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Beyond Disney World: 8 great family getaways

By Catey Hill

According to a recent survey by the Preferred Hotel Group, a consortium of 650 independent hotels and resorts, multigenerational travel—defined as a trip of parties belonging to three or more generations—is one of the biggest trends in the travel industry. Nearly 21 million Americans—40% of all U.S. leisure travelers—have taken a multigenerational trip in the last 12 months. Grandparents make up 26% of all leisure travelers in America, and a third of them had taken a multigenerational trip within the last year, the survey revealed.

The multigenerational trend is being driven by travelers like 65-year-old Christine Tibbetts, a journalist in Tifton, Ga. Tibbetts has six children, 13 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, and she's traveled with members of that pack to places as close by as Georgia's St. Simons Island, and as far-flung as Paris and Alaska.

While she admits that you "need flexibility" to make these kinds of trips work, she adds that traveling en masse is ultimately a rewarding experience. "Traveling together equalizes a family, puts us all on an even playing field," she says.

Hotels, resorts and travel agents are expanding their offerings for the multigenerational market. Nonprofit educational travel company Road Scholar began offering multigenerational trips in 2012 (before that, its family-oriented trips were intergenerational, limited to grandparents traveling with grandkids).

The company's new international destinations include Italy, Spain, France and the Galápagos Islands, with more being added this year. A little over a year ago, Preferred Hotel Group launched PreferredFamily.com, a site dedicated to multigenerational travel where users can search and filter locations by the ages of family members, activities, amenities and interests. Travel company Thomson Family Adventures launched a partnership with The Smithsonian in 2012 to create multigenerational adventures in Peru, China, Costa Rica and Panama, and plans to add more in the coming years.

This kind of travel isn't everybody's cup of tea, of course. It can be hard to coordinate the logistics of a trip with a big group, and traveling with that many people isn't cheap. It's often hard to agree on a destination, as not everyone's idea of fun involves Mickey and Minnie. Affluent boomers, after all, tend to be pretty well traveled, and are often looking for somewhere new or more culturally stimulating, but that kind of novelty often isn't a top priority for the school-age set.

With all this in mind, MarketWatch asked travel experts for their advice about destinations that are conducive to multigenerational travel, with activities and attractions that the whole family will be likely to enjoy. Some of the destinations we found are relatively accessible for U.S. travelers; others are a little more off the beaten path and out-of-the-ordinary. Here are eight of our favorites:

1. Alaska Cruise

Many vacationers have found that cruises offer a relatively inviting way to travel with the whole family. Parents can let their kids roam free on many ships, and there's usually a broad range of entertainment and excursion choices aimed at each age group. Often, grandparents can find ways to spend some quality one-on-one time with each grandkid, says Kim Orlando, the founder of travel website TravelingMom.com.



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Christine Tibbetts recommends a cruise to Alaska—she cites the scenery, which can encompass glaciers, whales and brown bears, and the excursions, which include salmon fishing and dog-sledding. Many cruises include viewings of Glacier Bay National Park, known for its striking glacier-carved terrain, roughly 70 species of mammals including grizzlies and lynx, and more than 250 species of birds; and visits to coastal cities like Juneau and Ketchikan. Passengers who are up for a longer excursion away from the ship can visit Denali National Park, home to Mount McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America.

When to go/what you'll pay: The most popular time to go is in the summer, but if you can stand a little nip in the air you can find better deals and fewer crowds in May and September. Seven-day cruises in September onboard Holland America and Royal Caribbean, two of the popular lines for Alaskan cruises, typically start at about \$600 or \$700 per person.

2. Turks & Caicos

Caribbean beach vacations typically offer activities for the active (think snorkeling or parasailing) and the sedentary (sunbathing!), and most major beach destinations have all-inclusive resorts that host entertainment for people of all ages. That, plus the fact that it's relatively close to the U.S., makes the region a draw for multigenerational travelers: In fact, 56% of people who were considering such travel reported an interest in visiting the Caribbean in the next two years, according to the Preferred Hotel Group survey.



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For those thinking about this kind of trip, Marcy Gelber, a travel agent based in Northbrook, Ill., recommends Turks & Caicos. Its beaches are some of the best in the area, she says, and it's typically less crowded than bigger destinations like Jamaica and the Bahamas. You could head to a resort that specializes in family trips: Gelber recommends the all-inclusive Beaches Turks & Caicos, which sits on a 12-mile-long beach, hosts a 45,000-square foot water park, and offers activities for the kids that range from an Xbox play lounge to a teen disco to Sesame Street characters on site. For a more private experience, Gelber suggests renting a house where the family can stay together.

When to go/what you'll pay: The high season for the Caribbean is from roughly mid-December through mid-April, so you can expect to find higher prices then. In November, late April and early May, the temperatures average between about 75 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit, and visitors can avoid the hottest summer temperatures while still scoring off-season deals. Beaches Turks &

Caicos is currently offering deals starting at \$319 per adult per night and \$54 per child per night. There are direct flights from the U.S.; from New York, the flight takes about three hours. Round-trip airfare from New York typically runs about \$450.

3. African Safari

The spectacle of a safari game drive, where tourists can catch a glimpse of Africa’s “Big 5” —elephants, lions, leopards, buffalo and rhinos—can appeal to just about every age group. South Africa is one of the more popular safari destinations for families because it has a better infrastructure than many other African countries, says Lindsey Ueberroth, president of Preferred Hotel Group. Krüger National Park is probably the most popular South African park for safaris, but there are hundreds of other public areas and private game reserves that are less crowded.



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An increasing number of resorts and hotels in safari country cater to multigenerational travel, says Ueberroth. At Gondwana Game Reserve hotel in Mossel Bay, South Africa, for example, there’s year-round Big 5 viewing and five-star cuisine, plus a “junior ranger program” that teaches children about African wildlife and nature, using sightseeing trips and other activities. The hotel also has children’s menus and on-site baby sitting.

When to go/what you’ll pay: Your best bet for a South African safari is between June and September, the Southern Hemisphere’s winter, when it’s not too hot and less likely to be rainy. (The lack of rain also means the trees are less leafy, which can make it easier to spot wildlife.) You can go on safari at a wide range of price points from a few hundred dollars to thousands per person per night. Airfare isn’t typically included, and that can easily add more than \$1,000 per person to the cost. It also adds a couple of days to the trip: The flight from New York to Cape Town typically requires one stop and will take around 19 hours.

4. The Outer Banks

The Outer Banks, a series of long, narrow barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina, grace many publications’ “best beaches” lists, and visitors here can quickly see why. You can drive for long stretches of the two-lane highway that bisects these islands and see only swaying sea oats, dark blue waters and windswept sand dunes. On the east side of the islands, the Atlantic Ocean has a steady but usually manageable surf; on the west side lie the calm waters of a variety of sounds and bays. Fishing is big here, and there are seven coastal golf courses, as well as kid-friendly activities like paddle boarding, horseback riding and private helicopter tours.



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Among the many towns in the Outer Banks where travelers can stay, TravelingMom.com’s Orlando recommends Duck. In this town of just 500 year-round residents, the private beaches are wide and

great for seashell-hunting, and you can rent a large home right on the ocean, so “you basically own your own piece of the beach,” says Orlando.

When to go/what you’ll pay: Summer is the best time to go, especially if the grandkids will want to play in the ocean. Large beachfront homes in Duck run about \$3,000 and up for a week during the summer.

5. Argentina

Philippe Brown, the founder of custom travel company Brown + Hudson, says that he’s seeing more families booking multigenerational trips to Argentina. “Argentina is a great place for families because there’s lots of culture, a diverse landscape and a good infrastructure,” he explains.

Many families opt to start with the culinary, shopping and historic attractions of Buenos Aires. Many visitors check out the Recoleta (Evita Peron is buried in this old cemetery) and grab a steak (an Argentine specialty) at one of the many sidewalk cafes. Families then often switch gears and head to the Patagonia region, where they can fish and boat or ride horses over mountains and lush grassland terrain.



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When to go/what you’ll pay: While Patagonia is best seen in the Southern Hemisphere’s spring and summer months (November through April), the beginning and end of that period are the times it’s least likely to be hot in Buenos Aires. One of the best ways to tackle Argentina is by booking a custom guided tour. A 14-day trek through Argentina, which takes visitors to Buenos Aires, Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego National Park and more, costs \$5,425 per person through travel company Journeys for Families. Round-trip airfare from New York to Buenos Aires—a roughly 10 hour flight—starts at around \$1,000 per person.

6. Glacier National Park

Families that like fresh air and wide-open spaces might gravitate toward Montana’s Glacier National Park, a million-plus acre park with more than 700 miles of hiking trails and 760 lakes. This trip “makes sense for every age group,” says Tibbetts. For the more adventurous, there’s hiking, horseback riding, river rafting and kayaking; for someone seeking something more serene, there are scenic boat cruises across alpine lakes, bird-watching, golfing and fishing.

It’s worth spending a day in the nearby town of Whitefish—a town with an Old West feel, where the main drag is lined with locally owned restaurants and shops—before driving up to the park itself. Tibbetts recommends renting a home that the whole family can stay in: “There are lodges in the park that were built in the early 1920s and ‘30s,” she says. “They’ll bring back memories for the eldest generation.” Families can also charter one of the park’s vintage 1930s red buses for a private tour of the park.



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When to go/what you'll pay: Go between late May and early September when the temperatures are mild. There are dozens of options for accommodations, ranging from single hotel rooms to cabins; rates are very reasonable with many hotel or cabin rooms for under \$100 and even deluxe multi-bedroom accommodations for well under \$1,000 a night.

7. Costa Rica

Jim Kackley, the general manager of Thomson Family Adventures, says that Costa Rica is consistently one of the most-booked multigenerational destinations. It's a popular eco-tourism spot, offering a variety of terrain, including beaches and rain forest, as well as myriad activities that range from wildlife-watching to surfing to zip lining; it also has a reputation for being relatively safe.

Kackley recommends families visit the Tortuguero and Manuel Antonio national parks. In Tortuguero, you can take small boats through canals (an activity popular with older people and small children) or walk along the beaches; visitors can see a variety of exotic wildlife, including endangered sea turtles. Manuel Antonio, which boasts a lush rain forest and sits next to the Pacific Ocean, also caters to both the adventurous and less adventurous. It has a famous canopy zip line and quality surfing (it's a great place for a beginner to learn, says Kackley), and it hosts a variety of resorts, many of which have expansive white-sand beaches.



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When to go/what you'll pay: Costa Rica's dry season runs from December through April, and as you might expect, this tends to also be the priciest time to go, especially toward the Christmas holiday. To save money, go during the rainy season from May to November—it mostly rains in the afternoon, so there will be dry time during which to see the sights. The Arenas Del Mar Beachfront and Rainforest Resort in Manuel Antonio, which employs its own naturalist to guide visitors through the area, gets high ratings on FamilyVacationCritic.com and TripAdvisor.com; rates for an April trip can be found for under \$200 per night. Round-trip flights from New York to San Jose, Costa Rica's capital, start at about \$380 during the rainy season; the flight takes about five hours.

8. Paris

Sixty percent of people who were considering multigenerational travel reported an interest in visiting Europe in the next two years (the highest percentage for an international destination), according to the Preferred Hotel Group survey. One of the most popular European destinations for families is Paris, says Natasha Palmroth, the director of international program development for Road Scholar.

The attractions of Paris—shopping, museums, culinary delights—hardly need listing here. But now there are more family-focused guided trips, to help parents and grandparents entertain kids each day without exhausting themselves (or their patience); there are also more Parisian hotels catering to the entire family, with on-site baby-sitting and kid-friendly activities. One new Road Scholar trip, for example, offers a program that is geared



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for three generations, and includes tailored guided tours through Paris that include visits to big sites like the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower (where there's a behind-the-scenes tour), French language lessons and dinner with a Parisian host family.

When to go/what you'll pay: The best months to visit Paris are April and May or September and October, when the weather is relatively mild, and fewer tourists are in the streets. Most of the new multigenerational travel offerings are clustered in the more crowded summer months. The Road Scholar trip to Paris costs \$2,429 per adult and per child for travel for eight nights in July. Round-trip flights from New York to Paris start at about \$1,100.

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