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10 Value

Destinations For Families

Choosing the right destination helps families save big

BY CHANIZE THORPE

Families will find extra value if they use a tour operator for their European vacations.

Making your clients' dollars stretch further is the name of the game when they vacation with family. Choosing the right destinations can make the difference between an easy-going getaway, where pre-planning equals fun in the sun, or a penny-pinching holiday full of tears and tantrums — from adults and children alike.

<< Europe With a Tour Operator

With the euro still presenting a mostly unfavorable exchange rate against the dollar, having an affordable European vacation takes finessing, but it can be done. One of the best ways to save is by using a tour operator.

"We have an advantage because we purchase thousands of air seats, hotel rooms and tourism services each year. So we're buying, on average, at 50 percent less than an average consumer," said Steve Perillo, CEO of Perillo Tours. "Even after the vendors add on their mark-ups, the final cost for us is still lower than the retail rates available to the public."

In addition, with a tour operator, families don't have to worry about the headaches and expenses involved with transportation details, such as car rentals, taxis and train tickets.

"Using a tour operator can eliminate the stress of travel. Not only do you have the comfort of door-to-door travel, travelers can forget about 'mechanics' and spend their time looking, listening, learning and taking pictures of their surroundings," Perillo said.

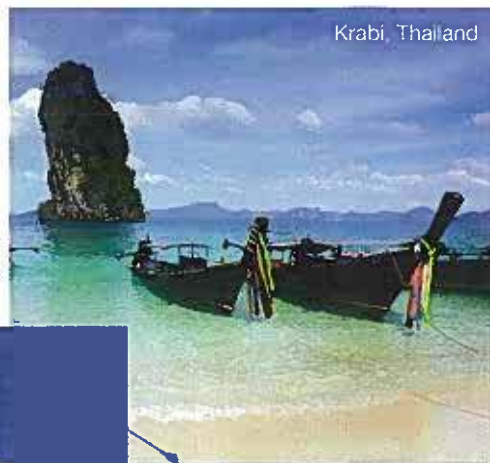
Also, tour operators that specialize in family-friendly European vacations are more likely to offer accommodations in spacious apartments or villas (especially in places like Italy) at rates travelers might pay for a cramped hotel room when handling their own reservations.

3. Thailand

Travelers who want to show their kids the exotic beauty of Asia should consider a trip to Thailand. This exotic country is considered one of the world's most affordable options thanks to a consistently favorable exchange rate, affordable dining and a glut of great hotels with great service.

"Echoing Thailand's nickname, 'Land of Smiles,' the Thai are incredibly friendly and consider children to be honored guests," said Julie Fitzgerald, Asia general manager at G Adventures.

G Adventures offers an affordable family-specific Thailand Family Adventure tour that includes a cooking class, elephant ride and an educational Hill Tribe village visit.



Krabi, Thailand



Glacier National Park

4. National Parks

The 390-plus U.S. National Parks around the country make for a money-manageable getaway, especially if visitors are road-tripping and taking advantage of the inexpensive campsites and lodging available on site. If your clients have any flexibility, lesser crowds can be found at off-peak times in March, October and November. And don't forget to take advantage of the five free park entrance days during 2012.

Yosemite National Park, which receives millions of visitors annually has enough types of accommodations to fit anyone's budget — from campgrounds to the modest Curry Village tent cabins. Day trips and hiking are free at the Grand Canyon, and there's affordable lodging throughout the park and just outside of it.

Waimea Canyon on Kauai



2. Hawaii

With careful planning, families enjoy the islands of aloha without sticking to a budget. To begin with, tell them to consider going off-season — especially during the fall when prices are considerably lower. Also, visitors should take inventory of discounts that they might already have, such as frequent-flyer miles, hotel or car rental points and credit card points. Finally, vacation packages from consolidators such as Pleasant Holidays — which offers affordable getaways to the islands and includes perks like value coupons on dinners and activities as well as free stays and meals for children — are a great option. In addition, the islands have a wide range of budget-friendly, spacious condos, which often include full kitchen, sofas, beds and free parking. Cooking breakfast and lunch helps clients cut costs, so the money they could use on an extra excursion. If your clients go between December and February, they may even be treated to a free show of whales and dolphins playing off shore.

5. Mexico

Heading south of the border has always been an option when it comes to budget-friendly getaways. In particular, the quality of Mexico's many all-inclusive resorts means that families can have a five-star experience while controlling costs. Time it right, and your clients will generally find the best deals from late April all the way through mid-December. During the summer months, there should be "kids stay and eat free" deals. Flights are cheaper with low-cost carriers such as Air Tran, Spirit and JetBlue, which are competing with major airlines. So it's always a good idea to check out deals and packages from wholesale operators.