

THE BEST Summer VACATIONS

Our editors

Taking a vacation with the kids can be more work than just staying home. But what if someone else would supervise, entertain and feed your child—leaving you lots of free time and the opportunity for togetherness when you feel like it? This fantasy has become a reality as more and more resorts cater to the needs of families who want to play together—but not for 24 hours a day.

The following are the highlights from the past year of our “Family Getaways” column. All these destinations have earned the L.A. Parent Magazine Award of Excellence for demonstrating a commitment to families with children.

pick their

THE OJAI VALLEY INN AND COUNTRY CLUB, about an hour and a half from downtown L.A., seems to have spared little expense to make your child’s vacation as enjoyable as yours. For \$15 a day, your 3 to 14 year old can participate in supervised swimming, tennis, field trips, arts and crafts, and more traditional camp activities, while you get to explore the laid-back charms of the surrounding oak-filled valley.

favorite

There’s also a Saturday evening “camp” that keeps kids playing games and munching on goodies while parents slip away to nearby downtown Ojai—a small town with the California charm of a bygone era.

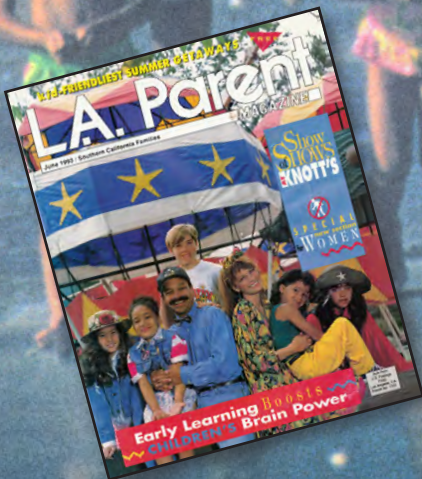
family

The inn features a championship golf course, two heated pools and first rate tennis facilities. The casual Oak Grill, an outdoor restaurant where kids can watch the golfers drive those elusive white balls into the romantic countryside, serves fine cuisine with the obligatory burger and hot dogs for the discriminating kiddie. Room rates range from \$195 to \$395; special packages available. Call (800) 422-OJAI (6524).

getaways

Tucked away high in a serene mountain valley just outside Bakersfield, the QUARTER CIRCLE U RANKIN RANCH is an actual working ranch where the Rankin family has been raising cattle for almost 130 years. Since 1965, the Rankins have also been taking in guests, and treating them to their special brand of Western hospitality and family fun.

The main event is horseback riding, then you and the kids can swim in the pool, fish in the trout-stocked pond, hike the horse trails or play volleyball, horseshoes, Ping Pong and tennis. During the summer, a counselor leads children 4 through 12 (from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 8 p.m.) in scavenger hunts, hikes, swim meets, the weekly ranch-style Olympics and other activities.



Mornings and evenings, meals are served in the dining room of the 122-year-old Rankin ranch house. At day's end, guests retire to one of 12 tidy cabins. The Rankins can host only about 40 guests at a time, so early reservations are a must. Rates, including all food and activities, are \$110 per day for adults and \$70 for children (summer and holidays). Call (805) 867-2511 or write Quarter Circle U Rankin Ranch, Box 36, Caliente, CA 93518.

I had brought my family to the **RANCHO BERNARDO INN** in San Diego to rest, recreate and try out the Inn's free Kids' Camp RBI for ages 5 through 17. Parents pay only for their children's meals; the Inn takes care of the rest.

And there is plenty of rest for parents while the kids play indoor and outdoor games, swim in the heated pool, and generally have a great time. If the tykes still won't crash after the full program, there are family movies for rent to be played in your room.

The Rancho Bernardo Inn itself comprises eight Spanish-style "haciendas." One- and two-bedroom suites feature deluxe accommodations, vistas of the San Pasqual Mountains and lovely landscaping for strolling with your toddler. Just about everybody plays or talks about the 45 holes of golf surrounding the Inn. If golf isn't your thing, there are 12 championship tennis courts, a new fitness center and two swimming pools (one just for families with children) and three gourmet dining experiences—all with kid-friendly attitudes.

Camp RBI runs on major holidays and some summer weeks. Room rates range from \$185 to \$255 per night—special golf, tennis and fitness packages are available. Call (800) 542-6096.

Going to **CLUB MED, IXTAPA MEXICO** forces you to leave the real world behind—there is no telephone or clock in the rooms, and there's not a newspaper in sight. And to further help you enter relaxation mode, Baby and Mini clubs offer quality childcare for kids 1 to 12.

The Club Med experience is more family camp than Ritz Carlton: The accommodations are clean but spartan, the dress is casual and the emphasis is on getting involved. Classes in windsurfing, sailing, snorkeling, circus skills, tennis, archery, aerobics, arts and crafts, and golf lessons, among others, are taught to adults and children. Deep-sea fishing, horseback riding and golfing at a nearby course are available for an extra fee.

Both kids' clubs are stocked with toys and shaded by high-pitched palapas. Babies have their own air-conditioned clubhouse with cribs, private restaurant with baby food chef, and a freshwater wading pool. The Mini Club has a large three-foot-deep pool, dining room featuring kid-pleasing food, theater, and arts and crafts room. From 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (the amount of time is your decision) kids can enjoy activities ranging from beach picnics for the babies to scuba diving in the pool and flying on the regulation circus trapeze (with safety belt) for ages 4 and up.

All summer, children 5 and younger stay free with each paying adult. Rates per adult (without airfare): \$850 per week, children 6 to 11 \$555. One price includes sports with equipment and lessons, childcare, and wonderful buffet meals with drinks. Call your travel agent or (800) CLUB MED.

Seeking a Caribbean vacation but don't want to tote the kids to Aruba? A 44-acre tropical isle is nestled within splashing distance of Shamu in Mission Bay: **The SAN DIEGO PRINCESS RESORT** (owned by the cruise line of the same name) is a lush maze of individual bungalows surrounded by

five swimming pools, a duck-filled lagoon, restaurants, tennis courts, bayside beaches and a fully equipped marina.

While parents are soaking in the whirlpool, scuba diving or golfing, Princess Summer Camp (\$5 per hour) offers daily activities from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for kids 5 through 12. Starting with drama and crafts, the children then hit the sunshine with sandcastle-building contests, aquatic games and obstacle courses. Every evening, kids 2 and older are supervised during children's movie night.

Families can fill the hours together by joining a botanical tour of the grounds, taking a bike or quadracycle out for a spin and visiting the marina for boat rentals.

Summer room rates range from \$150 per night for a lanai guest room by the garden to \$325 for a bayside suite. (Request a kitchenette when making reservations.) Call (800) 344-2626.

To me, the picturesque cabins and nearby lake, breathtaking scenery and campfire sing-alongs of **MONTECITO-SEQUOIA RESORT** have more in common with my long-ago camp days than past vacations spent lounging by a pool in Palm Springs.

At this family camp (located in the Sequoia National Forest between Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks at 7,500 feet) adults and children can take part in horseback riding, swimming, sailing, archery and tennis, among other alfresco activities. While the kids 6 months to 17 are involved in their supervised programs, parents can hike the trails or (my preference) snooze in the sun.

We always seemed to work up quite an appetite with all that fresh air and exertion and eagerly lined up for the day's three delicious buffet meals, digging into everything from flank steak and tabouli salad for dinner to fluffy pancakes and crisp bacon for breakfast (and I didn't have to wash a single dish!).

For a family of four, a seven-day stay (including meals and activities) ranges from about \$1,690 for a cabin (use nearby bathhouses with showers and electricity) to \$2,100 for a lodge room (with private bath). Four-day Mini Week packages are also available. Call (800) 227-9900.

PREMIER CRUISE LINE'S BIG RED BOAT, has something for everyone—while you and your spouse are navigating the ship's nightclubs, cabarets and shops, the kids are entertained by Disney characters and youth counselors. A three- or four-day stay at Florida's Disney World (this includes Epcot Center and River Country water park) can precede or follow your three- or four-night cruise in the Bahamas. You'll set sail from Port Canaveral on one of two itineraries—Nassau (the Bahamian capital) and Salt Cay, or the Abacos Out Islands.

While in Disney World, we stayed at the Port Orleans Hotel near Epcot Center—an enchanting double-themed park comprised of World Center and Future World.

Once on the ship, kids can join First Mates, for ages 2 to 4, Kids Call, for ages 5 to 7, or Starcruisers for 8 to 12 year olds. A Mickey Mouse Un-birthday party, scavenger hunt, crafts and a limbo contest are among the activities, from early morning to 10 p.m. Group babysitting is also available from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. (\$3 an hour for one child, \$5 for two or more). Then you can enjoy a Jacuzzi, work on your tan or explore parts of the ship you haven't seen; the Big Red Boat also has casinos, an ice cream parlor and a 250-seat theater. And, yes, the rumors are true—be prepared to eat all day and night.

Cruise rates are determined by the package you choose (hotel and cabin location) and time you

sail. The Disney World/Cruise vacation for a family of four ranges from \$3,156 to \$4,596. Cruise only rates: three-day, \$1,700 to \$3,240; four-day, \$2,080 to \$3,680. Packages include discounted round-trip airfare, unlimited admissions to all three Disney parks, Magic Morning Breakfast (the Disney characters join you for this meal), a guided tour of NASA's Spaceport USA and a rental car while in Florida. For a brochure, call (800) 473-3262. To make reservations, contact your travel agent or call (800) 456-4FUN (386).

Forty miles north of Santa Barbara in the scenic Santa Ynez Valley, **THE ALISAL GUEST RANCH & RESORT** offers horseback riding (ages 7 to adult) daily over the ranch's 10,000 acres of sycamore-dotted hills. Cookouts, square dancing and hayrides complete the frontier ambiance. Alisal Lake is the place for bass fishing and sailing; tennis courts and an 18-hole golf course, for the less rustically inclined. Children 6 and older can partake of arts and crafts, nature hikes, tennis lessons, barbecues, pizza parties and clown shows. A pool and spa, and a recreation room with Ping-Pong, pool table and large screen TV, round out the facilities.

In town, you can tour neighboring wineries or shop and dine amid nearby Solvang's quaint windmills and cobblestone streets.

Rates include breakfast and dinner in Alisal's dining room. Cocktails and live entertainment nightly enliven the Oak Room Lounge (babysitting is available). Two-bedroom suites are \$310 per night, double occupancy; studios \$270. Kids 2 and older pay \$65 a night. Call (805) 688-6411.

A stay at the luxurious **GRAND HYATT WAILEA** on Maui's southwestern shore equals tropical style pampering for all ages. Camp Hyatt with its whale-shaped swimming pool, a fountain, movie theater and computer room, is hard for grown-ups to resist. But since we didn't cut the 3- to 15-year age requirement, we set out to discover the many adult playgrounds.

For the royal treatment, stop by the elegant Spa Grande. Following a loofah scrub, cascading waterfall shower and limu (seaweed) bath, I was so relaxed I could hardly walk. To further unwind, there are massages and facials, ti leaf wraps and mud masques.

With our 2-year-old daughter squealing in delight, we journeyed down a series of water slides—part of the resort's 2,000-foot canyon riverpool. A current whisks swimmers through small pools and grottos before emptying into a freshwater kids' pool and beach.

One of the trip's most memorable activities was a snorkel sail to a private coral reef aboard the 60-foot catamaran *Alii Nui*. In addition to water sports like scuba and windsurfing, the resort offers garden and art tours, lei making classes and a guided telescope tour of the night sky. A short walk takes you to the Wailea Tennis Club and nearby golf courses.

Despite the variety of recreational activities, don't expect to lose weight here. There are half a dozen fine restaurants to sample—each with a selection that also met our kids' exacting culinary standards.

Camp Hyatt is open day and night, year-round. Day Camp costs \$40 per day, including lunch; Night Camp runs \$25 with dinner. Room rates start around \$325. For information, call Hyatt at (800) 233-1234.

Contributing to this story were R. Backlar, J. Bieman, V. Hughes, S. Jacques, M. Slawoff and C. Wood.