



Best Cultural Trips and Experiences to do with Kids



Do you want to expose your kids to other cultures and raise globally-aware citizens? Make culture a priority on your next family trip.

Family travel used to mean packing the kids and the dog in the station wagon and heading to grandma's house for a week. Or, maybe it meant beating the summer heat at a cabin in the mountains or a motel on the beach. But as the modern American family has changed, so have our travel styles. Yes, theme parks, beach vacations, and road trips still top the charts for family travel. However, according to the Family Travel Association US Family Travel Survey of 2017, 61 percent of families are also taking their kids to museums or cultural attractions. In fact, many families surveyed said that it was important to them that their children understand different cultures.

Travel agencies, tour companies, hotels, and even cruise lines are seeing an increase in demand for hands-on cultural experiences, or even immersive cultural trips.

"We find an increasing number of Ciao Bambino clients are asking their advisors for activities that give them insight into the way locals live today, in addition to hitting all the main historical attractions," said Amie O'Shaughnessy, CEO of [Ciao Bambino! Inc.](#), a Virtuoso travel agency that specializes in family travel. "Immersive cultural experiences give families the opportunity to transition from being an observer to a participant while exploring a destination. One of the easiest ways to do this is to enjoy a local playground or play soccer with local children at their community school."

"Families are more and more conscious about the value of raising good global citizens. Many parents are eager to show their kids the world and experience new cultures alongside their kids," said Patricia Monahan, Founder & Chief World Explorer with [Our Whole Village](#). "That said, parents have a few concerns when it comes to culturally-immersive experiences. Number one is safety, followed by the adequacy of the experience to their children's ages and developmental stages."

This is why you are now seeing hotels that offer cooking classes for dishes native to their destination, cruises and resorts that bring in educators and specialists to lead programs, and the increasing number of tour companies offering family-oriented cultural trips.

Cultural Experiences vs Cultural Trips



With so many options to choose from, it can be hard to decide where to go and what to do while you are there. First you need to decide if you want the trip to be all about cultural immersion, or do you want a mix of relaxation, sightseeing, and a cultural experience or two thrown in? After all, you can still see Italy the traditional ways, but adding in a mozzarella making class or fresco workshop with an artisan steps it up a notch.

The best thing to do, especially with younger children, is to start with a trip to a destination and include cultural experiences. These can be options such as an educational program, cooking class, artist workshop, a meal with a local family, or farm/market visit. Once your children have had this introduction to other cultures, then it is time to plan a more immersive cultural trip.

Perfect starter destinations include Italy, France, Spain, Costa Rica, and Ireland. You can then move into more “exotic” destinations and trips including African safaris, Amazon river cruises, trekking in Peru, or exploring destinations in Asia.

The most important thing is preparing kids for the experience before you go (I’ve written an article about ways to [raise a good traveler](#) and ways to [prepare kids for trips](#).)

[Global CommUnity](#) Founder Christie Holmes has recognized this need to prepare hearts and minds for a meaningful travel experience. Global CommUnity creates customized, age-based itineraries for families in nearly 30 countries. Prior to travel, they send out pre-trip engagement materials to excite travelers and share key details about the destination, culture, and wildlife. Young children receive a hand-made doll with a storybook about a child in the travel destination, while teenagers receive social

media applications. Global CommUnity's philanthropic partner, Whole Planet, even supplies the family with recipes of common local dishes to try before they go. They truly understand that when families take the time to prepare for the trip, the experience becomes that much more impactful and memorable.

Best Cultural Trips and Experiences with Kids

To give you some ideas, I've reached out to a few tour companies and travel agents that specialize in offering cultural experiences and trips for families to get their input on some of the best options for kids. This is what they recommended:

Cultural Experiences



Image courtesy of Princess Cruises

Macaron Baking in Paris – Everyone is crazy about the colorful, tasty puffs of air that are the macaron cookie. What better way to enjoy this French treat than to learn to bake them in Paris? [Cook'n with Class](#), a French Cooking School, offers family-oriented cooking classes (in English).

Buffalo Mozzarella Making near Positano – Imagine learning how to make mozzarella, starting with a visit to the buffalo farm at [Tenuta Vannulo](#). Afterwards, you can taste the cheese and other dishes prepared with vegetables from their organic farm.

Truffle Hunting in Tuscany – [Podere il Casale](#), an organic farm outside of Pienza in the hills of Tuscany, will take the kids on a truffle hunt. If successful, they will return and prepare dishes made with truffles. This organic farm also offers cheese making demonstrations, cooking classes, and lunch on their gorgeous patio. While waiting for the food, kids can enjoy the peacocks and other animals throughout the farm.

Mask Making Workshop in Venice – There are a number of tours that offer mask making in Venice, but [Ca' Macana](#) is the best of the best for quality craftsmanship. Ca'Macana has been called the best mask shop in Venice and is one of the most well-respected and recognized producers of Venice carnival masks in the world. You can either shop for a mask or sign up for a workshop to create your own.

Gladiator School in Rome – If your kids like history, sign them up for Gladiator School. They will learn about this ancient tradition, as well as engage in some sword fighting that will make a visit to the Colosseum a whole lot more relevant.

Laser Tag in Underground Bunkers in Russia – Visiting the underground bunkers is one way to learn about the Cold War, but it would be a lot more fun to run around and play laser tag in those bunkers after learning about their original purpose.

Painting Faberge Eggs or Matryoshka Dolls in Russia – For budding artists visiting Russia, Global CommUnity recommends learning to paint Faberge eggs or Matryoshka nesting dolls after learning about them as a way to incorporate culture and bring home a personal souvenir.

Stargazing – Hotels and cruises are capitalizing on dark skies that are prime for star gazing and night sky viewing. Some hotels, like [Hotel Ranga](#) in Iceland that has its own observatory and in-house astronomer.

Princess Cruises has partnered with Discovery, Inc. to create immersive, educational programs onboard their ships and offers [Stargazing at Sea](#) with a trained naturalist. [Hurtigruten](#) even offers guaranteed Northern Lights sightings.

Visit a Chocolate Farm in Costa Rica – [Costa Rican Vacations](#) arranges a visit to a local plantation near Arenal for a chocolate eco-tour that is tasty and fun. After learning about the nutritional, medicinal, and cultural values of Cacao, and learning about the chocolate making process, you get to taste the results!

Treasure Hunt in Angkor Thom, Cambodia – Global CommUnity arranges a specially-designed Treasure Hunt for families, encouraging them to explore the Great City of Angkor Thom in the style of Indiana Jones. Afterwards, they can ride ATVs through the paddy fields surrounding Siem Reap and take in an Apsara Dance Show in the evening.

Home Stays – Our Whole Village recommends a home stay with a vetted family of artisans in [Peru's Sacred Valley](#) or [Costa Rica's Sarapiquí Region](#), for an enriching and eye-opening experience for kids of any age.

Cooking Classes – Many hotels are starting to offer cooking classes, including the Keshi Yena Cooking Class at the [Aruba Marriott Resort](#). The resort gives kids a cooking apron, and teaches them how to create one of the island's signature dish, made from a Gouda rind and stuffed to the brim with a variety of meats, veggies, spices, sauces and more.



Image courtesy of Aruba Marriott

Hotel/Cruise Programs- Hotels have come a long way from offering simple kid's clubs outfitted with a few toys and video games. Many, like the Royalton Luxury Resorts offer cultural experiences for kids through their camps. The Seaside Camp Discover Culture at Royalton Luxury Resorts gives children the opportunity to learn about the country in which they are vacationing with local themes from properties in Mexico, Saint Lucia, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. The program highlights the culture, landmarks, and people of the host country as campers participate in destination-specific daily activities such as mastering a signature dish, learning a cultural dance or crafting a one-of-a-kind masterpiece using local techniques.

Others, like the [San Ignacio Resort](#) Hotel in Belize arrange local tours and excursions for families such as a Maya Community Tour, Mennonite Cultural Tour, and a Chocolate Tour.

Or, while staying at [Crystal Cove](#) an all-inclusive on Barbados' sparkling west coast, families can discover their inner islander by learning to play calypso classics on the steel pan or by jumping in for a game of beachside cricket or road tennis, the island's sport of choice. Further south is [Turtle Beach](#), where families can practice their Rihanna-inspired Bajan accents with dialect lessons, whip up sweet pastries with the award-winning dessert chef using unusual ingredients like noni flour and cactus, or learn about island conservation efforts with an elite team of Turtle Pioneers.

The Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley luxury lodge in Australia offers a [Ranger for a Day](#) program that shows kids the ropes of what it's like to be a park ranger, introduces concepts of ecology and conservation and includes hands-on activities like wildlife monitoring and tree planting.

Cruises have even gotten into the game, moving beyond kid's clubs and video arcades. In Alaska, kids on Princess Cruises can partake in a Junior Ranger program and in the Caribbean, they explore butterfly farms and learn about conservation.

Cultural Trips for Kids

There are so many options when it comes to cultural trips. Do you want a service/volunteer element? If so, look at companies like [Me to We](#), which offers trips to India, Africa, and other destinations.

Or, if you have kids that really love animals, [Animal Experience International](#) offers trips such a dolphin conservation in Croatia, dog rescue in Spain, sea turtle conservation in Costa Rica, and more.

There are also eco-tourism companies that focus on family travel like [Elevate Destinations](#) and [Todos Santos Eco-Adventures](#).

You can even look for tours that focus on cultural heritage travel, like [Motherland Travel](#) or [CIE Tours](#).

Overall, you want to look for companies that specialize in family travel (look for the [Family Travel Association](#) membership logo!), like [Global Family Travels](#), [World Fusion Tours](#), [Global CommUnity](#), and [Our Whole Village](#).

If you are looking for specific cultural trips, here are some great options:



Image courtesy of Boundless Journeys

Peru – [Boundless Journeys](#) is a small-group tour operator goes off the beaten path for immersive and authentic travel experiences. For families seeking a cultural experience, they offer hand-crafted trips to Peru that explore both modern and historic culture, starting in Cusco with a city tour and traditional food and music. From there, they move into the Sacred Valley to visit local markets and villages, learn about traditional weaving at an artisan co-op, and explore important Inca sites such as Moray, the Maras Salt Mine, Pisac, and of course, Machu Picchu. The entire itinerary is based on delving deeper into the Inca and Quechua culture for an unforgettable family vacation.

Brazilian Amazon – Our Whole Village runs family-oriented [Amazon river cruises](#) in Brazil. These fully-immersive trips offer something for everyone: plenty of contact with nature, interaction with local indigenous and riverside communities and active adventure in a fun, safe and comfortable journey on the Rio Negro.



Portugal – [Sagres Vacations](#) designs personalized itineraries that include child-friendly tours and activities such as horseback riding, water activities, cooking classes, bread baking, nature hikes, biking, canyoning, interaction with local children where they can participate in soccer games, and much much more. This offers a perfect blend of relaxation and immersion in local culture and activities.



Image courtesy of Costa Rica Vacations

Costa Rica – [Costa Rica Vacations](#) designs trips for families that are full of adventure and cultural experiences. Kids and teens can learn to surf or visit the Wildlife Rescue Center. The wildlife rescue center outside of Manuel Antonio National park was actually started by 2 tweens, 9-year-olds Janine Licare and Aislin Livingstone, with the goal of raising money to replace the dwindling rainforest by selling crafts by the side of the road. Today, they help injured animals including sloths, monkeys, birds, marmosets, tamarins, kinkajou, and more. Of course families can also enjoy hot springs, zipline through the rainforest, hike to waterfalls, raft down rivers, and have countless other adventures.

South Pacific – For mini-marine biologists and wildlife lovers, [Paul Gaugin Cruises](#) offers a way for families to explore Tahiti, French Polynesia, and the South Pacific through a joint program with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Every day of the voyage, there is a combination of naturalist-led island and/or beach excursions, science activities, crafts, games, and other adventures. Depending on the itinerary, children might learn about underwater life during a snorkeling excursion, observe the ocean or the stars through binoculars or an onboard telescope, and learn about different kinds of marine life and their habitats. Other activities include going on a dolphin-watching expedition, swimming with sharks and rays, playing beach games, enjoying a Tahitian dance performance on board, and learning what it means to be a Steward of Nature.

Have you taken a cultural trip that you have loved? I would love to hear about it!

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