



Beau-Rivage Palace in Lausanne, Switzerland

# Family Values

## Punching up Seasonal Priorities

by Chris McBeath

There was a time when the corporate traveller was king, but as the economic downturn continues to challenge business travel, let alone FIT, tour, and group travel, hoteliers are looking at any and all market sectors to pick up the slack. Indeed, for many smaller properties, making hay while the sun shines this summer will be a matter of survival. Family travel has always been a mainstay component to summer revenues and the competition to cater to kids is hotter than ever.

Whether families receive such perks as kids fly free, complimentary nights, or two-for-one dining and entertainment specials, there is lots of extra value available right now. “The travel industry is experiencing what could be considered the equivalent to a buyer’s market in real estate, so it’s all about creating a better value vacation that is as affordable and inclusive as possible,” says travel marketer Nina Zapala with hospitality consultants Fareed, Zapala, Koepke.

According to Virtuoso Travel Mart, *accessibility and affordability* are key trends for the upcoming 18 months, coupled with buzzwords such as experiential, bonding, renewing, adventurous, and value. Little wonder, then, that large resorts in destinations such as Hawaii, Las Vegas and the Caribbean, are subsidizing costs just to get people there. Even Iceland can be had for a steal these days. Meanwhile, all inclusive resorts, ranches, and cruises are pulling out all the stops and hotels are competing more aggressively with the home/villa rental market as families lean towards self-catering holidays as a way to stretch any discretionary dollars on activities rather than accommodation and eating out.

As stiff as the competition is, all is not lost. But it IS a question of being able to move quickly.

Smarter tourism organizations have rallied. Check out Washington DC (see sidebar on page 8), where family travel is featured as a destination highlight which begs the question of regions closer to home. Even though BC has huge family appeal, several municipalities have yet to bring family travel to the forefront of travel marketing initiatives, thereby leaving individual properties to go it alone at a time when team efforts would likely bring better results.

### Food For Free

“Slashing prices doesn’t always give you the competitive advantage. Google ‘hotel discounts’ and you’ll see four million search results pop up,” remarks Nina. “The keys to long-term success are wrapped around authentic experiences and innovative promotions designed to build long-term guest relationships, repeat business, and consistency.”

Alliances also build value. For example, By the Sea Resorts in Florida, have introduced a Kids Eat Free program, whereby guests present their hotel keycard or parking pass to various attractions for 20% off admissions as well as earning free kids meals for every adult meal purchased in the hotel and at selected restaurants. Partnerships like this are a guest benefit, not a bottom-line detriment. It's an important paradigm shift because it's only through teamwork that many properties will continue to build for the future. In fact, with online resources such as [www.kidseatfreecard.com](http://www.kidseatfreecard.com) gaining ground (its 130 plus locations are still fairly localized to the southeastern US), it's only a matter of time until sites such as these guide consumer purchases.

### Web Smart Moms

When you consider that most family travel planning is done by mothers online, your hotel's Internet presence and website not only need to reflect this family vacation priority, but they would do well to get onto resource networks and blogs such as [www.travelingmamas.com](http://www.travelingmamas.com); [www.familytravelforum.com](http://www.familytravelforum.com); and [www.thefamilytravelfiles.com](http://www.thefamilytravelfiles.com). "When I first started [www.TravelingMom.com](http://www.TravelingMom.com), I was really motivated to find resorts that don't just have an all-day camp for kids," says Kim Orlando, TravelingMom's founder. "I wanted something more inclusive; activities that the whole family could do together."

At the very least, and if appropriate, follow in the footsteps of the Lake Okanagan Resort, and become rated on [www.hotelfun4kids.com](http://www.hotelfun4kids.com), and check out the "Tips for Hospitality & Tourism Operators" at [www.kidfriendlycanada.com](http://www.kidfriendlycanada.com), one of the pioneer sites founded by industry expert Cheryl MacKinnon.

Creating an Internet presence has grown far beyond descriptive pages. Today, sites need to be absorbing, engaging, and interactive, especially when you have an eye on the family market. Teens surf and are influential decision-makers within the family unit.

With this in mind, it's worth remembering that when money is tight, people tend to spend on familiar values - things they know they like. The same holds true for vacations and is the reason that hoteliers need to be trolling for repeat clients, offering repeat visitor packages, and making sure there is complete Internet-ease on their website. You need look no further than Sun Peak Resorts.

"We were the first in Canada to use Resorts Interactive Software two years ago because it really speaks to our younger set demographic," explains Corey Wiwchar, Marketing Manager for Sun Peaks. "We were ahead of our time, but it's really helped us make our site - and



*Marriott's Kids Golf-4-Free program*

our destination - as engaging as possible with multi-media components that include video-share, because uploading videos gives visitors a sense of ownership of the mountain, an official blog, which we're looking to evolve to include an independent blog for the same reason, and a regionalized photo contest "Show us how your enjoyed the ride" that works off the branding statement of an international snowboard company: Enjoy the Ride." The results speak for themselves. In nearly all instances of web visitation, pages visited, and the length of time those visitors stayed on the site, participation has almost doubled.

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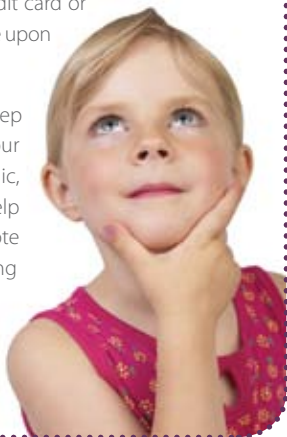
#### Kurt Cassidy, B.A., Benefits Consultant

1200 Park Place, 666 Burrard Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 2X8  
Tel: (604) 688-7208 Fax: (604) 688-7268 [www.zlc.net](http://www.zlc.net)

## Ideas at Work

This burst of family-friendly amenities, activities and accommodations has a lot to do with demand

- Lido Beach Resort, Florida, has a Stock the Fridge and Save package where, for \$50, guests can enjoy a fridge full of favourites, so dining in becomes an easy, affordable option. Why not revamp traditional minibars into mini-groceries?
- Marriott Golf's Kids Golf-4-Free program encourages families to learn and play the game of golf together by allowing kids 15 and under to play golf for free after 3:00 pm when accompanied by a full paying adult. The chain's Family Golf Festival program involves families enjoying an afternoon of free golf instruction, clinics, fun activities, interactive golf games, family golf programs, and a chance to win a variety of prizes.
- The Ciragan Palace Kempinski provides every child with a Kids'tanbul brochure, a pint-sized city guide that includes information about museums, toy stores, game parks, bakeries, and a litany of child-friendly activities and sites in Istanbul. This is an easy-to-adapt idea.
- The Omni Hotels in Los Angeles and San Francisco, offer Kid's Fantasy Suites stocked with bunk beds, videogames and a fridge filled with yogurt, carrot sticks, and candy. Every child receives a backpack after check-in filled with a stuffed animal and five mystery items.
- The Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, Orlando has Dr. Seuss designed rooms that integrates off-kilter furniture with wacky creativity; parents especially like the fact that there is no exterior door into the hallway off the kids' room.
- Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort offers a Baby Butler Service: daily diaper delivery, in-room crib, free meals, a baby gift, and 10% discount on baby rental items such as infant tubs, strollers, highchairs, and bouncy seats.
- Destination DC, the tourism board for this capital city, has put together a site specifically for family travels as well as a list of free or nearly free attractions and activities. Lobby your local tourism agency to do the same.
- Provide each child with a \$5 hotel credit card or play money with some basic rules on usage upon check-in.
- In addition to blogs and twitters that keep online conversations going between your property and your targeted travelling public, include informational news portals to help increase online search results and promote traffic to your site. The downside? Keeping news up-to-date.



## Urban Competitors

The burst of family-friendly amenities, activities, and accommodations has a lot to do with demand. Although kids' camps are still popular, there's a hunker-down mentality that's fueling a desire for togetherness where activities can be experienced as a family unit. And it's not just building sand castles together.

Fast paced cities can seem magical to the eyes of little children, and since today's toddlers and teens have such sophisticated tastes, hotels are incumbent to offer culinary programs, golf clinics (see sidebar), parent-child spa services, special teen lounges equipped with iPods and game stations, and more. Many Fairmont properties offer the PSP® (PlayStation Portable) with games and movies that become a family affair.

At one of Paris' swankiest palace hotels, Hotel Fouquet's Barrière, family travel is taken seriously. Packages here include luxurious adjoining accommodation, family movies, complimentary access to the Aquarium Trocadero or Euro Disney, and free champagne for parents and champomy for children. And at the Beau-Rivage Palace in Lausanne, Switzerland, the hotel's Kids are Kings program is redefining family travel in Switzerland. "Our goal is not to turn the Beau-Rivage Palace into an amusement park, indeed quite the opposite," suggests Francois Dusart, General Manager. "Our children's programs are designed to entertain, intrigue and occupy children by drawing them into adult pursuits, rather than shipping them off to a faux playland." For example, children aged 3 through 11 may participate in a treasure hunt - a board game with clues that take them throughout the hotel by following pictures and obtaining stickers as they progress. For older children, the hotel's pastry chef hosts a participatory cooking lesson - the final product is delivered to their rooms - as well as a flower-arranging class that culminates in the children presenting their creation to Mom and Dad.

Meanwhile, the Ciragan Palace Kempinski in Istanbul, Turkey, has introduced royal treatment for pint-sized pashas with its Princes and Princesses program. It starts with a customized registration process and a backpack of goodies - a Kids'tanbul brochure (see sidebar), colouring book, and pens - before heading off to their room where amenities include bathrobes and slippers designed to fit the smallest guests, tear-free bath products, a teddy bear on the bed, snacks, chocolates, cookies, and milk. Children are also photographed with a Sultan's crown on their head; the resulting picture is framed and presented to each child at check-out, complete with the rubric "When I was a prince/princess at the Ciragan Palace Kempinski."

Thankfully, the US dollar still goes a long way in Canada and with gas prices stabilizing, the rubber tire trade is expected to hold strong, especially in light of promotions such as [www.bedandbreakfast.com](http://www.bedandbreakfast.com)'s Tanks for Travelling with its offers of free gas, accommodation, and/or meals. But hotel chains and independent alliances can offer similar incentives. By their very nature, they are often in a better proximity to local attractions and have the resources to respond better to family demands than their B&B counterparts. Helping with reservations en route is a prime example. As for satiating the "memorable authenticity" factor, why not surprise a guest with a fun driving game and snack upon checkout? Guests will leave on a positive note, which stimulates word-of-mouth as well as positive blog entries to TripAdvisor, Facebook and other twittering social networks which is the fastest, most effective, results-oriented marketing strategy you could hope for in providing families with more than a good night's rest. 🌐