

"I want a budget-friendly vacation for the whole family!"

Our experts have *your* next family getaway covered!

Visit a family hotspot!

Go on a sleepover safari!

Travel expert Candyce Stapen, Ph.D., promises you can take a special safari—even if you're on a staycation: "Zoos ranging from the National Zoo in D.C. to the San Diego Zoo have 'Snore & Roar' sleepovers," she says. "You can take a tour with flashlights and sleep overnight in tents. It's so exciting for the kids, and since most animals are nocturnal, you'll see a whole different zoo than you would in the daytime." Museums are also getting in on the trend: "At the Smithsonian, for example, you can have a real night at the museum, complete with a movie and activities," says Stapen. Just search the name of your zoo or museum with the word sleepover.



Explore the other Florida!

Disney who? Travel pro Anne Banas promises you'll have plenty of fun and find better deals elsewhere in the Sunshine State. "Florida is celebrating the 500th anniversary of Ponce de León's arrival with lots of special events," she says. "If your kids are fascinated by space, for example, the Kennedy Space Center's Atlantis exhibit opens in June." Also great: "Visit Sanibel Island, which boasts some of the world's best shelling." Learn more at VivaFlorida.org.



See a "secret" national park!

"If you go to a lesser known national park, you'll beat the crowds *and* have a great time at a hidden gem," says Stapen. Her favorite off-the-beaten path park? "Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky, which features the longest mapped cave system in the world. You can take guided tours, and your kids can become rangers through the Park's Junior Ranger Program."

Visit the music capital!

"Nashville is on SmarterTravel.com's top ten list of best budget places to visit in 2013," says Banas. "There's so much to do, from visiting the new Music City Center—a public space for art and music—to the new Johnny Cash Museum opening this summer to the CMA Music Festival in June. Plus, the city is going through a hotel building boom, which is lowering hotel prices."

Take a staycation!

Peek behind the scenes!

You already know about factory and museum tours, but staycation maven Matt Wixon promises there are plenty of surprising "tours" you can take in your hometown: "Visit your local bowling alley, for example," he suggests. "If you call ahead and tell them your kids are interested in seeing what happens behind the scenes, they'll show you how the pins are set up—it's so exciting for little kids. Or call your local movie theater and ask if you can bring the kids down on a Sunday morning; they'll show you how the projection system works and how they make popcorn." Other places to visit? "Newspapers, radio and TV stations are always giving free tours."



Go on a kid-friendly train ride!

"There are tons of scenic train rides all over the country," says Wixon. "And there are special rides set up for kids that run about an hour. You can take a ride where Thomas the Tank Engine sings and dances or get 'side tracked' by a staged train robbery." Just go to FunTrainRides.com to learn more.



Visit the minors!

"Ask your local minor league baseball team about their special activities," urges Wixon. "They'll let kids run the bases, talk with players and play with the mascot. Last year, my sons loved being chased by a 'prairie dog!'"

Save more!

Book your hotel on Tingo.com!

"If the hotel price drops, Tingo.com will rebook you at the lower price and refund you the difference. You can save from \$5 to \$195!"

Consider the rental trend!

"A big trend is vacation rentals, as more extended families are going on vacation together," says travel maven Eileen Ogintz. "It's a great way to split the cost." Visit FlipKey.com and HomeAway.com for info.

—Kristina Mastrocola

Our expert panel



Family travel expert **Candyce H. Stapen, Ph.D.**, is travel editor and producer for new digital content at USA Today. Visit her at gfvac.com.



Executive editor for SmarterTravel.com, **Anne Banas** has appeared on such programs as *Good Morning America* and *The Early Show*.



Matt Wixon—author of *The Great American Staycation*—writes for *The Dallas Morning News*. Read his humor columns, including those about staycations, at MattWixon.com.



Family travel expert **Eileen Ogintz** is the author most recently of *A Kids' Guide to Washington D.C.* Visit TakingTheKids.com for more of her family-friendly tips.