



For a Great Family Vacation, Take Your Kids on a Cruise

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MIAMI, April 26, 2017 -- As you start making plans for vacation while school is out for the summer, consider that one of the easiest and most affordable options is a cruise. Cruise vacations are a snap to plan, kid-friendly and the perfect way to create family memories.

Fun is a given, which may be why Carnival Cruise Line this year alone will host nearly 800,000 kids, more than any other cruise line and the most ever in the company's history.



Value is part of the allure. Cruise fares include accommodations, activities and meals. Conveniently located homeports in Florida, Texas, California, New York, Washington and several other states mean easy access to ships without having to incur the cost of air travel.

"There are no long road trips involved or dragging luggage from place to place," advises Nancy Schretter, a well-known expert in family travel and managing editor of Family Travel Network (familytravelnetwork.com). "On a cruise you can easily visit several destinations in places such as the Caribbean, Mexican Riviera and Alaska, without major transportation and logistical challenges."

When planning a family cruise vacation, it's a good idea to involve the kids.

"Find out about things they've always wanted to do – or what they've seen their friends brag about on social media – and see how you can factor some of these ideas into your trip," Schretter suggests. "Kids, especially teens and tweens, want to be involved in the planning process."

Happy kids make happy parents and grandparents. Three of the most popular cruise lines – Carnival Cruise Line, Princess Cruises and Holland America Line – have you covered with attractions to keep youngsters entertained – from camp-like activities programs, to opportunities for water play, to movies shown on big screens out on deck, popcorn included.

Complimentary kids' programs in elaborate, well-equipped play spaces and clubs are key to the family harmony formula at sea. In these colorful areas, experienced youth staff keep youngsters well occupied with age-appropriate, camp-like activities so the grownups can get a little R&R.

"Our kids absolutely love the kid programming. They get upset when I come pick them up," says Jacksonville, Fla.-based family blogger Carrie McLaren (carrieontravel.com), who writes about traveling with her 8- and 6-year-old daughters, the youngest with Down syndrome. McLaren has taken her daughters on six Carnival Cruise Line sailings.

With the kids well supervised, McLaren says she and her husband are able to relish alone time – she likes to relax in a lounge chair at the adults-only Serenity retreat; he likes to spend time in the casino. "We come back together and have a free ice cream, or watch movies or play games and have meals," she says.

"Every member of the family gets a vacation on a cruise," adds Schretter.

Complimentary kids programming

Kids are increasingly being recognized as important cruise customers and much time and effort goes into creating programs that will keep them enthralled.

Princess Cruises is in the midst of a multi-million-dollar kids' facilities upgrade. Recently debuted on the Grand Princess and Caribbean Princess, Camp Discovery is a redesigned youth and teen center for ages 3 to 17 – part of the cruise line's partnership with Discovery Consumer Products. The new centers will roll out across the fleet in 2018.

Kids on Princess Cruises ships can newly participate in educational activities inspired by popular TV programming such as Shark Hunter, a *Shark Week*-themed scavenger hunt, and hands-on science challenges developed by Tory Belleci, star of the show *MythBusters*.

On Holland America Line, kids participate in Club HAL activities, with separate hangouts for ages 3 to 12 and 12 to 17. While younger kids might prefer Lego blocks and doing take-home crafts projects, 'tweens and teens may compete in Xbox 360 tournaments and take hip-hop dance lessons. There are also trivia contests and other tie-ins with the TV program BBC Earth.

While cruising in Alaska's beautiful Glacier Bay, kids on Holland America Line and Princess Cruises ships may participate in an activity-based program with the National Parks Service and receive an official Junior Ranger patch and certificate.

Carnival Cruise Line's Camp Ocean, the most popular youth program in the cruise industry, is open to ages 2 to 17 and puts big emphasis on fun.

"We are not school, and we tell our staff that," says program director Caroline Lombardi. "We are vacation, we are fun, we are focused on activities kids love, a place kids really want to come back to."

On Carnival Cruise Line's 25 ships, kids may participate in ocean- and island-related activities, arts & crafts, sports, music, fun science experiments and more.

"We really go for fun activities that bond kids and create memories, just like summer camp," Lombardi says.

Family bonding experiences

Outside the organized activities, cruise ships are a place where families can take time to reconnect – whether giggling together over the presence of a towel animal in your stateroom, splashing around the pool or challenging the kids to a game of basketball, mini-golf or Ping-Pong.

On Princess Cruises ships in Alaska, Puppies in Piazza is a popular activity with adults and kids alike (you get to hold Alaskan huskies!), while stargazing with Discovery at Sea encourages family bonding under the stars. On Holland America Line ships, demonstrations at the Culinary Arts Center appeal to foodies of all ages.

Parents and grandparents can get nostalgic sharing their favorite Dr. Seuss characters with their progeny on Carnival Cruise Line ships – including during The Green Eggs and Ham Breakfast with The Cat in the Hat and Friends. Or show your cool side by joining the kids zipping down waterslides at WaterWorks or doing the thrilling SkyCourse ropes course.

Shore excursions provide another venue for multigenerational family bonding, whether you book a day at the beach or get adventurous with ziplining, snorkeling, whale watching, horseback riding, dogsledding or swimming with dolphins. Schretter suggests researching excursions pre-cruise and letting each family member choose one excursion or activity they really want to do. Bonus: Select excursions have reduced prices for those under age 12.

Family accommodations

Cruise ship accommodations offer pricing for every budget, whether you book one stateroom or a suite or connecting staterooms for more space. Pricing is full-fare for the first two adults and heavily discounted for the third and fourth passenger sharing a cabin. Large multigenerational groups booking several cabins may qualify for discounts and perks.

There are also new accommodations specifically designed for families.

On Holland America Line's latest ship, ms Koningsdam, family ocean-view staterooms sleep up to five and come with the bonus of two bathrooms. Recently debuted on Carnival Cruise Line's new Carnival Vista, and also included next year on Carnival Horizon, Family Harbor staterooms and suites up the ante with such niceties as exclusive access to a family lounge stocked with snacks and games.

Dining

On cruise vacations families actually have the time to dine together. Buffets are open for three meals a day as a casual option, while special kids' menus in the dining room and specialty restaurants make sit-down meals easy and enjoyable, even if you have fussy eaters.

"On our last cruise my youngest had pizza and extra fries every night," says McLaren, noting her older daughter took pride in ordering off the adult menu. "Parents can order from the kids' menu too, so I ordered a kiddie banana split and the girls thought that was hilarious."

Expert Tips for Planning Your Family Cruise Vacation

Here are 10 tips from family travel experts to help you make the most of your cruise vacation experience.

Involve your kids in the cruise planning process. They are likely to have opinions. Kids who help plan trips have an investment in their success.

Encourage the kids to try new things. Whether food or a new activity, memories are also made by trying something new.

Build an hour of quiet time into every day. The temptation is to keep going day and night but everyone needs a break.

Take advantage of room service breakfast. The kids will love it and you get to linger in bed.

Check out the ship's library. You'll find books and games and an Atlas you can use to show the kids where you've been after a day in port.

Set some rules for shipboard behavior. Your kids and teens should be briefed on how you expect them to behave on the ship.

Visit the kids program the first day. It's a good idea to introduce your youngsters to the youth staff and their shipmates. While you're there, pick up the activities schedule.

Set a comfortable pace. There's much to do on the ship and at the ports but that doesn't mean you have to do it all.

Take time to explore the ship. Memorable times with your kids can be as simple finding the smokestack and locating the cameras that show live views on your in-cabin TV.

While you're all together, pose for next year's holiday card.

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