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Taking the Kids -- not too late to plan a spring break -- or think about summer

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By Eileen Ogintz, Tribune Media Services
Taking the Kids
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Uh-oh...

It seems everyone except you has planned a spring break.

"Can't we go someplace, too?" the kids want to know.

The good news is it's not too late to plan a spring getaway (check www.takingthekids.com for ideas) whether you've got just a few days or an entire week to spend and there's still time to find a great deal.

To get you started, here are six great bets for spring getaways:

1. **PLAY BALL!** I love spring-training getaways in Arizona (www.cactusleague.com) and Florida (www.floridagrapefruitleague.com) because the kids might actually get an autograph, you sit closer to the action and tickets are so cheap (lawn tickets are just \$8 to see the **Chicago Cubs** play at HoHoKam Park in Mesa, Ariz.) that you won't feel guilty if the kids -- or you -- can't last for all nine innings.

There are plenty of hotel packages (www.visitflorida.com, www.arizonaguide.com) and plenty else to do whether you are in Arizona, Phoenix (check out the Musical Instrument Museum, www.themim.org, the only international musical instrument museum of its kind in the United States with iconic instruments (**John Lennon's** piano) or Florida (explore the **Everglades** by airboat, kayak or canoe). Did you know the Everglades are the largest subtropical wetlands in the United States? Check out the National Park Service website for kids (www.nps.gov/ever/forkids/index.htm).

2. **MICKEY, SPIDERMAN AND MORE.** Orlando, Fla., (www.visitorlando.com) now has the distinction of being the first city in the country to welcome more than 50 million visitors annually. The weather is a lot more pleasant in spring than in summer. If you have young kids not yet in school, wait until after spring break when the prices come down. There are plenty of new attractions, including LEGOLAND (just opened last spring -- read my column about it, <http://www.takingthekids.com/weekly-column/touring-the-largest-and-newest-legoland-in-the-world/>) and the new water park soon to open that is geared to younger families. There's also **Disney's**

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT ...



In theaters: New movie reviews

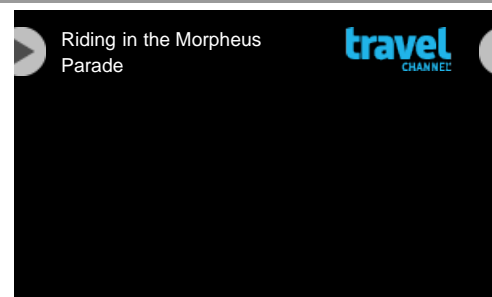
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VIDEO GALLERY



expanded Fantasyland that will include SeaWorld's Turtle Trek 3-D, which opens later this spring and Universal Studios' "Amazing Adventures of **Spider-Man**" attraction at their **Islands of Adventure** theme park. Whether this is your first or 10th time visiting Orlando, you can't see it all -- not nearly -- so relax and enjoy yourselves!

Opt for a house with a pool (rent directly from the owner www.vrbo.com) or a hotel with a great pool complex like the new Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, complete with a 10-acre lake and family-friendly rooms with bunk beds for children and a second flat-panel television. (Visit www.wyndhamgrandorlando.com where rates start at \$179, including breakfast for a family of four.) The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort (www.swandolphin.com/) is touting a "Love Your Family" deal in a 1,000-square-foot executive or grand suite with two bathrooms, a \$100 resort credit per stay for use toward onsite character dining, Swan paddleboats, unlimited beverage cups, souvenirs and more. (Rates start at \$399 a night.)

3. HIT THE SLOPES These days, there is as much to do off the slopes as on, whether you are going to Park City, Utah (www.visitparkcity.com) and touring Utah Olympic Park (sign your teens, 16 and older, up for a bobsled ride on the Olympic track or take the younger ones to the Alpine Coaster at Park City Mountain Resort), Stowe, Vt., (www.gostowe.com) where Ben & Jerry's factory is always a draw, smaller Bolton Valley (www.boltonvalley.com) or nearby Burlington, VT., or Big Sky, Mont., (www.bigskysort.com) where you can zip-line high above the trees and spend the morning doing hands-on activities at the Museum of the Rockies (www.museumoftherockies.org) in nearby Bozeman. Go to Snowmass, Colo., and learn about the ice-age mammoths (www.snowmassiceage.com) that have recently been discovered there. Go snowmobiling at Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme, Mich., (www.grandtraverseresort.com).

You'll find plenty of kids-free deals too, including at Aspen/Snowmass (www.aspensnowmass.com). SKI.COM can also put together a well-priced package with air, lodging and lifts.

4. SUN, SAND AND MORE. Opt for a different kind of beach getaway and book an eco adventure (www.greenloons.com). Kayak with baby whales in Baja (www.seakayakadventures.com). Explore Belize or Costa Rica (www.wildland.com or www.familyadventures.com). See how the 1 percent lives by being waited on hand and foot at a private Bluefields Bay villa (www.bluefieldsvillas.com) in Jamaica where even a nanny can be provided and you'll get to know locals in the small town. It is more affordable than you think! Remember that prices in the Caribbean typically drop in April. Share a condo or villa with another family and you'll save even more (www.homeaway.com). If all-inclusive is your style, Beaches Resorts (www.beaches.com) offer exemplary programming, including offerings for infants and toddlers -- check out the "Sesame Street" activities -- as well as for tweens and teens.

5. TURN ON THE CITY LIGHTS. There are great deals to be had in major and smaller cities, especially on weekends when the business travelers are gone, whether you want to introduce your kids to Broadway, tour the **9/11** Memorial in New York City (www.nycgo.com), shop till you drop at the American Girl Store (<http://www.americangirl.com/stores/locationny.php>), explore the biggest children's museum in the world (www.childrensmuseum.org) in Indianapolis, or ride



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VACATION HOME RENTALS

bikes over the Golden Gate Bridge, visit a fortune cookie factory, talk to a farmer at the huge Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market, or see how much fun science can be at the Exploratorium in San Francisco (www.sanfrancisco.travel/).

6. ACROSS THE POND. See London (opt for a multi-day London Sightseeing Pass, www.londonpass.com, that saves you money and lets you bypass lines to major sites) all gussied up for the summer **Olympics** and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, encourage your teens to practice their French in Paris (book a free tour with a local, <http://www.parisiendunjour.fr>) or make ancient history come alive in Rome (opt for a guide for the Vatican and Coliseum from a company like www.nancyaiellotours.com -- we thought they were great!)

Spring is a good time to visit -- fewer crowds and cheaper airfares! Consider trading your house. Home Exchange (www.homeexchange.com) is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Or rent an apartment to experience a foreign city like a local.

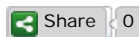
Above all, have fun!

(For more Taking the Kids, visit www.takingthekids.com and also follow "taking the kids" on www.twitter.com, where Eileen Ogintz welcomes your questions and comments.)

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