# Best family vacation spots: Try these 15 getaways for summer fun

**Josh Roberts** FamilyVacationist.com

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If there's one thing everyone can agree on, it's that summer is made for vacations. For families, the long sunny days and cool summer nights offer a special kind of freedom from the daily grind of school and work schedules. If you're on the hunt for summer vacation ideas recommended by real travelers, consider one of these trip ideas in the U.S. or abroad.

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Gullfoss in Iceland. *Josh Roberts*

## 1. Iceland

## A cool summer vacation destination for escaping the heat

"Just when I feel like I'm about to melt, I plan a trip to a cooler climate—and Iceland is a recent favorite summer family destination," says travel writer and toddler mom Kayla Voigt. With up to 22 hours of daylight in the summer and daytime temperatures hovering between 40 and 60 degrees, you can play outside for hours without longing for AC in Iceland.

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Voigt adds, "On the Ring Road, you'll find jaw-dropping waterfalls, black sand beaches, and well-maintained hiking trails perfect for little legs. While Thingvellir National Park and the Golden Circle get all the hype (for good reason—it's gorgeous), head to the northern capital, Akureyri, for the best whale watching all year." Another bonus: Iceland is just a short hop from the East Coast with flights in the four to five-hour range, so it's a European vacation without the long transatlantic flight.

Aerial view of theme parks and mountains in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. *Pigeon Forge Tourism Bureau*

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## 2. Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

## Theme parks and Mother Nature at your doorstep

Travel writer and mother of four Jamie Davis Smith recommends Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, for summer fun. "Pigeon Forge is a rare town that has it all. It is full of kitsch, thrills, and natural beauty—the town is a great jumping-off point for adventurers interested in exploring the nearby Great Smoky Mountains National Park—and it's also home to Dollywood, so it's a destination that appeals to thrill-seekers and country music fans alike with a world-class amusement park." Families also love The Island at Pigeon Forge for its carnival-like atmosphere and two Margaritaville hotels.

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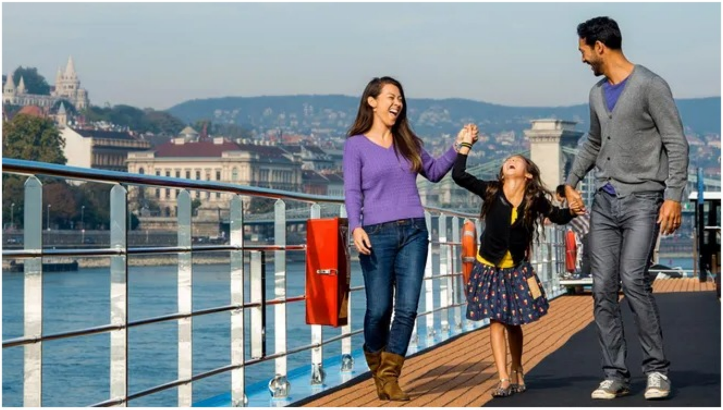

Danube River Cruise with Adventures by Disney. *Courtesy Of Adventures By Disney*

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## 3. Explore Europe by river or fjord with Disney

## European adventures with a Disney twist

"I'm a seasoned traveler who knows how intense a trip to Europe can be, so an Adventures by Disney Danube River cruise traveling to eight cities and four countries turned out to be just the right speed for our two kids (ages four and eight)," says FamilyVacationist contributor Cynthia Drake. "We had a team of Adventure Guides who ensured both the kids and adults were getting the most out of the trip (including taking candid family photos along the way), whether we were making strudel and listening to a string concert at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, or roaming the markets in Budapest."

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Father of two Dave Parfitt, a frequent FamilyVacationist contributor, also recommends a Disney vacation experience. "Our Disney Cruise Line sailing along the Norwegian coast blended scenic beauty, cultural immersion, and Disney fun. We sailed from Copenhagen, Denmark aboard the Disney Magic through Norway's granite-walled fjords lush with cascading waterfalls," he shares.

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"UNESCO World Heritage Sites gave insight into Scandinavia's cultural and natural history with the colorful Bryggen wooden market and sublime Geirangerfjord. On excursions, we carb-loaded on buttery, heart-shaped waffles topped with cream and berries. After a day exploring Norwegian sites, Disney friends welcomed us on board the ship to enjoy an evening of dinner and Broadway-style shows before heading to bed with chocolates upon our pillows."

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Alaska Railroad. *Alaska Railroad*

# 4. See America’s beauty by rail or road trip

## The freedom to roam in some of the most beautiful places in the U.S.A.

Parfitt also recommends a rail journey across Alaska as a memorable summer vacation experience. “Alaska Railroad’s Coastal Classic line chugged us from Anchorage to Seward through coastlines and forests,” he says. In Seward, his family played with comical otters and puffins at the Alaska SeaLife Center before cruising through Kenai Fjords National Park. Afterwards, the Alaska Railroad headed north back to Anchorage and further to Denali and Fairbanks.

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“We couldn’t stop laughing with our high school tour guide narrators while enjoying GoldStar service with drinks and dining. Time passed quickly in our glass-domed cars gazing at salmon-packed streams, eagles overhead, moose, and bears in the woods.”

The classic National Park Grand Circle Tour, especially when done in an RV, is another summer tradition recommended by Parfitt. "We picked up our rental RV in Las Vegas, stuffed in the kids, food, and gear, and headed to Utah’s red rock canyons,” he shares. The RV gives you the freedom to go wherever and see whatever you want.

Examples? "Enjoying alpine wildflowers in Cedar Breaks National Monument on our way to Bryce Canyon. Hiking Navajo Loop and Queen’s Garden trails while deer strolled past our Bryce RV campsite. Admiring the Grand Canyon’s view from the North Rim’s Bright Angel Point before heading right back where we started."

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## 5. Cancun, Mexico

## A memorable spot for multigenerational summer vacations

Summer may bring steamy temperatures to Cancun, Mexico, but June through mid-September is also whale shark season, making this tropical destination a great option for multigenerational summer vacations. "After a July trip to the Yucatan, 12 of us in my extended family—ages 10 to 68—agreed that snorkeling in the deep ocean with the spotted gentle giants was our best-ever vacation adventure," says FamilyVacationist contributor Kara Williams.

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White-sand beaches and the turquoise Caribbean sea beckon, but also consider swimming in cenotes and touring Maya ruins. Make your home base Finest Playa Mujeres, just north of Cancun. The all-inclusive oceanfront resort welcomes families with supplied baby gear, toddler water slides, and a nifty kids' club pool with a climbing dome.

Asheville has mountain scenery and plenty of activities. *ExploreAsheville.com*

## 6. Asheville, North Carolina

### A closer-to-home summer vacation for extended families

Asheville is another summer getaway spot with broad multigenerational appeal, says FamilyVacationist's Editor-at-Large Beth Luberecki. "Start with all the postcard-worthy mountain scenery, which can easily be taken in from overlooks along the Blue Ridge Parkway or explored in a more active way from trails that lead to waterfalls and scenic vistas," she says.

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The food and beer scene in Asheville is just as impressive as the views, and the whole family will be wowed by the opulence of The Biltmore Estate (which offers a kids' audio guide narrated by the Vanderbilts' dog). Stay at the Village Hotel at the Biltmore Estate, where you can walk to Antler Hill Village and the Biltmore's winery for a complimentary tasting.

## 7. Freeport, Maine

### A classic summer vacation with Downeast charm

Maine and summertime go together like fireworks and the Fourth of July. Freeport, Maine, may be known as the home of L.L. Bean's flagship store, but this New England town offers families much more. FamilyVacationist contributor Allison Tibaldi recommends hiking at scenic Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park, going the DIY route to make a scented candle at Sea Love, and taking a behind-the-scenes tour at family-owned Wilbur's of Maine to see how they make classic Maine confections.

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"When it's time for dinner, the seafood at the Freeport Oyster Bar is so fresh you can still taste the brine," shares Tibaldi. "My kids love the indoor swimming pool at the Hilton Garden Inn Freeport Downtown, a comfortable hotel located in the heart of town."

Whidbey Island is one of the most scenic islands in the United States. *Embrace Whidbey And Camano Island*

## 8. Whidbey and Camano Islands, Washington

## With or without kids, a can't-miss summer vacation in the Pacific Northwest

Washington's Whidbey and Camano Islands are a perfect summertime fit for families and couples alike. "I love visiting Whidbey and Camano Islands in the summer because there's a fun energy in the air," says FamilyVacationist contributor Jean Chen Smith, specifically citing the many beautiful parks for hiking and biking. And if you love being on the water, you can also rent a kayak or a canoe.

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When it comes to vacation accommodations, rental properties are the way to go here. “I highly recommend a Vacasa vacation rental like the Spyglass Beach House in Freeland or the unique circular home Whidbey Moon Landing in Coupeville. Not only are the houses great for families with kids, they’re spacious for couples looking for more privacy. Other perks of vacation rentals are fully-equipped kitchens and washer and dryers. Some even have fenced backyards.”

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## 9. Joshua Tree National Park, California

## A less-crowded national park in the summer? Sign us up!

If you’re a fan of the outdoors, Chen Smith also recommends California’s Joshua Tree National Park for its diverse landscapes and many hiking trails. “It’s an excellent summer vacation destination because unlike many of the other national parks, it never seems to get overwhelmingly crowded.” Families traveling with younger kids may be especially drawn to the park’s trees because they bear a resemblance to those in Dr. Seuss’ "The Lorax."

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Chen Smith’s family enjoys staying at AutoCamp Joshua Tree for its easy access to the park and glamping experience at a reasonable rate. Accommodations include refurbished airstreams and cozy cabins with all the modern comforts, such as spa-inspired showers, comfy sitting areas, and a compact kitchenette. Some even have outdoor showers.

## 10. St. Augustine, Florida

## A family-friendly summer beach vacation

"If you love the beach and American history, St. Augustine is the ideal summer vacation destination," shares FamilyVacationist contributor Megan duBois. "The sandy shores are family-friendly with lifeguards in the warmer months and even offer the ability to drive a car onto the beach, which is a rarity in the United States."

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St. Augustine’s historic downtown district is also loaded with restaurants, shops, and entertainment. "One of my recent discoveries is the St. Augustine Pirate and Treasure Museum, where a real pirate flag, treasure, and more are showcased in interactive exhibits."

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## 11. Bethany Beach, Delaware

## Summer beach vacation without the crowds

If the Florida beach crowds aren't your cup of tea, how does a beach town with more manageable crowds sound? “I’ve never had trouble finding a spot on the beach when visiting Bethany Beach, Delaware, even during peak travel season,” shares FamilyVacationist’s theme park reporter Carly Neil. “I’ve been with multiple generations, ranging from grandparents to toddlers, and there truly is something for all ages.”

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Bethany Beach is filled with shops and restaurants that keep everyone, even non-beachgoers, happy. You’re a short drive from Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, Rehoboth Beach, and Ocean City, Maryland, for fun day trips. Renting a vacation house is the way to go at Bethany Beach, Neil advises.

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## 12. Tenerife, Spain

## A sun-soaked summer family vacation with European flair

"Tenerife is a Spanish Canary Island that will forever be one of my family’s favorite vacation destinations," says FamilyVacationist contributor and mom of two Cortney Fries, who was drawn there by the black and gold sand beaches, sunshine and warm weather, picturesque Mount Teide, and five-star hotels.

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But, she adds, "The incredible Siam Park and jovial guides who took us kayaking in the crystal-clear waters by Los Gigantes captured our hearts. We still talk about eating salty, wrinkled potatoes with mojo sauce by the ocean while listening to live guitar."

Consider a trip to Wisconsin's capital. *Sharon Vanorny/Destination Madison*

## 13. Madison, Wisconsin

### Small city, big charms for a kid-free summer break

If you're looking for a summer break without the kids, Fries recommends Wisconsin's state capital. "It's a college town and a pretty hip place to visit, especially in summer. I loved destressing at KOSA Ayurvedic spa with a pal and experiencing some of their unique services based on 5,000-year-old wellness principles. Then my friend and I shared a million laughs attempting to learn log rolling, a lumberjack sport where you try to balance on a floating log in the lake."

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## 14. Charleston, South Carolina

### Southern charm in the summertime

With its coastal charm, beautiful architecture, and rich history, Charleston is the perfect summer vacation destination for couples or families, says FamilyVacationist's Gwen Pratesi. The Holy City also has one of the top culinary scenes in the country with plenty of locally caught seafood, fresh oysters, and regional ingredients on many menus.

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"I like to stay in the center of the historic district at The Charleston Place, one of the best properties in the city," Pratesi shares. "Sullivan's Island Beach, a three-mile-long barrier island, is an ideal getaway for the day. The small beach locale, just nine miles from town, features pristine beaches, water sports, and casual eateries."

## 15. Island-hopping in Tahiti

### The ultimate summer vacation for couples

Pratesi also recommends a Tahiti cruise as the ultimate island-hopping summer trip for couples. "It's one of the most romantic trips you can take as a couple. Windstar has been sailing in French Polynesia for 36 years, and the line offers itineraries from seven to 21 days in length, with stops in the picturesque islands of Bora Bora, Moorea, and Fakarava."

**VACATION IN PARADISE:** Bora Bora with kids? These French Polynesia family resorts belong on your vacation bucket list

You can even book a longer itinerary that includes the remote Marquesas Islands, a volcanic archipelago 740 miles northeast of Tahiti. These mystical islands were once home to Thor Heyerdahl, the adventurer who led the Kon-Tiki and Ra expeditions. You'll also find ancient sacred tiki statues—some of the largest in the Pacific—and the former home of French artist Paul Gauguin on Hiva Oa.

Dreaming of summer vacation? These 15 trip ideas will please the whole family originally appeared on FamilyVacationist.com.

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