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Why Package Tours are Your Best Bet for Family Vacations

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By [Kara Williams](#)

www.thevacationgals.com

Think about your last family vacation. Did you argue over driving directions? Quibble over where to eat? Spend too much time figuring out your day's itinerary and not enough time actually taking in the sights?



If you answered yes to any of these questions—and your family isn't comprised of die-hard do-it-yourselfers—you might consider a packaged tour for your next trip. Here's why.

Packaged tours can benefit your wallet. You know the price of your trip before you go, and outfitters negotiate prices in bulk with hotels and sightseeing or activity vendors, so a packaged trip would cost less than it would if you pieced it all together on your own. Accommodations, transportation, many meals, sightseeing and/or soft-adventure activities are all typically included in family-friendly tours.

You don't have to worry about getting from point A to point B. Instead, you get to enjoy the scenery instead of navigating maps. With all the planning arranged by someone else, you can simply relax and enjoy your time with your children.

Tour guides know the area of the world you're visiting inside and out. They're usually full of insider knowledge, so your kids will likely learn about local culture, history, ecology and more on their trip (all the better for those back-to-school "What I did on my summer vacation" essays).

But do consider the potential drawbacks. For example, you travel with other families over the course of several days. So, if you don't like someone in the group, too bad for you—you're stuck with them as companions until the end of the trip. (On the flip side, you and your kids could meet lifelong friends.) You are also on a daily schedule—often a very strict schedule. You may want to spend more time shopping in town, but the van (or bus) is leaving in an hour; if you're not on it, you'll miss your ride to the next overnight destination. That said, smart tour operators recognize the value of allowing plenty of free time for families to simply rest and recharge—and enjoy resort amenities, like on-site swimming pools and the like.

To get you started researching your family's first tour, consider these top operators:

Adventures by Disney

Disney obviously knows the family market, so it's no surprise this company offers incredible opportunities for the younger set: going backstage at *The Lion King* in London, stick-fighting lessons in China, scavenger hunts at the Louvre. Trips take place on six continents, but many are close to home: my blogging buddy took an [Adventures by Disney tour of the U.S. Southwest](#) two summers ago and had a ball. General minimum age is 4, but some trips have suggested minimums based on the activities included in the itineraries. disney.go.com.

Vail Resorts

Known for its ski mountains and portfolio of luxury accommodations under the RockResorts umbrella, Vail Resorts entered the family tour market in 2009 with its Epic Summer program. This is a 3- or 6-night itinerary that gives families an excellent introduction to [Colorado's mountains in the summertime](#). With a home base in Keystone, guests on the 6-night program spend their days visiting Vail, Breckenridge, Beaver Creek and Rocky Mountain National Park. Activities include horseback riding, hiking and river rafting. Minimum age for children is 6. epicsummer.com.

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the REI Family minimum age for children is 6. [Open in new window](#)

REI Adventures

The awesome outdoor-gear store offers awesome outdoor trips for families, too. Adventures include safaris in Africa, sea kayaking in the Galapagos, mountain biking in Mexico, heli-hiking in Canada and surfing in Kauai. For families who find lounging on the beach a tad boring, these active itineraries are made for you! New for 2010 is a vacation I know my water-loving kids would enjoy: the San Juan Islands Family Adventure that includes not only kayaking, hiking and cycling, but also a tour of a University of Washington marine biology lab. Recommended age minimum typically varies from 6 to 8, depending on the trip. [rei.com](#).

Tauck Bridges

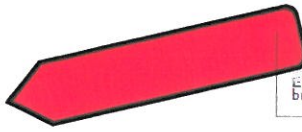
This family-owned tour operator celebrates its 85th anniversary in 2010, so the company has long mastered the art of daily scheduling and juggling the needs of all the different personalities typically found on a tour. Family trips include plenty of activity and educational opportunities, such as hiking in the Costa Rican jungle while learning about the animals that make their homes there, as well as top-notch accommodations, such as oceanfront Marriotts in Hawaii and the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies. The company just introduced a family-friendly river cruise called "Blue Danube: Family Riverboat Adventure." General minimum age is 3, but many trips and their associated activities are recommended for children age 8 and above. [tauckbridges.com](#).

About the Writer

Kara Williams goes by ColoradoGal over at [TheVacationGals.com](#), where she blogs about travel with her buddies. Learn more about her at [www.KaraSWilliams.com](#).

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