Hooray FOR HOLIDAYS

There's nothing more exciting than your first family holiday, so pack your bags and check out these exciting destinations…

BEACH BREAK

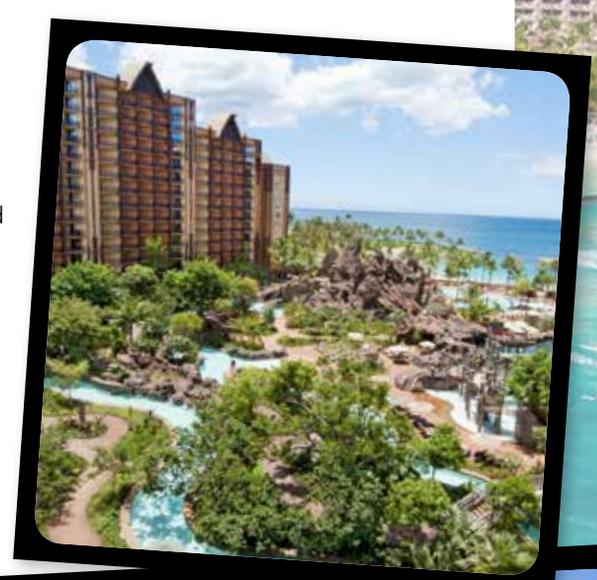
ALOHA HAWAII

You know it's a sign of a good holiday when your four-year-old begs you at the airport on the way home not to make him leave. Hawaii had long been on the bucket list, so when the opportunity for an inter-generational holiday with the grandparents came up, we jumped at the chance to have a family holiday.

Arriving in Honolulu, on Oahu island, we were greeted with a traditional lei welcome (only when in Hawaii!) before heading off to our first stop – The Grand Islander by Hilton Grand Vacations, located next to the iconic Hilton Hawaiian Village resort. Ideal for families, the Grand Islander offers apartment-style accommodation with full kitchen facilities, a large living area and, in our case, two large bedrooms with ocean views. Being able to prepare breakfast before heading out, or whip up a quick dinner after a day spent swimming was a life-saver (we all know what it's like taking tired little ones out for dinner). The Grand Islander has access to all the facilities at the Hilton Hawaiian Village including four pools – one with a waterslide that the kids will love – so you get the best of both worlds during your stay: the convenience of self-contained accommodation combined with the bells and whistles you'd expect from a large resort.

It's also a great place to explore Honolulu from, with a trolley stop to the famous Waikiki Beach or the Ala Moana shopping centre right outside your door. The Atlantis submarines also depart from the jetty directly outside the resort. Intrepid adventurers will love diving 30 metres below the surface to view Diamond Head's marine life during the 90-minute tour.

While Waikiki has plenty on offer, if you really want to explore Hawaii, Oahu is easy to get around. There's plenty of car hire options available, and once you've left the hustle and bustle of downtown Honolulu, it's pretty much one road around the island. Heading to the North Shore, with its laid-back attitude, allows you to circle the entire island. The scenic drive takes only a couple of hours, allowing for stops along the way, such as the famed surfing mecca of Waimea Bay. The kids will also enjoy the Dole Pineapple Plantation (the pineapple whip is not to be missed), home to the world's largest





Disney Resort & Spa





maze and the Pineapple Express train.

After a few days exploring Waikiki and its surrounds, we packed up and headed west for a few days of R&R at the Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa in Ko Olina. The resort community of Ko Olina is nothing short of picture perfect, and not surprisingly the Disney resort could only be best described as 'magical'. Designed by Disney imagineers, every element at the resort tells the story of Hawaiian culture, with Disneyana taking a backseat (rest assured Disney fans – it's still there but in a more subtle form, such as Disney music piped through the elevators adapted into traditional Hawaiian songs).

Once you're at the resort, there's very little reason to leave: there are three pools, two waterslides, a lazy river, two splash zones, a protected beach and a number of dining options on site. The big drawcard, however, is Aunty's Beach House, which caters for kids aged three to 12. Aunty's Beach Club is open from 8am to 9pm daily, with arts, crafts and special activities such as Stitch's Space Goo, Keiki Hula and Aunty's Aloha Party included (be sure to book before you leave Australia as places for activities fill up quickly). While my little one was reluctant to go on his first visit, he soon couldn't wait to see what was happening at Aunty's each day.

Of course, it wouldn't be Disney without some appearances from Mickey, Minnie and the gang (who are also on holiday) and other characters who make appearances throughout the resort each day. Check the daily 'Iwa for appearance locations. To ensure you see your favourites, make sure you book in for the Disney character breakfast for at least one day of your stay, where you're guaranteed to meet and pose for a happy snap with Mickey (Minnie and Pluto also popped in to say hello during our breakfast). Big and little kids will enjoy the party-like atmosphere, as Aunty drops in with her ukulele to entertain the kids during the breakfast.

> The resort community of Ko Olina is nothing short of picture perfect.

While it might be more expensive than some other resorts in Hawaii, the smile on my son's face throughout our entire stay makes it worth it. It's the experience that counts and, as we all know, happy kids on holidays equals happy parents.

ROOMS AT THE GRAND ISLANDER BY HILTON GRAND VACATIONS START AT AROUND $440 PER ROOM. ROOMS AT AULANI, A DISNEY RESORT & SPA, START FROM AROUND $760 PER ROOM.

Closer to home

PALM COVE, QLD



Palm Cove in Far North Queensland is one of Australia's most idyllic holiday destinations. Peppers Beach Club & Spa is set across the road from the beach and the resort is landscaped with a rainforest rock pool and lagoon pool with sandy beach. If the kids get bored of the pool, there's a playground on site to keep them entertained. Stay from $269* per night in a Spa Suite (minimum three-night stay) including full breakfast daily. To book, visit www.mantrahotels.com or call 1300 987 603. *Conditions apply.

BROOME, WA



The whole family is catered for at Cable Beach Club Resort & Spa, situated near the white sands of Cable Beach. There are a number of accommodation styles, including apartment-style rooms, and kids will be kept busy with a water playground, pool, mini golf, a games room and outdoor playground. Prices start from $199 per night. To book, visit www.cablebeachclub.com.

LORNE, VIC



This seaside town has been welcoming families for generations, with its mix of lush rainforest and pristine beaches. Little ones will love the Lorne Sea Baths with in-ground trampolines, swimming pool, mini golf and bumper boats. Stay at the Mantra Lorne with rooms from $199* per night. Visit www.mantralorne.com.au. *Conditions



CITY SLICKERS

SUPERB SINGAPORE

When people think of overseas family holiday destinations, Singapore rates highly. A flight time of only seven-and-a-half hours from Sydney may seem a little long for some, but the pay-off in the family-friendly stakes is big.

What is probably most striking about Singapore is how safe the streets are and how easy it is to navigate around town. The Marina Bay area is sleek, modern and stunning, with beautiful gardens to explore and the ArtScience Museum, which offers fun, interactive experiences your little ones will love. If you can swing it, head down on a Friday to enjoy additional child-friendly activities and programs, developed in mind with the exhibitions currently on display.

Staying at the iconic Marina Bay Sands hotel, we got to experience the true essence of everything Singapore has to offer. The hotel stands 55 storeys high, with 2561 hotel rooms. Marina Bay Sands has 13 newly refurbished family rooms suitable for families of four (two adults, two children). Each room features one king-sized bed and two single beds in one large space, with a view over the gorgeous Gardens by the Bay. The Sands SkyPark and Observation Deck sits 200 metres above the ground, and an infinity pool spanning 150 metres lets us take in unprecedented views of the Singapore skyline, while relaxing on a sun lounger. While this all sounds very romantic, there's also a kids' pool on the deck, and life guards who monitor the pools, which gives any family extra piece of mind.

If you love shopping, you'll be blown away by the super-luxe The Shoppes at Marina Bay. Not just for grown-ups, The Shoppes boasts the most comprehensive luxury children's boutique section, including Gucci Kids, Baby Dior and Fendi Kids. (It's a must-see, even if you can only dream!) As well as an indoor ice-skating rink and Sampan boat ride through the ground floor of the centre, there are also lots of dining options around the complex that offer really cool kids' activities for little chefs. Bread Street Kitchen, celeb chef Gordon Ramsay's restaurant, has a kid-friendly menu, special kids' pack with colouring book and even an ice-cream decorating session in the kitchen, complete with chef whites and aprons to help them look the part.



> The Marina Bay area is sleek, modern and stunning, with beautiful gardens.

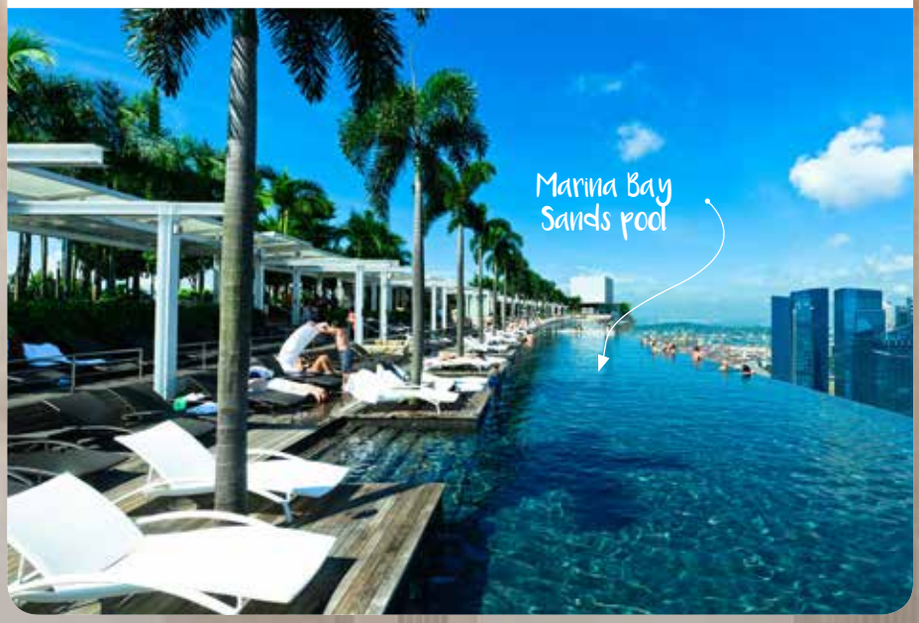
For animal lovers, the Singapore Zoo is the world's first nocturnal zoo, and it really comes alive at night, with people flocking to see some truly impressive animals, including lions, zebras, tapirs and tigers. You can choose to take a walking trail around the zoo or hop on a tram, which guides you through the enclosures. Arrive early for the Thumbuakar fire performance, and don't miss the Creatures of the Night show before you hop aboard the tram… it's totally adorable and the zookeepers love to involve little ones in their special demonstrations.

Sentosa Island is also a must-see while you're in Singapore. It's only a stone's throw away from the main island, and you can get there by car or cable car, which takes around 20 minutes. On Sentosa Island you'll find the infamous Merlion statue, Universal Studios and the Trick Eye museum, which is well worth the admission price. The whole family will love creating their very own optical illusions and capturing memories you'll have for a lifetime!



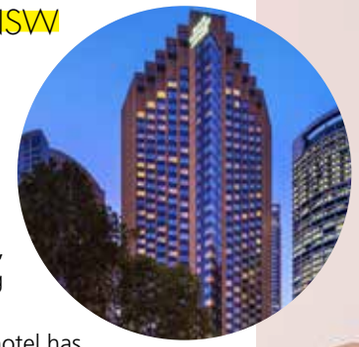


MORE INFO: STAY AT THE MARINA BAY SANDS, SINGAPORE. THE AVERAGE DAILY ROOM RATE IS $495** PER ROOM, WITH LOTS OF CONFIGURATIONS TO CHOOSE FROM. IF YOU'RE A HOTEL GUEST, YOU'LL RECEIVE 20% OFF SAMPAN RIDES AND A 15% DISCOUNT AT THE ARTSCIENCE MUSEUM. FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO BOOK, VISIT WWW.MARINABAYSANDS.COM.



Closer to home

SYDNEY, NSW



A family of city slickers will love the Four Seasons in Sydney. Not only is the hotel located in the historic Rocks area, it also has amazing views of the iconic Sydney sites. The hotel has children's room service menus, kid-size robes and complimentary cots and rollaway beds. Stay in a Premier City Room for $465 per night. Visit www.fourseasons.com/sydney.

HOBART, TASMANIA



Hobart is quickly becoming a holiday hotspot for families, because of its old-world charm and fresh Tasmanian air. Stay at Somerset on the Pier, where you can relax in a Family Executive Apartment with views over the River Derwent. This hotel also offers a grocery shopping service and free Wi-Fi. Prices start from around $320 per night for the Family Executive Apartment. See www.somerset.com/en/australia/hobart.

ST KILDA, MELBOURNE



St Kilda is a great place to take the kids and it's still within reach of all the fantastic things Melbourne has to offer. The Novotel has a tram stop virtually at the front door, and it's within walking distance to Luna Park, St Kilda pier, a beach and vibrant cafés and restaurants. For kids, there's a child-friendly menu, play area and pool. Prices start from $220 per night. Visit www.novotelstkilda.com.au.



ISLAND GETAWAY

FABULOUS FIJI

Arriving in style by private sea plane, our first glimpse of Malolo Island Resort Fiji is straight out of a picture-perfect postcard: endless blue skies, white, sandy beaches and gently swaying palm trees. The crystal clear waters surrounding the island are teeming with beautiful sea life and coral, thanks to the fact that Malolo is in a protected marine sanctuary. We have arrived here for some desperately needed rest and relaxation, and I couldn't imagine a better place to be.

After a delicious welcome drink during which we are serenaded by local musicians, we head down the sandy pathway to our plantation-style bures. There are four types of bure to choose from – the romantic, couples-only Tadra beach bures to large family bures that sleep up to seven people – and all are beautifully designed with soft furnishings in fresh whites and blues. Our bure doesn't have a TV, phone or internet access, which feels a bit quiet at first, but really allows you to relax and disconnect from the busy-ness of everyday life. We settle in to enjoy our complimentary bottle of sparkling wine and a beautiful fruit plate while watching kids play happily on the sand.

Whether you're a fan of the 'drop and flop' type of holiday, or you like a bit of action and adventure, there is plenty to see and do at Malolo. Free activities include paddle boarding, kayaking, sailing, wind surfing and snorkelling, and there are beautiful walking trails around the island. If you're in the mood for romance, book a babysitter and head off on a sunset cruise. You can also take a day trip to the famous MonuRiki Island (where the movie Cast Away was filmed), or visit a local village or school. Leilani's Spa is well worth a visit, too – indulging in a soothing outdoor massage was definitely one of the highlights for me and a great way to get into the holiday mood.

Kids are well catered for, with Tia's Treehouse offering complimentary care and activities for children aged four to 12. Kids can have great fun feeding the fish, getting involved with traditional costume making and face painting







and even learning a few Fijian words. Older kids can hang out in Khail's Club, a beautiful air-conditioned lounge where teens can play table tennis, watch TV or lounge on the huge bean bags and access free Wi-Fi. Babysitting services are available for a bargain $6** an hour.

There are many good dining options from adults-only Treetops restaurant to the casual Terrace restaurant which offers light a la carte meals as well as themed dining three nights a week. Plus a Beach Bar, where you can enjoy traditional pizzas and delicious cocktails. All in all, this heavenly island resort ticks every box, ensuring everyone has a great holiday – including mum and dad!

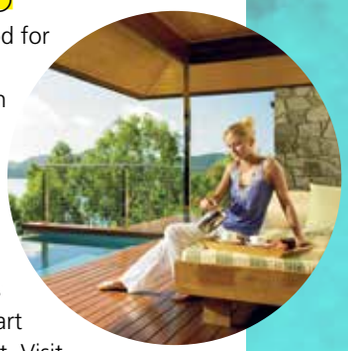
> Whether you're a fan of the 'drop and flop' holiday, or you like action and adventure, there is plenty to do.

MORE INFO: PRICES START FROM AROUND $2330** FOR FIVE NIGHTS IN AN ISLAND BURE (SLEEPS FOUR), WITH PLENTY OF EXTRAS INCLUDING FREE MEALS FOR KIDS. VISIT WWW.MALOLOISLAND.COM FOR MORE DETAILS.



Closer to home

HAMILTON ISLAND, QUEENSLAND



If you're in the mood for sun, sea and sand, look no further than Hamilton Island. The Reef View Hotel has large, comfortable rooms with views over landscaped gardens or the sea. Prices start from $370 per night. Visit www.hamiltonisland.com.au for more information.

LORD HOWE ISLAND, NSW



Although just a short plane ride from Sydney, Pinetrees on Lord Howe Island feels a world way. This multi-award winning, family-friendly resort, offers elegant ensuite rooms as well as large family cottages. Feed the kingfish at Ned's Beach, go snorkelling over coral reefs or take a hike in the beautiful natural surroundings. Prices start from $1577.50 per person twin share for a five-night bed-and-breakfast package. Visit www.pinetrees.com.au.

PHILLIP ISLAND, VICTORIA



Just 90 minutes from Melbourne, Phillip Island is a popular spot with families due to its population of little penguins. Stay at the Silverwater Resort, which offers hotel-style resort rooms as well as one-, two- or three-bedroom apartments. Facilities include an indoor pool, children's playground, games room and jumping pillows. For more info, visit www.silverwaterresort.com.au.

Experience this!

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A HOLIDAY THAT OFFERS MORE THAN R&R, OR SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT, CHECK OUT THESE SUGGESTIONS:



> If your kids love Ninja Turtles and Nickelodeon, head to Sea World.

LITTLE ADRENALINE JUNKIES

OK, so the Gold Coast isn't off the beaten path when it comes to family holiday destinations, but if you've got a tribe of wild ones, it's the perfect spot to get the heart racing. Paradise Resort is a great family-friendly base in the heart of Surfers Paradise, and only a short drive away from the major theme parks. Toddlers will love the ABC Kids-themed section at Dreamworld with miniature thrill rides, or if your kids are more into Ninja Turtles and Nickelodeon, head to Sea World (we found Dreamworld to be better suited to younger kids, whereas Sea World catered better for ages four and up). Once you've spent the day at the theme parks, head back to Paradise Resort, where the accommodation includes four hours of free kids club a day – the perfect chance for you to relax while the kids burn off any extra energy.



FARM BUDDIES

All young children love a petting zoo, so imagine how excited they'd be to spend their holiday on a real working farm. Ripples n Tonic on Phillip Island has self-contained cottages with farm animals such as horses, sheep, cattle, alpacas, goats and chickens which can be hand-fed onsite. There's also loads of space to run around (including an in-ground trampoline) and the world-famous Phillip Island penguin parade is just a five-minute drive away. Cottages start at $210 a night.

ZOO-TOPIA

Imagine falling asleep with the sounds of an African safari blowing through the wind... well you can at Western Plains Zoo's Zoofari Lodge in Dubbo. The Zoofari Lodge standard package includes one night's luxurious accommodation and two-day Zoo admission and bike hire, buffet breakfast, African-style banquet dinner, and exclusive behind-the-scenes tours.



Lodges are available in two styles – Animal View lodges are perched on the edge of a vast savannah area where giraffes and antelopes roam. Bushland View lodges are nestled nearby. The Guest House includes a fully licensed dining room and bar, lounge area, library and outdoor pool. Rates start from $279 per adult twin share (Bushland View Lodge) and $59 per child (1-4 years) and $159 per child (5-15 years).



Words Nicola Conville, Erin Mayo, Danielle Sen **Photography** Getty Images

**Prices approximate and may change due to exchange rate