

# FAMILY TRAVEL —

Thinking Outside the Box



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One are the days when the one time the family hits the road is to make the long road trip to grandma's and calls it a day. Today's families are curious, and although many want to visit theme parks as a family, they also want to see the treasures that Italy holds, they want to cruise Alaska and be awed by its glaciers, they want to swim in a turquoise ocean in the Caribbean or the South Pacific, for that matter, they want to visit museums in their own backyard. They want to explore the world, and they are looking to you to navigate them because families are not made from the same mold—today's family comes in all shapes and sizes. With that in mind, for this **2023 Family Travel Trends Report**—a complement to the **Family Travel Trends Survey 2023** conducted on **recommend.com** as well as the **Family Travel: Tips to Increase Bookings** webinar—we reached out to experts in this travel segment to gain insight into what family travel looks like in 2023 and beyond. We wanted to not only report on what's trending,

we also wanted to give you a few ideas for trip inspo around the world. Keep in mind, the impact you have on making someone's dream come true can't be overstated. The vacations you create are born from your clients' dreams and live with them for the rest of their lives...forever cherished.

In this trends report, you'll also find the family travel trends survey data, which points out that most of your peers are optimistic about bookings in 2023 and into 2024. And even though families aren't heading to grandma's, that certainly doesn't mean they aren't traveling with her and grandpa. Multi-gen family travel has soared to new heights following the pandemic, with Lauren Doyle, president and sr. travel advisor of **The Travel Mechanic**, noting that, "People are wanting to take grandparents along to celebrate and make those memories that will be cherished. We have seen multigenerational trips to Japan, Greece, Italy." Yes, in 2023, it's about thinking outside the proverbial family travel box.



## What's Moving the Needle Among Family Travelers

In fact, adds Doyle, "Families are ready to take that family bucket list trip," with Carolyn Wepler, sr. v.p. for **Goway Travel**, adding that, "We have seen a big trend of multi-gen family trips including grandchildren and grandparents traveling together to bucket list destinations such as Egypt, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Finland, Italy and more. It's all about the experiences they can share together no matter the age, be it an animal encounter, a walking tour designed to engage young children in local cultures, cooking classes where the family prepares the meal with a local chef and then all dine together, chartering a private boat for the day to explore coastal regions including swim stops, remote local restaurants and cave experiences. Accommodation is key, with villas, and apartment-style units being popular choices

to allow for downtime for family to regroup and relax."

As Milton Segarra, COO for **Discover The Palm Beaches**, notes, "Despite the concern of rising prices, the trends we follow all insist that American travelers are not willing to forgo their family vacations. Families would rather find less expensive options, travel closer to home, or cut travel spending in other areas like dining, entertainment and shopping to allow them to fit a trip into their budget. We are also seeing that many American travelers cite visiting friends and family as a priority for their leisure trips."

Adds Sheldon Suga, v.p. managing director for **Hawks Cay Resort**, "Families traveling today want convenience and a turn-key experience so they can maximize their vacation experience. Whether it's

offering onsite services or an abundance of food and beverage options that cater to different needs, we are seeing that families want to have plenty of options right at their fingertips."

If you thought that seeking out wide-open spaces for a vacation was just a pandemic trend, think again, says Wendy Swenson, director of marketing for **Alaska Travel Industry Association**. "National and state parks, and wide-open spaces of all kinds, are still really popular with family travelers.... And there are so many ways for families to get out and enjoy them, whether they plan a road trip or camping trip or stay at a wilderness lodge," says Swenson.

And seeking to be out among nature, says Ryan Connolly, co-founder of **Hidden Iceland**,



is exactly what families are requesting when they travel to Iceland. Connolly says that staying in hotels that are Northern Lights-friendly—or hotels that are in the middle of nowhere, with no unnatural light obstructing the view—is increasing in popularity among multi-gen family groups.

“Searching for the Northern Lights in any capacity isn’t a problem for a group of adults willing to get outside in the cold

in the middle of the night each night,” says Connolly, “but that just isn’t something that can be expected of families with young kids. Instead, Hidden Iceland prefers to run multi-day tours that include sleeping in hotels that are Northern Lights friendly.”

Of course, cruising has roared back, and, as Swenson notes, cruise lines are “great at accommodating large family groups.” But don’t just think

large cruise ships. Kristin Karst, **AmaWaterways’** co-owner and executive v.p., tells **Recommend** that “Gen Z is always underestimated. A river cruise can be a soft adventure and it’s extremely attractive to them. We are a floating boutique hotel—they can be in their spacious cabin, they can sleep the morning in if they like, or they can be very active. For them, it’s about choices.”

**“Despite the concern of rising prices, the trends we follow all insist that American travelers are not willing to forgo their family vacations altogether.”**

*-- Milton Segarra, COO, Discover The Palm Beaches*



## Gen Z's Impact

What's brewing in the minds of the next travel-hungry generation—the Gen Z crowd, or those from around 26 to 11 years old—you might ask and how have they changed the way their families travel? Doyle says that they are requesting what they see on TikTok and Instagram, “but it’s not necessarily about checking the tourist spots off the list. Unique is a common thread and finding those experiences is what we as advisors have to do.”

In fact, says Segarra, “Gen Z is unwilling to compromise on

quality. They want unique and elevated experiences and are willing to spend more for them. They also fully embrace travel technology, including booking apps, review sites, social media recommendations, and more—so you have to meet them where they are and be able to verify campaigns with real-life content, showing your authenticity.”

Adds Suga: “Parents are prioritizing their itineraries to find destinations and resorts that keep their Gen Z children engaged and off their devices while also

providing them with a shareable moment to post.” All agree that being connected is very important for this demographic, because, as Karst says, they can take pictures, post them and “have those bragging rights.”

“These travelers,” points out Wepler, “have brought much more of a youthful and adventure spin to the traditional family holiday. Think ‘Game of Thrones’ walking foodie tour in Dubrovnik, a full ‘Harry Potter’ customized trip in England, hanging bridge hiking and ziplining in Costa Rica, Sydney Harbour bridge climbs and Great Barrier Reef snorkeling in Australia, a visit to the WetaWorkshop in Wellington, NZ followed by a stop in Queenstown to go on a 4WD ‘Lord of the Rings’ safari and then finishing up with a full day jetboat trip on the magnificent Dart River.”

**“Gen Z has brought much more of a youthful and adventure spin to the traditional family holiday.”**

*-- Carolyn Wepler, Senior Vice President, Goway Travel*



## Survey Says

We wanted to hear from you—what is on your clients’ bucket lists; how safe do they feel when traveling; what destinations are they booking; what’s inspiring them? You gave us the 411 and here’s what the survey says: Most of the survey respondents graded the current state of the travel industry a “B,” with the majority reporting that they have strong bookings for 2023. And in terms of grading suppliers and their offerings, most graded them between “A and B+.” The majority of those who responded also said they are booking a tremendous amount of multi-gen family vacations, with many clients inquiring about celebratory-style vacations with the whole family. That said, half of the respondents said that top of mind for their family clients are the finances involved in taking a vacation, and many clients are

vacationing one to two times a year on average.

We also wanted to know how much of an impact children have on making the final decision of where to travel/ what type of vacation to take. It surprised us to see that 85 percent of survey respondents said that the children of their family clients have an impact on the decision-making. But it’s the parents and grandparents who are the ones leading the family vacation planning, say

most of the survey respondents, with social media barely swaying the decision-making process. And although sustainability is top of mind for Gen Z and their younger siblings, 57 percent of our survey respondents said a company’s sustainability practice doesn’t play a role in their client’s family vacation decision-making.

And when they do go off on their vacations, families, say the respondents, are looking to stay in all-inclusive properties, traditional hotels and vacation ►

### Top 4 Must-Haves for a Perfect Family Vacation

- ✓ Loads of activities
- ✓ Access to family-friendly meals
- ✓ Connecting rooms
- ✓ Top-notch customer service



**Booking Window?  
It's averaging six months.**

rentals, with many heading to a beach destination in the Caribbean, Mexico or domestically. And cruising internationally has come back with a vengeance.

In fact, when it comes to cruising, the top three reasons families are choosing this as their vacation mode is because they see it as a floating hotel where they can unpack once and visit multiple destinations; it offers loads of onboard activities; and it's reasonably priced. And where are families cruising when they do hop on a ship? The Caribbean and Alaska were the two top choices, as per the survey respondents.

Theme parks, you might ask? Those are definitely on clients' radars, with almost all survey respondents noting that their family clients' vacation at a theme park every few years.

### **Standout Destinations for Family Travel**

- ✓ **United States**
- ✓ **Caribbean**
- ✓ **Mexico**

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*-- Sheldon Suga, Vice President Managing Director, Hawks Cay Resort*

# Some of Our Favorite Inspo for Family Travel Bookings



Left: Fairbanks riverboat on the Chena River in Alaska. Below: Goway Travel offers family-friendly itineraries around the world, including to Egypt.

## ALASKA

So why recommend Alaska for a family vacation? Swenson says, "Alaska makes everyone put their screens down and pay attention to their surroundings. No matter your age, you just want to spend your time outside playing—whether it's on a hike, a fishing trip, a whale watching excursion, a kayaking trip, a glacier trek, a snowmobile or dog mushing tour, a bike ride. Being present and in the moment during those experiences can really be bonding for a family."

She points to cruising as one of the best fits for families who want to explore the 49th state, noting that sailing through Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve is an amazing experience, "both for its glaciers and marine life, but also for its cultural heritage." But, she notes that travel advisors who want to present their clients with something a little less traditional, might want to recommend a road trip through Interior and Southcentral Alaska as an alternative. "It gives the opportunity to spend time in smaller communities like Seward, Homer or Valdez, which are all rich in activities

like fishing, kayaking and wildlife viewing, and big on small town charm," she says. "A winter road trip is just as fun, especially if you can time it to events like the Fur Rondy in Anchorage, the World Ice Art Championships in Fairbanks and the Denali Winterfest. There are so many options for skiing, Northern Lights viewing, snowmachine tours, dog mushing tours and more."

## GOWAY TRAVEL

For clients who want to be led by the hand, so to speak, a tour operator such as Goway Travel might be the way to go. Says Wepler, "Ideally a multi-gen or family group will take

a customized departure of an organized tour so that they are the only guests traveling, which is not only more comfortable but allows for flexibility through the day if needed. There are many accommodation options in hotel suites and villas that cater to families of all ages, as well as other forms of transport. In Egypt, for example, instead of the traditional Nile Cruise, a small group can take over a *dahabiya*, which is a small luxurious vessel that sails the Nile at a slower pace and includes your own Egyptologist."

And pointing to another out-of-this-world experience, she says, "in Japan we have a program dedicated to families only that includes everything from *taiki* drum lessons to lunch in the pop culture haven of Harajuku at the Kawaii Monster Cafe; visits to Tokyo Disneyland; dressing up in traditional dress in Kyoto; and the option to take an origami class."







*Hawks Cay Resort in the Florida Keys.*

## HAWKS CAY RESORT

Visitors to the Florida Keys go to Hawks Cay, says Suga, “to experience island life and to get out on the water. We encourage guests to take advantage of all our onsite amenities, especially those that leave from our marina, like diving, spearfishing, snorkeling, sunset cruises and, of course, fishing.” It’s a “one-of-a-kind resort destination,” adds Suga, “offering guests a quintessential Keys experience that is perfect for a vacation, any time of year. With a full-service marina, plenty of onsite activities, and round-the-clock programming, the resort attracts families who want a tropical vacation experience focused on the sun and sea.”

## HIDDEN ICELAND

When it comes to its natural attractions, Iceland is diverse, says Connolly. And, he notes, they are within a few hours of each other. “So, depending on the itinerary you make, there

*Seljalandsfoss waterfall in Iceland.*



should be no lengthy driving times and no queues to get in, like at a theme park,” he adds. “For example, our newly created family-friendly 5-day tour can have your clients staying in just one or two hotels for the entire time if that is their preference, and yet they can still bathe in natural hot pools, explore glaciers, enter lava caves, pet baby goats, search for puffins, ride horses, visit thunderous waterfalls, discover ice caves, walk on black-sand beaches with crashing waves, and, of course, eat all the weird and wonderful cuisine that the locals create—and that’s before we even mention the Northern Lights, if they decide to come in winter.”

When it comes to hidden gems, Connolly says that searching for the Atlantic puffin under the warm midnight sun in summer is unbeatable, but there’s nothing, he adds, like glacier exploration. “It can be very family-friendly and not as chilly as you might expect,” he points out. For example, your clients can take a trip into a man-made ice tunnel via superjeep if the kids are very young (under 5), hike on the surface of a glacier (great for first-timers), ice climb (for the more adventurous teens), visit a blue ice cave (easier walking option) or go remote by taking a heli glacier tour (for the luxury guests).”

## THE PALM BEACHES

With its animal sanctuaries, specialty museums, smaller-scale theme parks and loads of outdoor adventures, on and off the water, this destination, says Segarra, is made for families. “At the top of the list of family-friendly activities are the beaches. The Palm Beaches boast an impressive 47 miles of Atlantic coastline for families to snorkel vibrant reefs, go for a paddle, hop in a boat, or build sandcastles at any of the beautiful beach parks,” he notes. “Located between Miami and Orlando, families can travel easily via the **Brightline** train and enjoy



*The Breakers in the Palm Beaches.*

a gentler side of Florida, offering stunning beaches, outdoor adventures, beautiful resorts and an amazing culinary scene with fewer crowds.”

He points to some must-sees, including the Loggerhead Marine Life Center, a sea turtle rehabilitation and educational facility; Lion Country Safari, a drive-through animal encounter where you can see lions, rhinos, zebras, giraffes and more from the comfort of your car; and Rapids Water Park, which is South Florida’s largest water park with giant slides and a lazy river. There’s also Peanut Island, he notes, located just north of West Palm Beach—with swaying palm trees, low-tide sandbars, and amazing snorkeling.



### **HOW ARE THE PALM BEACHES CONTRIBUTING TO FAMILY TRAVEL BOOKINGS?**

From amazing animal encounters to rip-roaring water parks and resort children's clubs, you'll find fun activities for kids around every corner in The Palm Beaches (and plenty for parents to love, too). To help increase family bookings in the destination, one of our first priorities is to highlight the ample activities for every member of the family: beaches, water sports, interacting with animals, sports, arcades, resort amenities, cultural offerings, and more. We show the family (or at least the decision-maker) that everyone has a reason to love The Palm Beaches. Even better? If your local attractions can offer discounts to travelers.

To help seal the deal, we showcase family-friendly hotels and resorts that kids and parents will love without sacrificing quality. In The Palm Beaches, families can enjoy one of the many family-friendly properties, multiple of which were recently renovated, such as The Boca Raton, PGA National Resort, Eau Palm Beach, The Breakers Palm Beach, and more. Each of these properties offer amazing experiences for all to enjoy without leaving the resort, and many offer comprehensive childcare to keep the kids busy. Golf, spas, pools and cabanas, kids' clubs, and more – our properties shine when it comes to family time.

Vacation is no time for complexity, so parents need convenience at their chosen hotel, which is why we also promote our family-friendly guest rooms, which include suites, connecting rooms, or other condo-style spaces such as those at Marriott Singer Island or AKA West Palm.

Last but not least, our team at The Palm Beaches ensures our creative materials represent all types of families. Help your potential visitors to see themselves in your destination by using images that show all types of families!

### **ABOUT THE PALM BEACHES**

As America's First Resort Destination®, The Palm Beaches have been renowned as the warm-weather getaway by discerning guests for over 125 years. Here, genuine hospitality is a way of life, and our vibrant blend of people, cultures and towns welcomes everyone. Enjoy cleaner sands, warmer waters and fewer crowds, in a place that surpasses all expectations. A gentler side of Florida awaits you in The Palm Beaches.

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# ST. AUGUSTINE PONTE VEDRA

FLORIDA'S HISTORIC COAST®

## Take the whole family on a real adventure

It's hard pleasing everyone when it comes to planning a trip. Luckily, St. Augustine | Ponte Vedra makes it easy. Home to more than 60 historic sites and attractions ranging from zip lines to 42 miles of pristine beaches, finding something to do won't be a problem, but deciding what to do just might be. So, whether your clients are beach lovers, history buffs, outdoor enthusiasts, shopping mavens or foodies with big appetites, St. Augustine | Ponte Vedra is a one-of-a-kind destination with an unforgettable past.

Make history while learning all about it. Are your clients Interested in adding a little education and outdoor activities to your family vacation? Then, there's nothing more exciting than heading over to the oldest masonry fort in the United States – the Castillo de San Marcos, a must-see for families of all generations.

Do they want a little fun in the sun and adventure? We've got that, too. Anastasia State Park has over 1,600 acres of beautiful beaches, tidal marshes and sand dunes with a wide variety of wildlife – not to mention, incredible hiking and camping and beautiful beach coastline. If they're looking for even more outdoor activities like swimming, fishing, or just natural beauty, the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve is a favorite for all ages.

With so much to do and so much to see, you'll find there is something unique and special for each family to experience in St. Augustine | Ponte Vedra. Learn more [FHCTourandTravel.com](http://FHCTourandTravel.com).

## The St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors & Convention Bureau

Located midway between Daytona Beach and Jacksonville, Florida's Historic Coast includes historic St. Augustine, the golf and seaside elegance of Ponte Vedra, and 42 miles of pristine Atlantic beaches. Start planning the perfect vacation for your families and multi-generational groups at [FloridasHistoricCoast.com](http://FloridasHistoricCoast.com) or call Evelyn Lopez-Kelley, Director of Leisure Sales at 1.800.418.7529 ext. 2011.

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