and feel independent while doing it.

3. Good cleaning service and turn down: Hotels need to be thoughtful about different audiences. This may sound odd, but we may

ask the hotel to keep a broom in the room so we can sweep sand ourselves, and want them to leave the chair fort intact after our kids laboured to build it. Patience with continuous calls for extra towels also goes a long way.

4. Good snack options and kid-friendly restaurants: Hotels should offer easy-to-access areas that allow children to get their own snacks like fries and virgin daiquiris, as well as dining spaces that allow families to eat comfortably without feeling self-conscious. Also cost is important, and a truly family-friendly hotel should not charge \$28 for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or the like.

5. Surprise and delights: Unexpected treats that children can immediately enjoy or take home will leave a lasting impression on every family. For example, Ojai Valley Inn & Spa in California always has liquorice in the room when we arrive because my boys mentioned they liked it once.

Right: The happy family
Below right: Montage Laguna Beach

Q What are your favourite family-friendly hotels and why?

There are many, but here are my top three. The Kahala Hotel & Resort in Hawaii offers a terrific beach with cabanas. Eau Palm Beach in Florida is right on the water and offers fun pools, good adult activities and delicious food. L'Hotel du Collectionneur Arc de Triomphe, which is located just blocks from my parents' home in Paris, is in the heart of the city and close to many children's activities, museums, galleries and walking malls.

Q In what ways can/should travel be educational? What do you hope your kids learn from travelling?

Before we travel, my wife or I will purchase a fun book about the area and read it to the kids so they learn about where we're going before we get there. There is a series of very artistic, cool books from the 1960s called 'This is...' Each book is filled with fun details and drawings about a specific city. Our kids love these. Also, before we go to London, they will definitely read 'Paddington at the Tower' (London Tower). At the end of the day, I want them engaged in the destination, to be curious about the history and culture, and to create their own list of items they want to explore. Also, you hope they learn to see and find joy in observing and interacting with how different cultures dress, communicate and behave.

Q Tell us about the last family holiday you had. Where did you go? What did you do?

Our last holiday was to Tennessee. We went to experience the new home of relatives who live there and had fun exploring parks, lakes and downtown areas. The next time we visit, I want to do the country music experience and go to the Opry and spend time at the fantastic Hermitage Hotel.

Q Travel is in your DNA and we understand that by the age of 13 you had travelled to more than 50 countries. What was your first international trip?

It was India. Overall a memorable, exciting adventure. My parents still have photos of me with a python around my neck and a huge grin while standing in a street market. Because India is so different and exotic, that trip was an inspiring launch pad for future travels. Also, we went right around the time of Indiana Jones, which I loved as a kid.



Above: The Sherry-Netherland sits above the famous toy store FAO Schwarz in the middle of New York City.
Right: The beach paradise of Manua Kea Beach Hotel.

Q How many countries have you now visited? What is the one travel experience you long to share with your kids?

I'm at about 100 countries. I love to surf and golf, so when my children are a bit older, we may want to plan a surf trip to Bali or a family golf getaway in Ireland. My favourite travel experiences are when culture meets activity.

Q What are three of your favourite family travel memories?

The first would be bungee jumping in New Zealand on my 13th birthday – I was the youngest ever at that time to Bungee a specific bridge. Second would be a trip through Italy with my mum, dad and sister when my mother turned 50 – amazing food, great wine, and lots of laughs. The third would be celebrating my dad's 70th birthday with our extended family – my kids, my wife, my parents, and my sister – on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Q Multi-gen is a bit of a buzz word. Do you and the extended family (sister, parents) ever travel together?

We travel together about once every two years, and it is generally to celebrate someone's milestone birthday.

Q What is still on the family wish list?

I think some sort of spiritual journey with an ashram could be really interesting when the kids are older. Then, it would be a ski trip to the Alps or, perhaps, a visit to Egypt, which was one of my favourite travels from the past.

Q How do you keep the kids occupied on a long-haul flight?

I wish I had more sage advice for this – I want someone else's best practices! iPads for my sons (ages three and five) are essential. For my daughter, who is one, naps and many laps down the aisle do the trick.

Q What is the best piece of travel advice you'd give to other parents?

A good family vacation offers something for everyone. Spend time during the planning process to make sure that everyone in the family has a say on the journey, whether they get to plan a half-day outing, map the route to a local specialty store, or choose a night to see a concert. Every person in the family should be on board and completely excited about the experience ahead. My parents did such a good job with involving my sister and I in our family's vacation plans, and those memories are probably why I am so endeared to the entire travel experience. ★

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