

 BEST  
FAMILY  
REUNIONS**Mohonk Mountain House,  
New Paltz, N.Y.**

Built in 1869, this sprawling 259-room lodge is nestled into the Hudson Valley just 90 minutes north of New York City. There's golf, mountain biking, guided hikes and an eco-friendly green-roof garden terrace at the spa, where you can take yoga, Qi Gong or meditation classes. The kid's programs offer activities like rock climbing, hiking, tennis clinics and fossil identification hunts. There is also an astonishing variety of theme week and weekend programs throughout the year, on topics ranging from knitting to yoga, birding, photography, music, gardening and local dining. And for family reunions or big groups booking six or more rooms, the resort offers personalized T-shirts for each guest and one complimentary room upgrade. Victorian rooms feature wood-burning fireplaces and balconies. Smaller family adventure packages include a private campfire with s'mores and a family geo-cache excursion. Summer rates from \$949 per night, all-inclusive for a family of four. [mohonk.com](http://mohonk.com)







*the* 12

# BEST

## Family Resorts

By Rebecca Strauss

Today's family resorts need more than a swimming pool and a game room with a few Xbox 360s to impress modern moms and dads – and kids. In this tight economy, resorts across the country are working hard to attract discerning parents – pony rides or wakeboarding lessons, anyone? Travel experts agree these 12 resorts offer the perfect package for both kids and adults – plenty of together time as well as adult amenities like farm-to-table meals, cocktail hour and spa classes galore.





## One-stop Getaways

### BEST INDOOR WATERPARK

#### Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

Build an onsite, indoor waterpark and they will come. Better yet, include admission to the waterpark with a resort stay. The Kalahari Resort draws families year-round with 125,000-square-feet of tube rides, a lazy river, a surfrider, a hot tub with an 83-person capacity, a wave pool and the Mud Hut swim-up bar for adults. For the smallest swimmers there's Tiko's Watering Hole, a 5,000-square-foot play area, featuring a miniature lazy river. And from Memorial Day to Labor Day there's also a 77,000-square-foot outdoor waterpark with more slides, a play area and another lazy river. For non-swimmers, there's a 100,000-square-foot theme park with a six-story Ferris wheel, a ropes course, mini-golf, 24 bowling lanes and a two-story elevated go kart track. If mom and dad are seeking more mature fun, the Spa Kalahari and Salon offers treatments from couple's massages to teen facials – plus mini mani/pedis and massages for the kids. Standard room rates run from \$199 to \$249. [kalahariresorts.com/wi](http://kalahariresorts.com/wi)





BEST  
BEACH  
RESORT

Disney's Vero Beach Resort,  
Vero Beach, Fla.

Disney's not the first name in family entertainment for nothing. About two hours from the mother ship in Orlando, Disney's Vero Beach Resort sits on Florida's east-central Treasure coast, and offers families a beach vacation with all the Disney panache. There are plenty of free activities for the family, like "unbirthday" parties (no parents allowed) with cupcakes, musical chairs and a pinata, an afternoon treasure hunt and crafts classes where kids design a shark-tooth necklace. The Disney Discovery Club, a three-hour supervised program for kids ages 4 to 12 costs \$35; evening programs include dinner. From mid-June to October be sure to check out the Turtle Troop, a guided excursion for families to see nesting sea turtles along the beach. And just to be sure the kids get their Disney fix, characters like Goofy and Donald make a regular appearance at breakfast on Saturdays. Rooms range from studios to beach cottages that sleep 12; multi-room accommodations feature a washer and dryer. Rates start at \$277 per night for a deluxe studio. [disneybeachresorts.com/vero-beach-resort](http://disneybeachresorts.com/vero-beach-resort)







BEST  
TIME  
TRAVEL

### Mission Point Resort, Mackinac Island, Mich.

Parents of a certain age may remember the cheesy 1980 movie *Somewhere in Time* starring Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour, and set on Mackinac Island, circa 1912. It's not hard to imagine that you've traveled back in time too on this northern Michigan, car-free island. Mission Point Resort sits on 15 well-manicured acres on the eastern side of town and offers unique activities for the entire family like the Haunts of Mackinac Haunted History Tours: The Mission Point Tour (\$12 per person) and the longer and spookier Dead of Night Tour (\$20 per person). If that's all too much for little ones, the kids' club activities include field trips to the island's butterfly house and Fort Mackinac, built by the British during the Revolutionary War. Cost is \$30 per child for a five-hour session. And for parents who tire of buying kids' meals that go largely uneaten, the cherry on top: kids younger than age 12 eat for free at both The Bistro on The Greens and Round Island Bar & Grill, so keep those chicken tenders coming. Standard room for four: \$209 per night. [missionpoint.com](http://missionpoint.com)







**BEST WESTERN ADVENTURE**

**Latigo Dude Ranch, Kremmling, Colo.**

Named for a strap on a western saddle used to adjust the cinch, the all-inclusive Latigo Dude Ranch will fulfill every family's fantasies of becoming cowboys and cowgirls. Activities naturally center on horseback riding and weeklong stays begin with each member of the family becoming acquainted with their ride for the week, one of 80 horses owned

by the ranch. Early mornings are spent on mountain hikes or fly fishing, with the rest of the day devoted to riding. Kids older than age 11 can accompany their parents on the High Meadow Overnight ride; kids ages 6 to 10 take a shorter overnight camping trip of their own on the Ute Scouts trip. Those unacquainted with horses get plenty of instruction in the children's program, which

is broken up by ages. Instruction is available for adults as well. Those who know their way around a horse have an opportunity to do some cowboy work by sorting and penning cattle. Rounding out the week are activities like square dancing, hayrides and river rafting. All-inclusive rates for a seven-night stay, \$2,750; kids ages 6 to 13, \$2,050, and ages 3 to 5, \$1,575. [latigotrails.com](http://latigotrails.com)



**The Tyler Place Family Resort, Highgate Springs, Vt.**

Families have been coming to the all-inclusive Tyler Place Family Resort for generations and it's easy to see why. The resort occupies 165 green acres on Lake Champlain, much of it wooded and filled with hiking and biking paths. Rustic but comfortable rooms and cottages all feature separate bedrooms for kids, some with bunk beds. Organized kids' clubs are broken into nine different groups, from newborns and toddlers to teens ages 13 to 15. Younger kids participate in scavenger hunts, go banana boating, have movie nights and pajama parties. Older children go wakeboarding, tubing, windsurfing and mountain biking – all kids get their own bikes for the duration of their stay. Adults are well cared for, too, with activities of their own like Pilates, wine tasting, painting classes and yoga. And there's a strict adults-only policy for the 5:30 cocktail hour and dinner. Don't worry; the kids are at a supervised pool party. Adults from \$207 per person per night; children \$127. [tylerplace.com](http://tylerplace.com)

**BEST KIDS' CLUBS**







BEST TROPICAL ESCAPE

**Grand Hyatt Kauai, Kauai, Hawaii**

If a tropical getaway is on tap this year, families won't do better than the lush Grand Hyatt Kauai. Occupying 50 acres on Keonelo Bay, there's a Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed 18-hole golf course, pool with waterfalls, a 150-foot waterslide, a saltwater lagoon and complimentary scuba lessons. But what really sets this resort apart is an admirable attention to native Hawaiian culture. Guest rooms feature carved headboards portraying the native hapu'u fern used by ancient Hawaiians for pillows and bedding. There's a twice-weekly (Sundays and Thursdays) luau featuring fire dancing and traditional Hawaiian songs and

food. Kids ages 3 to 12 attending Camp Hyatt can experience Hawaiian culture with activities such as lei making, hula lessons and palm frond weaving. They'll also learn about area wildlife, like the endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal. A full day is \$80 per child; a half-day is \$60, including lunch. And each day at 10 a.m. some of the four resident parrots are on hand, literally, for a naturalist-led "Parrot Talk" program, where kids learn about the intelligent birds' personalities and lives at the resort. The brave are encouraged to perch a parrot on their arm. And if you feel like giving back, the Enrich volunteer program offers guests a chance to get involved in monthly beach cleanups with the

Surfrider Foundation or hands-on forest restoration work in Koke'e State Park. A standard room for four starts at \$480 per night. [grandhyattkauai.com](http://grandhyattkauai.com).



**Arizona Grand Resort, Phoenix, Ariz.**

Though it bills itself as a premiere meeting hotel, the 640-room, all-suite Arizona Grand Resort offers more than enough diversions to keep the whole family busy, even if mom or dad is stuck on a conference call. Kids will want to spend most of their time at the onsite seven-acre Oasis water park, which features three eight-story waterslides, a wave pool and lazy river among other watery fun. Mom and dad can hit the 18-hole, par-71 Arizona Grand golf course or go for a family hike on 60 miles of trails in the adjacent 17,000-acre South Mountain Preserve. Kids' club activities are available for ages 5 to 12. Half-day sessions with lunch are \$30; full days are \$45. Dinner is served at the Rustler's Rooste, a steakhouse with killer mountain views, where you'll dine on mesquite-grilled beef while being entertained by cowboy poetry and live country music. A standard room for four starts at \$120 per night. [arizonagrandresort.com](http://arizonagrandresort.com).

BEST FOR WORK/PLAY







**BEST FOR THRILLS**

**Circus Circus, Las Vegas, Nev.**

Vegas may not pop to mind for a family vacation, but it will if you're staying at Circus Circus. It's a stalwart on the north Strip, occupying the same 68 acres since 1968; many of the 3,700 rooms underwent renovation in 2011 adding flat-screen TVs and Wi-Fi. Free circus acts like trapeze artists, daredevil roller skaters, acrobats and circus clowns begin daily at 11:10 a.m. in the center stage of the Carnival Midway. The Midway itself is filled with hundreds of carnival games – save room in the suitcase for the giant teddy bear you'll win on the ring toss. Also onsite is the Adventuredome Theme Park, five acres of indoor rides including the Canyonblaster double-loop rollercoaster. For more sedate activities, there are "4-D" movies that also feature live effects. All-day passes to the park are \$16.95 if you're less than 48 inches tall, \$27.95 if you're above 48 inches. And while the kids are busy riding the Sling Shot into the sky, mom and dad can try winning more than that teddy bear at the casino. Standard rooms for four start at \$54 a night. [circuscircus.com](http://circuscircus.com)



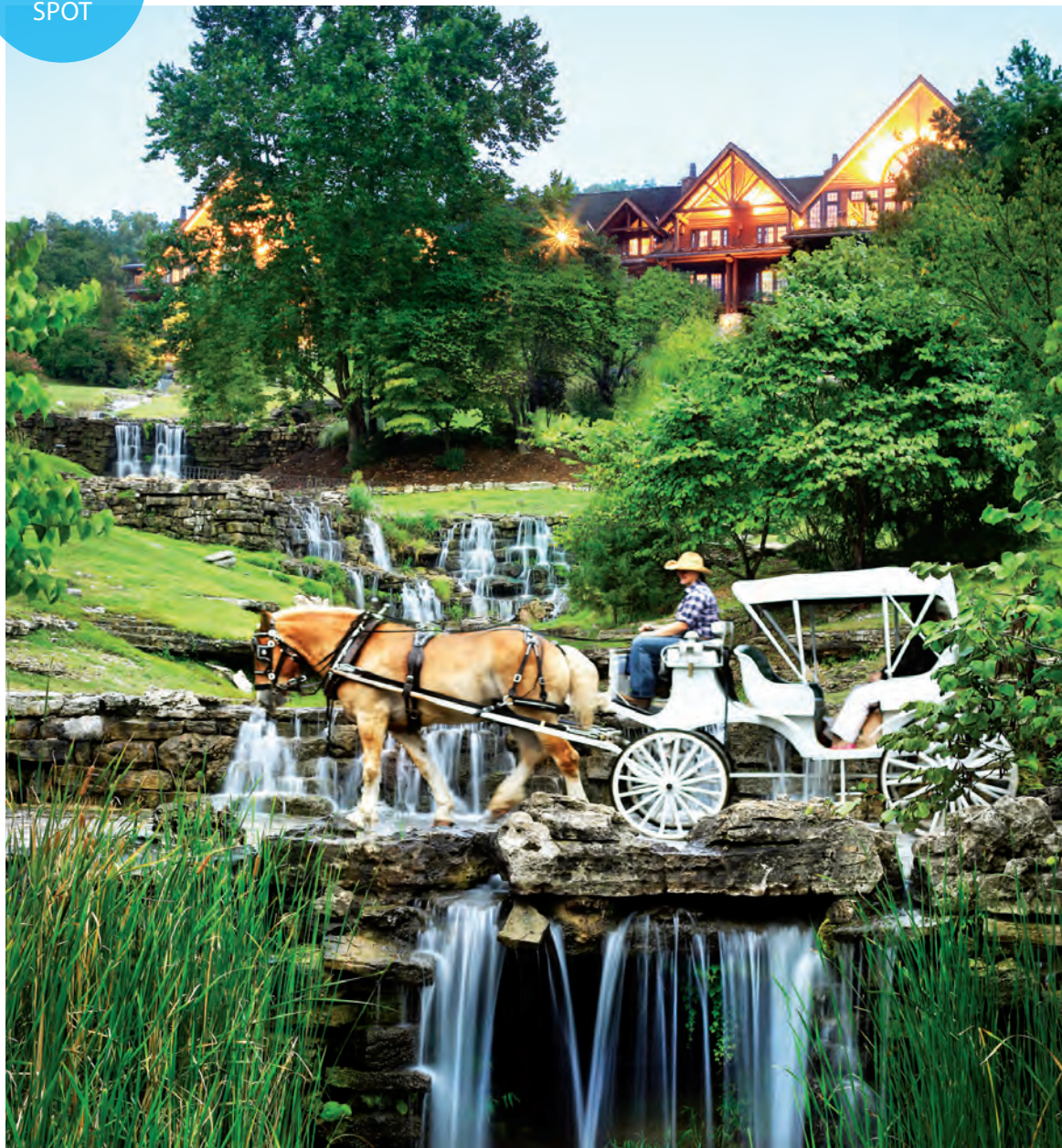


## One-stop Getaways

### Big Cedar Lodge, Branson, Mo.

Owned by outdoor leader Bass Pro Shop and set on 800 wooded acres overlooking the Ozarks' prime fishing spot, Table Rock Lake, the emphasis at Big Cedar Lodge is firmly on nature. Families can go out on the water by renting everything from wave runners to pontoons or can go analog by taking a complimentary canoe or paddleboat for a spin. On land, the stables offer 30-minute horse-drawn carriage rides and pony rides for kids ages 10 and younger. Hour-long campfire wagon tours take place on an antique hitch wagon and include s'mores, sasparilla and a singing cowboy. The onsite kids' club offers children ages 4 to 12 three-hour sessions introducing them to outdoor activities with an eye toward environmental awareness. Participants in the Kid's Adventure Club get a backpack containing a compass and a hat for collecting different adventure pins like plant and animal identification, archery and BB gun safety and training, compass navigation and fire building. The Kid's Adventure House offers activities like canoeing and paddle skills, stargazing and rock and fossil identification. A standard room for four starts at \$289 per night. [big-cedar.com](http://big-cedar.com).

BEST  
NATURE  
SPOT





## Out 'n' About Treehouse Resort, Takilma, Ore.

If you didn't get enough Swiss Family Robinson as a kid, this fantastical treehouse resort will make your own childhood tree house jealous. Nestled into branches and treetops are 14 tree-house rooms, plus one ground-floor cabin for the acrophobic. The Swiss Family treehouse features a separate kid's room, connected to the adult room by swinging bridge. The Treezebo and Forestreet rooms are each over 35 feet from above ground and guests must climb the Mountain View Treeway, a high-rise walkway featuring 45-foot and 90-foot suspension bridges and a series of ladders. If the kids even want to leave the room, there's an over a mile-long cable zipline course (\$45) and a full slate of activities on tap at the Treehouse Institute. There are classes on treehouse construction, horseback riding, ecology of the nearby Siskiyou Forest, and Manure 101 through 104, where interested students can learn to identify different forest scat and learn proper techniques for composting. Those classes are offered free. Rates from \$140 per night for four. [treehouses.com](http://treehouses.com)

MOST  
TREE-  
MENDOUS  
CAMP



BEST  
MOUNTAIN  
RETREAT



## Earthshine Discovery Center, Lake Toxaway, N.C.

The family that plays together stays together is the ethos at Earthshine Mountain Lodge on the edge of the Pisgah National Forest in far western North Carolina. Travel back to the 1840s in the morning, when families can press apple cider, apprentice at a blacksmith's shop or spin wool in the living history pioneer village. Or spend the

morning grinding corn, making clay beads or learning to throw a tomahawk with the Cherokee in the Cherokee village. After a homemade lunch (all the food is made from scratch), families head back out to tackle the adventure course with elements like the Puzzle Platform of Doom, where participants navigate a series of posts carrying a 2x4. Kids ages 10 and older can zipline on a 400-foot tandem run or tackle the high ropes course.

And families can mine for gems on the Crystal Creek hike. After dinner it's time for campfire stories and mountain music. The intimate lodge has only 13 rooms, so book far in advance; the all-inclusive option includes all food and the activities mentioned here. For \$165 a night per person for adults, \$105 for kids ages 10 to 17 and \$85 for ages 6 to 9. Tots younger than age 5 are \$20 a night. [earthshinediscovery.com](http://earthshinediscovery.com).

