



Family time on the beach at Alexandra Resort

It's a Beach Bonanza - Bring the Brood to the Caribbean

By Melanie Reffes

Aerial view of Alexandra Resort in Turks & Caicos

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Alexandra Resorts

Choosing the right resort for the entire family can be a vacation wild card. Although all offer beds for heads, only a handful make sure the grown-ups don't need another holiday once they get home. Whether the kids are old enough to show off their new shoes or still learning to tie their shoelaces, savvy hotels are keeping kids amused with more than beach volleyball and video games.

If the kids are big enough to stay on one side, or if Grandma and Grandpa are tagging along, ask for adjoining rooms. Make sure the resort has Wi-Fi for all the gizmos that tots and tykes cram inside their knapsacks, and as the younger set can have voracious appetites, resorts that offer big buffets are the best bets.

BEAUTY ON THE BEACH

With three resorts on two islands, two in Jamaica and one in Turks & Caicos, **Beaches Resorts** (www.beaches.com) offer the quintessential family vacation. From activities at the Kids Club to bartenders who pour generous shots for grown-ups, the all-inclusives are among the family-friendliest in the Caribbean. New at Beaches Turks & Caicos, Key West Luxury Village aims to please with Pirate Island Water Park, the SurfStream

simulator that teaches wave-riding, and Oscar the Grouch with his 'From Trash to Treasure' arts and crafts classes, and Sesame Street Stage Show. "With partnerships such as Sesame Street, Kinect, Xbox and Scratch DJ Academy, kids can experience something new every day," said Joel Ryan, group manager of entertainment.

Also on Grace Bay, 91-suite **Alexandra Resort** (www.alexandrarresort.com) hits the jackpot with affordable rates, suites with kitchens and the Pelican Kids' Club that entertains with sand castle building lessons and play time on the tennis courts. Open from 9 am to 1 pm, a ticket to the Club (\$25.00 per child) includes lunch with discounts offered to siblings and multiple day attendance.

Less than ten minutes from the Princess Juliana International airport in St. Maarten, 520-room **Sonesta Maho Beach Resort** (www.sonesta.com/mahobeach) is the biggest all-inclusive

playground on the Dutch side. "We offer travel agents a low rate of \$75.00 per person, per night so they can enjoy the total experience," said Kevin Matier, director of sales. "You can change the oil in your own car or you can enlist the expertise of a professional, which is why the travel agent market is important to us." With tennis courts, water sports, a swim-up bar where Bartender Cheryl blends kid-friendly mocktails, the Just Us Kids program, days and nights are vacation-perfect for families. "Our star attractions are the scavenger hunts, water aerobics and classes that teach kids how to create tie-dyed t-shirts," said Nico Burgos, animator at the Kids Camp.

For families who like animals (and what family doesn't?), The Butterfly Farm (www.thebutterflyfarm.com) in St. Martin is awesome, with hundreds of the colorful critters flitting about under a tented net. For the best photos, arrive early when the butterflies are looking for food. Like kids, the butterflies are slightly less energetic later in the day. For family fun on the water, Aqua Mania sells a variety of catamaran tours, including the popular Children's Lagoon Cruise. www.stmaarten-activities.com



Left: Sonesta Maho Beach Resort in St. Maarten (Credit: M. Reffes)



Above: Water activities at Beaches in Turks & Caicos (Credit: Beaches Resorts)

Below: Kids playing in the sand at Curtain Bluff in Antigua (Credit: Curtain Bluff)

KID'S AHOY

New at the 304-room **Sunset Beach Resort** (www.sunsetbeachresort.com) in Montego Bay, **Oasis at Sunset** is a 124-room hotel adjacent to the bigger resort. Families have access to Club Mon-goose, the waterpark and restaurants at the main resort, although the Oasis has its own beach and Club Family rooms with bunk beds. For families in Jamaica for the holidays, the star attractions are the Grand Markets or community street fairs. For a traditional Christmas celebration, Jonkonnu features revelers who parade through the streets in fabulous costumes. "With our year-round schedule of events, ranging from active tours to culinary and other cultural activities, the **Jamaica Tourist Board** aims to show travelers the authenticity of Jamaica," said John Lynch, director of tourism. (www.visitjamaica.com)

Resorts in St. Lucia are also jumping on the family-friendly bandwagon, luring kids (and their parents) to the island with the iconic Piton Mountains. "Whether it's snorkeling, horseback riding, visiting the world's only drive-in volcano or bathing in the Sulphur Springs, there is no shortage of family-friendly activities," said Tracey Warner-Arnold, deputy director of tourism. At the all-in-



clusive **St. James's Club Morgan Bay** (www.stjamesclubstlucia.com), kids can eat at four restaurants, play at the kids' club and sign up for windsurfing and kayaking. "Little Picassos can get in on the action with jewelry making and when the sun sets, the fun continues in the disco so parents can enjoy a date night," said Janice Victorin, activities manager.

Named for the initials of the resort, CeeBee Kids Club at Antigua's **Curtain Bluff** (www.curtainbluff.com) is rolling out the welcome mat with a roster of vacation must-haves like tennis lessons, Hobie Cat sails and an early buffet just for kids. "Today, everyone travels with their children," said Rob Sherman, managing director. "When we decided to open a kids club, I wanted it to offer our young parents a break during their vacation." Flanked on both sides by the sea, this 72-room resort is also adult-friendly with plenty of hammocks strung between the coconut palms.

TRAVELING WITH KIDS

(Courtesy: www.jetblue.com)

Pack smart: Know what you can (and cannot) carry onboard.

Stuff their backpacks with entertainment: The little ones can carry their own backpacks filled with crayons, books, games and their favorite toys.

Wear them out: Arriving at the airport earlier means your family can spend more time walking around. Burn off some of that extra energy and tire those little jetters out.

Dress simply for the airport: Wear slip-on shoes, keep jewelry to a minimal and avoid wearing a belt, so you have fewer items to take off through security.

Fly during naptime: When they're snoozing, you're cruising.

JetBlue will add nonstop flights from Fort Lauderdale to Montego Bay, Punta Cana and Port of Spain on May 1, 2014.

