

Making connections

By
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Lovato

Plan an unforgettable vacation—with something for everyone—to deepen family ties across three generations.

I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles and began traveling with my mother to northern California to visit my grandparents back when PSA was still an airline. I recall youthful trips to Sutter's Mill, Pismo Beach and Mount Shasta. One year, my adventurous grandparents even took the whole family white-water rafting. Instilled in me today is a lifelong love of wandering. But more important, these experiences wove themselves into the collective memory of our entire family, and formed a shatterproof bond across three generations.

A participant in an REI "Family Adventure" trip gets up close to nature in Costa Rica.





The Royal Tyrrell Museum offers dinosaur displays (left) and hands-on programs (below).



Travel has the transformative means to both broaden horizons and knit a family closer, and it's not just my grandparents who thought so. According to a 2011 Preferred Hotel Group study, this type of travel is more popular than ever, with 20.8 million Americans having taken such a trip in the previous 12 months. Why wait? Call up Mom and Dad, cancel the swim lessons and hit the road on one of these high-bonding-potential trips. (Too strenuous for one of the generations? Just take it down a notch.) Whether you're digging for fossils in the Badlands of Alberta, zip-lining over the rainforests in Costa Rica or riding the rails through Alpine scenery in Europe, your next gathering will not only be a thrill for all ages but also a chance to rekindle family connections.

Good times, Badlands

The possibilities are as endless as the highways in Alberta's Badlands (just 90 minutes from Calgary) and perfect for families who prefer the open road. Use the town of Drumheller as a base to climb into the now-defunct Atlas Coal Mine; take in a show at the theater in Rosebud (population: 88), which welcomes nearly 40,000 visitors a year; and come face-to-face with prehistoric Canada at the world-renowned Royal Tyrrell Museum, full of larger-than-life creatures and hands-on activities. Don't miss Dinosaur Provincial Park (2.5 hours away), a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the world's richest dinosaur fossil fields. Organized hikes, excavations and digs for all ages let you uncover (literally) fossils 75 million years old. An evening

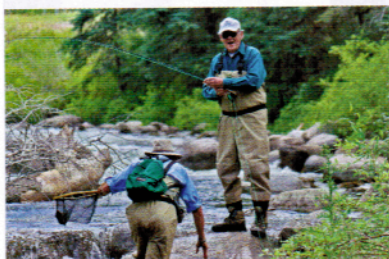


Dinosaur Provincial Park in Alberta's Badlands

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF TRAVEL ALBERTA; COURTESY OF TRAVEL ALBERTA; COURTESY OF GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA



Clockwise from top left: Carnival *Legend*; horseback riding at Colorado Trails Ranch; beach visit during an REI "Family Adventure" in Costa Rica; and fishing at Colorado Trails Ranch



photography excursion is ideal for snapping group photos, and onsite camping in premium tents, with beds and a barbecue, make for a fun overnight. "Families are in awe of the dinosaur fossils found in the Canadian Badlands and get two distinct fossil experiences—complete dinosaur fossils at the Royal Tyrrell and fossil-hunting in Dinosaur Provincial Park," says Judy Hammond, a specialist in Alberta travel. (canadian-badlands.com)

Land and sea

With Orlando and Disney World just an hour to the east, sandy beaches and the Salvador Dalí Museum just 30 minutes to the west and a busy cruise port, Tampa, Fla., can easily be declared an epicenter of

family fun. Spend a few days landlubbing, then set sail on a four-day cruise through the Western Caribbean to Cozumel, Mexico, on Carnival Cruise Line's *Legend*. On board, some family members can unwind with Pilates or yoga classes, while others show off their inner rock star and air guitar prowess at the karaoke lounge, or watch the big game at the sports bar. An onsite spa and pool are available for relaxing, and little cruisers and parents looking for time off will love Camp Carnival, where counselors with education or childcare experience run day and evening activities. Teens can surf at the Internet café, and the whole family can learn to scuba dive or take a local

tour during the offshore excursions. (From \$379 per person; carnival.com.)

Happy trails

Looking to saddle up and enjoy the great outdoors? Look no further than Colorado Trails Ranch, an all-inclusive 450-acre guest ranch just north of Durango. Kids and adults are giddy with choices, with river rafting, hiking, archery, horseback riding, fishing, swimming, hayrides, line dancing or reading a book on your private porch, to name just a few of the possibilities. With every detail arranged by the ranch, families have nothing to do but sit back and enjoy. "The ease of this vacation allows families to relax and be themselves," says ranch manager Jeanne

Ross. "Kids step back in time (so do the adults) and just have some good, old-fashioned fun." Custom experiences for kids 5–8 give Mom and Dad a break, and cabins with private baths are comfortably luxurious and come in a variety of room configurations. A professional onsite chef prepares daily breakfast, lunch and dinner, and nightly events entertain the teens and little buckaroos. (All-inclusive seven-day rates start at \$2,150 per person for adults and \$1,900 per person for children 5–12; coloradotrails.com.)

Adrenaline junkies

For kids and kids at heart, Costa Rica checks all the boxes for stunning scenery, comfortable accommodations and outdoor fun. REI's

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“Family Adventures” trip is perfect for kids and adults who like to play together, and will have you rappelling down waterfalls, zip-lining through the rainforest, hiking in jungle canyons, paddling an outrigger canoe, camping on the slopes of a volcano and soaking in a natural hot springs over eight unforgettable days. A visit to two of Costa Rica’s renowned national parks is on the agenda, and each night, comfortable and typical local lodging makes for a relaxing place to recap the day’s adventures. (Rates are \$3,525 per adult; \$400 discount for children staying with parents; discounts for REI members; rei.com/adventures.)


Winos and rhinos

For those who can’t take a whole week off but still want big adventure, Safari West—set on 400 acres in California’s wine country—is the perfect solution. Kids will love the hundreds of exotic birds and mammals, including giraffes, zebra and antelope. “Safari West is a great place to connect with kids, and grandparents love it,” boasts Aphrodite Caserta, the preserve’s marketing director. Guests can come for a two-hour driving tour (over rugged terrain) around the preserve for an up-close look at the animals, or go for the total experience with a sleepover in one of 30 luxury safari tents, complete with hot showers, plush beds and the sounds of kookaburra out

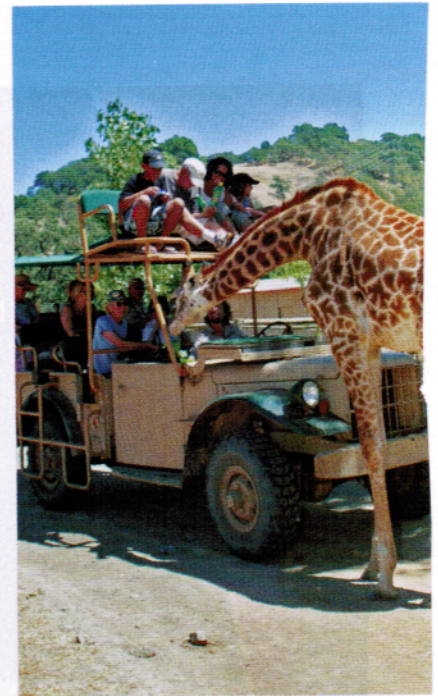
the windows. The onsite restaurant, the Savannah Café, offers scrumptious safari ranch-style BBQ meals with kid-friendly menu selections. Try out the “Wild Nights in the Wine Country” package, which includes an overnight stay for two, dinner for two at Savannah Café, two vehicle tours of the preserve and one bottle of Francis Ford Coppola wine with dinner, as well as a full tasting for two at the winery’s nearby tasting room. (Package \$550 for two; individual preserve tours start at \$80 adults, \$32 for children ages 3–12; safariwest.com.)

All aboard!

In this day of flight delays and TSA pat downs, travel, frankly, can be a chore. But it doesn’t have to be. Take the family to Europe and explore the old-fashioned way...by train! Kids will love it, parents and grandparents can relax and the freedom and flexibility leave plenty of time for memory making. Book a pass from Eurail, a partnership among several rail companies across the Continent. Whether it’s the towering mountains and crystalline lakes of the Alps, the glittering cities of Eastern Europe or the sunflower-filled French countryside that pique your interest, a Eurail pass offers plenty of possibilities for customizing a dream vacation. With the Select Pass, choose travel between three, four or five

countries (many groups of countries count as one, like Benelux). Passes for 23 countries are also available. Child, youth and senior discounts. (A three-country Select Pass starts at around \$387 per adult; eurail.com or 800-4-EURAIL.) 

KIMBERLEY LOVATO is a freelance writer who drags her family with her wherever she goes.



Giraffe and cheetah at Safari West