

# Caribbean



The ultimate guide to our favourite family resorts. From baby clubs and waterslides to trampoline classes and Xbox lounges, these properties have got something for every member of your travel crew! ILLUSTRATIONS BY **CHENOA GAO**



HOT PICK

# BEACHES TURKS & CAICOS

**WHY WE LIKE IT** A restaurant shaped like a pirate ship that serves PB&J sandwiches and ice cream floats 24-7? A choo-choo train ride? A show and dance party with all your pals from *Sesame Street*? An entire Xbox lounge? Gah! The real problem at this popular family all-inclusive (there are also two locations in Jamaica) is, what should you do first? It's jammed with so many restaurants (21) and activities (like, roughly 276 a day, including snorkelling and scuba diving) that you might want to just give up and spend your days hanging out in one of the many pools or horsing around in the 45,000-square-foot water park. Even newborns are accepted at Kids Camp, which is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day, and there are also one-on-one special-needs nannies available for an additional hourly fee.



**DON'T MISS...** The Night, Night Sleep Tight upgrade if your kid is obsessed with Elmo, Cookie Monster, Abby Cadabby or Grover. Having your kid's bestie from TV visit his room for a stretching session, tuck-in and story may sound kind of weird, but guess what—it's kind of great! I mean, would *you* ever forget it if a six-foot-tall Elmo came to say good night?

**BUT YOU CAN PROBABLY SKIP...** The extra cost for a character breakfast, unless your kid is really, really dying for a quick picture of himself with one of his *Sesame Street* pals.



**YOUR KID WILL LOVE...** The Resort Shop in the Italian village. This tropically inspired cornucopia is definitely a cut above your average get-your-flip-flops-and-sunscreen-here joint. A wall full of mermaid dolls? Need it! Pool and beach toys for miles? Put it on the plastic, Mom. Craft kits for getting through the pre-bedtime hour? Done. Forgot your beach cover up, a teeny-tiny bathing suit for your six-month-old? This store has got you covered.

**INSIDER TIP** Everything at Beaches is pretty much awesome, but there's no getting around it: Awesome costs. Beaches is definitely a splurge trip, but one way to whittle down the price is by choosing lower-category accommodations in the less-fancy Caribbean or French villages (there are four villages in total, including the Italian Village and Key West). The Caribbean Village is next to the beach, which is a bonus for many, but that also means you're next to the boardwalk, so it can be loud and busy. The French Village is a bit removed from the action, and the rooms could use a refresh, but you're not spending your vacation in your room anyway, right? —LEAH RUMACK



## 'TIS THE SEASON

Caribbean high season is from mid-December to mid-April, when rainfall is at its lowest, and airfare and hotel room prices skyrocket. Save some cash by travelling in October and November or May and June.

If you're worried about hurricane season (June 1 through Nov. 31), consider travel insurance. Make sure your policy covers natural disasters or includes "cancel for any reason" coverage, which gives you more flexibility if a storm is threatening.



# BOOK IT! RESORT TO THIS...

6 OTHER  
PROPERTIES YOUR  
FAMILY WILL LOVE

## 2. FOR ROCKERS OF ALL AGES

### **HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO PUNTA CANA**

With 1,787 rooms across 121 acres, this Dominican Republic all-inclusive is as big as the A-list acts it draws (Ringo Starr or mega-DJ David Guetta, anyone?). It's not short on G-rated fun either. Kids can play minigolf, hit the video arcade or tackle the climbing wall. At the Little Big Club, tots ages 18 months to three years old can enjoy Thomas the Train tables with mom or dad, while the four- to 12-year-old set can join a rock band with characters like Bob the Builder and Angelina Ballerina. Kids 12 and younger stay and eat free.



## 5. CUBA COOL

### **MEMORIES VARADERO**

If your kids enjoy watching the adventures of Toopy and Binoo on TV, then they'll love this 1,025-room megaresort. The beloved Canadian characters roam the grounds of this affordable all-inclusive along with Binoo's doll, Patchy Patch. Picky palates have plenty to choose from at the resort's eight on-site restaurants, which serve cuisines of all flavours spanning Cuban, Italian, Japanese and French. If you have kids age 12 and under, one kid stays and eats for free, while a second sibling is charged a discounted rate.

## 1. FOR A QUICK GETAWAY

### **GROTTO BAY BEACH RESORT**

OK, Bermuda isn't *technically* in the Caribbean. But one look at its sandy pink beaches and turquoise waters—easily accessible via two-to-three-hour flights from central or eastern Canada—and you'll be fooled. Stay just five minutes from the airport at this beachfront resort with a subterranean cave spa for adults, a floating inflatable slide and trampoline for kids, and sailing charters for the whole family. Since Bermuda is in the southern Atlantic, expect average daytime temperatures of 18C to 20C during the winter.



## 3. FOR THE MARY POPPINS EXPERIENCE

### **FRANKLYN D. RESORT, JAMAICA**

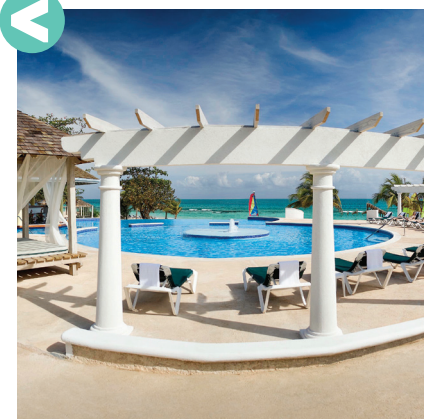
What FDR lacks in modern polish it makes up for with its casual, call-you-by-name vibe. And here's the best part: A nanny comes with your stay. It's not that you won't see your kids; the resort is small, with four pools and one small beach. But it will be someone else's job to watch them like a hawk while they craft in the kids' centre or go down the waterslide for the 57th time. Read a book or have a long conversation with your spouse while your kids have a blast? Now *that's* a vacation.

## 4. FOR VALUE VACATIONERS

### **JEWEL RUNAWAY BAY BEACH & GOLF RESORT**

This Jamaica all-inclusive features amenities not typically offered at similar resorts: Guests receive complimentary round-trip airport transfers from Montego Bay, green fees at the Runaway Bay Golf Club and twice-daily glass-bottom boat rides.

Don't miss the Red Ruby Ranch, where kids can groom horses, play laser tag and learn archery. Kids ages five and under stay and eat free (pay a discounted rate for children ages six to 15) and its brand new water park has a 300-foot-long lazy river.



## 6. FOR THE LITTLEST VIPS

### **PARADISUS VARADERO**

By summer 2016, this Cuba all-inclusive will be treating families with their very own concierge, who customizes the mini-bar with kids' drinks and snacks, and provides in-room amenities like children's robes and slippers, beach toys, and evening turndown service with milk and cookies. Bonus: Kids ages two and under stay free, and children between the ages of three and 12 get 25 percent off in the winter and 50 percent off in the summer when sharing a room with two adults. —DAVID LAHUTA AND SASHA EMMONS

# BEACHY KEEN

THE BEST STRIPS OF SAND FOR KIDS

## HORSESHOE BAY BEACH, BERMUDA

Next to this crescent of powdery pink sand is a shallow, waveless lagoon locally known as Baby Beach. Flanked by craggy rock formations and within sight of Horseshoe's food concessions and shower facilities, it's tailor-made for the tiniest of beach bums. **BONUS:** Pink sandcastles!

## GRACE BAY, TURKS AND CAICOS

If you're in Providenciales—the main island where all flights arrive—you'll likely be near this beach in Princess Alexandra National Park. The 6,500-acre protected marine area has a massive barrier reef that guards the littlest of swimmers from rough Atlantic Ocean swells.

## THE BATHS, VIRGIN GORDA, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Older kids will love the otherworldly collection of gigantic granite boulders in the caves and grottoes on Virgin Gorda's southwest coast. They're best explored on foot or by snorkelling its shallow waters. **TIP:** Bring water shoes, as the rocks can get slippery.

## TRUNK BAY, ST. JOHN

Nearly 60 years after Laurance Rockefeller donated Trunk Bay to the U.S. National Park Service, this white-sand beach is St. John's most well-preserved natural attraction. Families can rent chairs and umbrellas, plus swim safely, since the NPS employs lifeguards. **TIP:** Rent snorkel gear to enjoy the 205-meter-long underwater trail.

## SEVEN MILE BEACH, GRAND CAYMAN

Enjoy searching for treasure on long beach walks? It's called Seven Mile Beach for a reason. Also, if you stake out some ground on the north end, you'll be near the Cayman Turtle Farm, where kids can gently pick up turtles in touch tanks or swim with them in a calm lagoon.

MAP TEXT: DAVID LAHUTA

PLAY

## COOLEST KIDS' PROGRAMS

Sure, making crafts and tie-dyeing T-shirts is fun, but here are some kids' clubs that are kicking their activities up a notch.

### Jumby Bay, Jumby Bay Island

Budding sea turtle scientists can watch endangered hawksbills lay their eggs on the beach and release hatchlings back into the sea at this swanky private-island paradise off the northern coast of Antigua. Turtles are "adopted" and then tracked all summer via the resort's Facebook page.



### Club Med Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

Vacationers can learn circus arts and acrobatics from Cirque du Soleil-trained performers. Try the tightrope, flying trapeze, trampoline, acrobatic bungee and aerial silks, or master artistic activities like mask painting, performance makeup and juggling.



HOT PICK

# ATLANTIS PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS

**WHY WE LIKE IT** It's only got the coolest kids' club on the planet, Atlantis Kids Adventures (ages three to 12)—complete with a wizarding room, life-sized dollhouse, state-of-the-art interactive game room, cooking classes for aspiring brownie bakers and a Lego room.

**DON'T MISS...** Junkanoo. The legendary island carnival is the main event in December, but smaller versions of the parade occur on Friday and Saturday evenings throughout the year. It's just one of many reasons to head out to Marina Village (where you'll also find 21 shops, restaurants and ice cream so delicious you'll want to Instagram it to remember). Prepare to be dazzled by the vibrant costumes and traditional Bahamian Junkanoo music—made with goatskin drums, conch-shell horns, cowbells and whistles—that will make even the shyest in your family get up and shake it.

**BUT YOU CAN PROBABLY SKIP...** The beach-side kiosks. They're hard to avoid but extremely costly. It's better to bring your own beach toys, sun-safety essentials, swimming gear and refillable water bottles.

**YOUR KID WILL LOVE...** The secret room at the kids' club. It is *amazing*, but we took an oath of silence, so all we can tell you is it's a kid's dream. The famous waterslides, water parks and mile-long



river ride will also totally float your kids' boat. The resort boasts 18 themed "lagoons" loaded with kid magnets: sharks, mysterious moray eels and the Goliath grouper, which can grow up to eight feet long and weigh 1,000 pounds (they say it's the beast that swallowed Jonah in the Old Testament). A short distance from the resort, everyone can play with friendly dolphins and even give one a smooch at Dolphin Cay.

**INSIDER TIPS** Atlantis Resort isn't all-inclusive, (though you can purchase all-inclusive stays if you're travelling in a large group), and it's no secret that it's not cheap. But you can drastically cut costs by staying at the nearby **Comfort Suites**, where your accommodations include a daily buffet breakfast and access to Atlantis. The rooms also have mini-fridges you can stock with nearby grocery-store fare. For a fun night on the town that won't max your credit card, cab it to Frankie Gone Bananas for delicious Bahamian cuisine, friendly local diners and a live band. —HALEY OVERLAND

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATLANTIS RESORT

## Abaco Beach Resort, Bahamas

In the Bahamas Buddies program, kids ages three to 12 learn what it's like to live on the islands from Bahamian kids their own age (many of them sons and daughters of staffers). Participants make traditional island crafts, learn the Junkanoo dance, prepare conch and fish off the docks with their new friends.

## Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort, St. Lucia

Families can learn about the island's art scene at this posh resort. In addition to playing a game in which kids try to spot creations from local artists, families can attend artist-in-residence workshops to experience how murals, paintings and sculptures become works of art.



## Ocean Club, Turks and Caicos

When you check in at one of two Ocean Club Resorts in Providenciales, kids are given a game kit to identify indigenous plants and animals. Called Seafari, the property-wide scavenger hunt rewards young explorers with daily prizes and teaches them about the surrounding ecosystem. —DAVID LAHUTA





# COCONUT BAY BEACH RESORT & SPA ST. LUCIA

**WHY WE LIKE IT** First things first: St. Lucia is one of the most beautiful islands in the Caribbean. It's hard to beat vacationing in a place that comes complete with its own mountains (the famous Pitons), 19,000 acres of rainforest and miles of gorgeous beaches. This all-inclusive resort is only five minutes from the airport, and the not-too-large property's family-friendly Splash section has many freshly renovated rooms (ask for the King room with the trundle bed). Its kids' club will take babies, the CocoLand waterslides hardly ever have lineups, and the lazy river is the perfect way to drift the morning away. The on-site Coco Corral petting zoo is populated with friendly donkeys, goats, ducks and sheep, and day excursions (for an extra cost) include snorkeling trips and pirate-themed adventures.

**DON'T MISS...** The CocoLand Kidz Klub. It's enormous and comes with its own splash pad, playground and climbing wall. Caregivers will take your kids on hayrides, doll them up for Caribbean parades and teach them Creole. Plus, if you ditch the kids, you can sneak over to the plusher adults-only Harmony side of the resort, which has a spa, a pile of beach-facing loungers and hammocks and—oh, yeah—no children!

**BUT YOU CAN PROBABLY SKIP...** Driving around. If you have a kid who's prone to carsickness, you might want to pass on extended day trips that involve a lot of time on the road. St. Lucia is very curvy, and regurgitated goldfish crackers just don't look good on anyone.

**YOUR KID WILL LOVE...** The smoothie bar at breakfast and the kids-only swim-up bar.

**INSIDER TIPS** Bring your own pool and beach toys, as the resort doesn't really have any to lend. Make sure to pack bug spray and after-bite balm, too. Because of the rainforest, St. Lucia tends to be buggy at night. Also, plan to schlep your own car seats (they're not really a "thing" in St. Lucia) and brush up on how to attach them with only the seat belts—the transport vans that ferry guests to and from the resort and out on day trips don't all have the universal anchorage system. —LEAH RUMACK



## ASK AWAY

Not all hotels are created equal, so ask important safety-related questions before you book. Are there lifeguards at the beach or pool? Are the nannies and babysitters CPR certified? What's the ratio of counsellors to children at the kids' club? If you're travelling with an infant, ask for a crib to be placed in your room before you arrive.



# PACKAGE DEALS

Should you book with a carrier or strike out on your own?

**T**aking a family vacation is a wonderful way to bond with your kids, but *planning* one can be so agonizing that you might never get liftoff. Choosing a package vacation that includes airfare, transfers and accommodations can simplify the process.

"The greatest advantage of a package holiday is you're looked after from the moment of departure," says Colleen Kellar, a travel agent at Travel Time Inc. in Kelowna, BC, who has 25 years of family-travel-design experience. Another advantage is that you pay all the fees beforehand, so there aren't extra or unexpected costs when you arrive—or worse, when you get home.

Kellar points out that packages don't offer as much flexibility as a custom vacation. Many are seven- or 14-night stays in a single destination. "So families that want 10 nights or to split the holiday between two places may not be able to."

Flight routes and schedules require consideration, too. "What sets Air Canada Vacations and WestJet Vacations apart is they have daily flights to a lot of destinations, as well as connector flights via Toronto that open up more of the Caribbean islands."

And, of course, cost is always a factor. "Packages, for the most part, offer a better price," says Kellar. If you've selected a resort, you can weigh carriers on cost, but make sure you're comparing apples to apples, including the type of room, airport transfers and meal plans. If you do decide to build your own package, consider how much additional time will go into cobbling together your own trip.

"There are a lot of things that go into a final decision," attests Kellar. "One operator may have

better flight times, or one may offer upgraded room types over the others."

With that said, vacation carriers are stepping it up. The vast majority of family packages showcase resorts that have kids' clubs; kids stay, play and eat free deals; and spacious accommodations, such as rooms that sleep at least five and/or have adjoining rooms. Here's a rundown of family-friendly benefits and top picks from five major operators.

## AIR CANADA VACATIONS

Serving more English-speaking Caribbean destinations than any other Canadian operator, Air Canada Vacation's Family Collection includes resorts that feature kids' pools and menus, and kid-friendly entertainment, activities and play areas. Top picks include the all-inclusive **Beaches Resorts** in Turks and Caicos (see p.56) and Jamaica, and **The Sunscape Curaçao Resort, Spa & Casino**, with its family check-in experience that includes a red carpet and kids' welcome treats.

AIRCANADAVACATIONS.COM

## WESTJET VACATIONS

Most of the resorts in the Family Vacations Collection include supervised activities, and kids' pools and menus. **The Tamarijn Aruba All-Inclusive** has a kids' camp where they learn Papiamentu—the most widely spoken language in the Caribbean—and do scavenger hunts and bicycle tours. **The Holiday Inn Montego Bay** has Kid Suites furnished with fun decor and a partially separated in-room sleep and play area for kids.

WESTJET.COM/VACATIONS

## TRANSAT HOLIDAYS

Family perks include dedicated

check-in counters and free strollers you can use through the airport. Register your kids as Air Transat Kids Club members so they get free seat selection, plus priority boarding and baggage handling. Transat has resorts with a wide variety of family-friendly "badges," including For the Little Ones (baby-friendly holidays), Big Families (multi-generational vacations) and Little Fish (water-focused activities). New this year, they've added Waves of Fun—resorts with aqua parks, surf simulators and wave pools. Top picks include the **Melia Cayo Guillermo** in Cuba, ideal for those with kids under three, with its baby club, wading pool and babysitting; and the **Moon Palace Jamaica Grande**, which lets tweens get their surf on with its FlowRider, while the Playroom keeps little ones busy.

TRANSATHOLIDAYS.COM

## SUNWING

Sunwing's all-inclusive resorts offer kids' clubs, rooms suitable for more than three children and no supplemental fee for single parents. The SMILE program also

features properties with special pricing for kids, kiddie pools and shaded playgrounds; resorts in the Splashworld collection offer unlimited access to large water parks. Top family choices include the **Memories Splash** in Punta Cana, with its water park, daily entertainment and meet and greets with Toopy and Binoo; and **Jamaica's Jewel Runaway Bay Beach & Golf Resort** (see p.57), which gives little ones their own ranch complete with hayrides, archery and laser tag. [SUNWING.CA](#)

## SIGNATURE VACATIONS

Families can enjoy baby and kid clubs, babysitting services and single-parent specials. Top picks include the **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Punta Cana** (see p.57), which has many themed character activities with the likes of Angelina Ballerina and Bob the Builder, plus minigolf and a kids' pool with waterslides. **Dreams La Romana Resort and Spa** in the Dominican Republic offers childcare, a playground and sandcastle-building contests. [SIGNATUREVACATIONS.COM](#)

—COLLEEN SETO

IF YOU DO DECIDE TO BUILD YOUR OWN PACKAGE, CONSIDER HOW MUCH ADDITIONAL TIME YOU'LL SPEND COBBLING TOGETHER YOUR OWN TRIP.