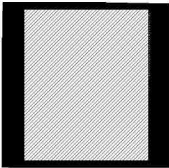


Families will find extra value if they use a tour operator for their European vacations.



# Top 10 Value Destinations For Families

Choosing the right destination helps families save big

BY CHANIZE THORPE

**M**aking 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.

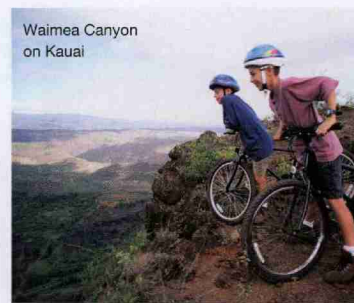


Glacier National Park

## 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.



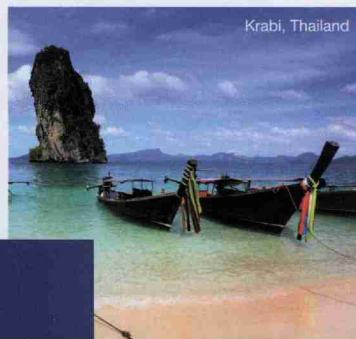
Waimea Canyon on Kauai

## 2. Hawaii

With careful planning, families can enjoy the islands of aloha while sticking to a budget. To begin with, tell clients 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 kitchens, sofas and free parking. Cooking breakfast and lunch helps clients cut costs, saving money they could use on an extra excursion. If your clients go between December and April, they may even be treated to a free show of whales and dolphins playing off shore.

## 5. Mexico

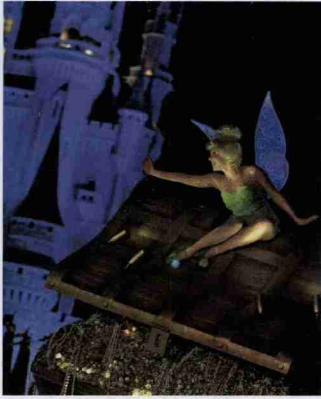
Heading south of the border has always been an option when it comes to budget-friendly getaways. In particular, the quality of Mexico's many all-inclusive resorts means that families can have a five-star experience while controlling costs. Time it right, and your clients will generally find the best 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. And it's always a good idea to check out discount packages from wholesale operators.



Krabi, Thailand

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feature: value destinations



## 6. A Disney Package

"Budget" is not usually a word associated with "The Happiest Place on Earth." However a Disney vacation can be made affordable with some strategic planning. For instance, purchasing a Disneyland package that includes accommodations at an off-property hotel in Orange County is a money-saver, and when guests stay at local "Good Neighbor Hotels," they can buy special Disneyland passes as well.

In addition to using the services of a travel agent, Leigh Caldwell, of the website ThemeParkMom.com, offers this advice for families going to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla.: "Booking a Walt Disney World package and staying on-property can actually be the cheapest way to vacation. The 'value resorts,' including Pop Century and the new Art of Animation Resort opening this May, start at \$82 per night, around the same price as a moderate-level, off-property hotel."



## 7. Vacation Home Rentals

Extended, multigenerational and multi-family vacations continue to be a popular travel trend. Consider the math: If more than three families are traveling together, a vacation home or villa rental is often cheaper and more comfortable than multiple rooms. Vacation homes are a popular option especially in the Caribbean and Florida where travelers can find multi-room properties with plenty of space, pools and kitchens. Villa rental agents can match families with varying budgets to the right properties. Companies such as Villas of Distinction and Wimco have listings throughout the Caribbean, and websites such as HomeAway.com and VRBO.com have listings as well.



## 8. Jamaica

Out of all the Caribbean islands, Jamaica is a great choice for the cost-conscious. There are many flights to the Montego Bay airport from a host of cities around the country, so airfare is generally more affordable than smaller islands. Plus, there's a hefty inventory of all-inclusive resorts, including Beaches, Breezes, FDR and Jewel that make the island optimum for a family vacation. Most resorts have several restaurants on site with a variety of cuisine. Also, many activities are included in the rate, such as snorkeling and even scuba diving. Don't forget the on-site kids' clubs and teen centers, which provide entertainment for young guests at no extra charge.



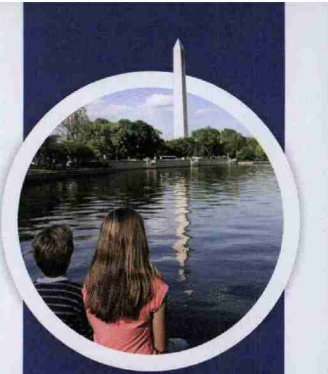
## 9. An Alaska Cruise

Cruising has long been a favorite option for families, especially those who appreciate the nearly all-inclusive structure. Add in the opportunity to visit multiple destinations while unpacking just once — and it's an easy sell. Plus, these days, with so many ports around the country, driving to a ship is easier than ever, saving on airfare. One of the most family-friendly trips is an Alaskan cruise.

"Alaska cruises are a fun and educational way to spend time with your family," said Amie Miller, owner of The Miller Travel Agency in Pennsylvania's Susquehanna Valley. "A family of four on a budget, departing from Seattle usually means a lower cruise cost and lower airfare from most U.S. cities."

## Resources

**HomeAway** ([www.homeaway.com](http://www.homeaway.com)); **National Park Reservations** ([www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)); **Theme Park Mom** ([www.theme-parkmom.com](http://www.theme-parkmom.com)); **Vacation Rentals By Owner (VRBO)** ([www.vrbo.com](http://www.vrbo.com)); **Villas of Distinction** ([www.villasofdistinction.com](http://www.villasofdistinction.com)); **Wimco Villas & Hotels** ([www.wimco.com](http://www.wimco.com))



## 10.

### Washington, D.C.

The nation's capital offers a patriotic vacation with lots of activities available on the cheap. Start with the 19 free Smithsonian Museums and galleries as well as the National Zoo and your clients have already saved plenty in entrance fees. Add the many monuments, memorials and historic buildings, and they will find that they haven't even opened their wallets yet. Know that at peak times — cherry blossom season and the summer — hotel room rates soar. Let clients know that the region's inexpensive and efficient Metro subway system, which even goes to Reagan National Airport, is best during the week. Weekends are more favorable for driving in D.C., due to more lenient parking regulations. Also, staying in a hotel that offers free breakfast just outside of D.C. in Virginia or Maryland can save hundreds of dollars as well, and clients can even take the 30-minute Metro ride into the city for the day.

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