

American Prairie's John and Margaret Craighead Hut has three connected yurts and can sleep up to nine people.

# AND AWAY WE GO!

The family that plays together, grows together. We've got 14 fresh ideas for unique trips that will have everyone too enthralled to check their phones and that promise an engagement with nature in new, wild ways.

 BEST PLACE *To See Wildlife*



Millions of bison once roamed the Great Plains but today are near extinction. The American Prairie's restoration efforts are trying to change that.

**DOMESTIC:**  
*American Prairie, Montana*

Spying the magnificent bison roaming wild on the Great Plains might be the quintessential American wildlife experience. This is the largest mammal in North America, with males standing six feet tall and weighing as much as 2,000 pounds, and their numbers are rebounding on the American Prairie, a public-private conservation partnership that plans to connect 3.2 million acres. Some 800 buffalo call these ranges home, along with growing populations of elk, deer, and pronghorn sheep. The 1.1-million-acre **Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge**, which straddles the Missouri River in the state's northeast, is the system's anchor, with all manner of activities, from hunting and hiking to birding and boating. But for some of the best wildlife viewing, head to private **Mars Vista**, some 75 miles north of Lewistown, off Highway 191, where you can take the kids on a two-mile nature trail and install yourselves at Antelope Creek Campground (from \$18). For a legitimate safari, check out the more remote **Sun Prairie** property, pitch a tent at Buffalo Camp (\$12), and cruise 50 miles of gravel and dirt roads looking for the resident bison herd. Remember to keep a safe distance from the animals, which can run as fast as 35 miles per hour. How distant is safe? Use the (literal) rule of thumb: Extend your arm and stick

out your opposable digit. If the entire bison is covered up, you're good. Bison calves are born in May and June, and adults go into rut—when males fight for the attention of females—in July and August. The elk usually follow suit, with their mating season in September and October. —Graham Averill

**INTERNATIONAL:**  
*East Greenland*

Think Africa has a megafauna monopoly? Think again. East Greenland is a wild, remote expanse of icebergs and fjords, and its vast environs and offshore waters serve as habitat for near mythical creatures like narwhal, polar bears, reindeer, walrus, wolves, and musk oxen, with their curled horns and long beards. The 375,000-square-mile **Northeast Greenland National Park** (the world's largest, equivalent to 100 Yellowstone) is worth exploring, but to be fair, this is not a place you can show up to without planning. And because of limited access intended to protect the landscape, guided trips with outfitters can cost tens of thousands of dollars. One of the less-expensive options is **Oceanwide Expeditions'** 13-day summer cruise, which offers an array of wildlife-watching adventures aboard its ship, in Zodiacs, and on land, as well as time in Ittoqqortoormiit (population 335), the most remote inhabited community in the Western Hemisphere. From \$7,000 —G.A.



Sledding in Greenland

FROM TOP: ADAM SÉBIRE/STOCKSY; LOUISE JOHNS; PREVIOUS PAGE: REID MORTHCOURTESY OF AMERICAN PRAIRIE.



**BEST PLACE** *For Cultural Immersion*

**DOMESTIC:**  
*The Chippewa Nation, Wisconsin*

The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians is a small tribe, with 1,400 members living on the 15,000-acre reservation. But it's a significant presence in this corner of the Upper Midwest, and a visit to the **Bayfield Peninsula** is a unique, immersive opportunity to learn about the tribe's centuries-old culture and customs. Two annual events—a powwow with dancing and drum groups (this year scheduled for January 27 and 28), and a day camp for youth and families that's expected to offer activities like snowshoeing, ice fishing, and dogsledging (February 22 through 24)—are winter highlights, but the surrounding Lake Superior shoreline is also a natural playground that the Red Cliff Band has worked to protect. Head to 175-acre **Frog Bay Tribal National Park**, which opened in 2012 as the country's first tribally owned national park. Its forested trails end at a sandy beach with stunning views of the Apostle Islands. Tread quietly and you might spot wolves and deer, or bring binocs and scope out the black-capped chickadee. As you wander, stop at wooden placards that identify



During winter, you can walk on water at Wisconsin's Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

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Credit: Gillian Henry

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local flora and fauna in English and Ojibwe. From late spring to fall, two Native-owned campsites are ideally suited for exploration: Buffalo Bay (from \$30) and Point Detour Wilderness (from \$25). —Andrew Blue Sky



Glendalough's "Monastic City," near the midway point of the Wicklow Way, dates back to the sixth century.

**INTERNATIONAL:**  
*Wicklow Way, Ireland*

Want to give your kids true immersion in a foreign culture? Ditch the car and travel by foot. A friend of mine recently took his two daughters (ages 11 and 14) on an 80-mile, seven-day trek along the Wicklow Way, a mix of trails and roadside walks that traverse the **Wicklow Mountains outside Dublin**, and reported that it was the perfect amount of hard. You begin in the suburbs of Ireland's capital and head south across rolling hills, glaciated valleys, and forested slopes. Along the way to **Clonegal**, the southernmost town on the trail, there are sixth-century monasteries, 400-foot-tall waterfalls, and 2,300-foot-tall peaks. At the end of each day you find yourself in a different small village, beckoned by pubs rocking with live traditional music, Victorian-era gardens, and cozy bed-and-breakfasts where you might be served black and white pudding for breakfast and roasted leg of lamb for dinner. Carry everything on your back, or travel light and hire a service like Wicklow Way Baggage to move everything from one town to the next (from \$11 per bag per day). Plan your trip for July or August, when conditions are at their warmest and relatively dry. —G.A.

FROM TOP: GILLIAN HENRY/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF TOURISM IRELAND

**BEST** *National Parks Trips*



Treehouse accommodation at Our Jungle House in Thailand

**INTERNATIONAL:** *Khao Sok National Park, Thailand*

Come to this magical park for sightings of elusive wild elephants, tropical jungle treks, and a floating café on the park's striking **Cheow Lan Lake**. This 180,000-acre natural treasure is located in southern Thailand, just a few hours north of Phuket but worlds away in terms of crowds. Towering limestone walls jut above the water (experienced climbers have given these a go), and plenty of sites offer canoe or kayak rentals. A friend who recently traveled here stayed at **Our Jungle House**, a resort in the rainforest a half-mile from Khao Sok village that has 14 treehouses and eight bungalows (from \$80). Staff can help plan guided adventures like rafting on a bamboo boat down adjacent Sok River, hiking to a waterfall, or spending the night in a floating cabin on Cheow Lan Lake. Families can sign up for elephant-care duties, Thai cooking classes, or kid-centric activities like nature art or lessons on local insects. The easiest way to get here is via private transfer from the airport in Phuket or Surat Thani, both of which have direct flights from Bangkok. —Megan Michelson

**DOMESTIC:** *Olympic National Park, Washington*

Thanks to varied terrain—*Jurassic Park*-like foliage in the interior and wild beaches on the coast—this Washington State gem is perfect for kids with short attention spans. Keep them entertained all day on the 9.4-mile **Ozette Triangle Loop**. It starts at pristine Ozette Lake and wends through a lush old-growth forest and coastal meadows via an easy boardwalk trail before delivering you to the western edge of the country, where sea stacks rise from the Pacific and sandy beaches are dotted with tide pools teeming with brightly colored sea stars and spiky urchins. Keep an eye out for otters and whales in the ocean and eagles in the sky, and seek out the **Wedding Rocks petroglyphs**, etched by the ancestors of the Makah Tribe. Close the loop with the Sand Point Trail, whose cedar boardwalk—lined with ferns and enormous cypress trees—makes the final three miles not only easy but beautiful. You and your family can do this easy hike on your own, but if you hire a guide come summer from **Lasting Adventures**, which runs seasonal youth camps at Olympic, you'll not only get the lowdown on the natural and human history of the terrain, but also someone to admonish your kids to pick up the pace (\$500 for up to five people). For more extensive exploration of Olympic's coastline and interior,

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF OUR JUNGLE RESORTS; COURTESY OF LASTING ADVENTURES



At Olympic National Park, coastal exploration can keep kids on the go for days.



You can cover significant ground via UTV in southern Utah, a unique way to tour the popular destination.



**DOMESTIC:**  
*UTV Adventure, Utah*

Break the phone addiction with **Wilderness Collective's** four-day family UTV adventure (from \$6,995, including a driver, meals, guides, and camping equipment). Guides enforce a strict no-device policy, tucking your phones into a secure box before taking you out to rip side-by-sides through the desert of **Dixie National Forest between Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks**. When I took this trip in October, handing over my phone was harder than I thought it would be, but time without it was life-affirming. We're talking miles of canyon exploration and hoodoos on foot and in the UTV, and camping on the edge of remote buttes with no one around. If you book a private trip, you can tailor the itinerary to everyone's tastes, leaving more time for side hikes and swimming holes along the way. If your kids are legal driving age (or have Utah's off-highway-vehicle education certificate), they can enjoy some time behind the wheel, too. Trust me, screaming over sand dunes in these fun machines is better than any video game they've played. A chef will meet your group at each campsite, and the food is as good as the scenery—think fireside cocktails and juicy steaks—and professional photographers document the whole thing, so you can

share your grinning, sand-covered face with all of your followers once you're back in civilization. Still up for more outdoor adventuring in the area? Check out the family-friendly canyoneering trips with **East Zion Adventures** and rappel into slot canyons on the edge of the national park (from \$189; ages 12 and up). —G.A.



Guided hikes with Midgard Adventure offer a taste of lesser-known Iceland.

**BEST** *Digital-Detox Backcountry Trips*

**INTERNATIONAL:** *Iceland*

The land of fire and ice is one of those stunning island nations you simply must visit. Kids will love exploring the rugged landscape's hot springs, volcanoes, and waterfalls; you'll treasure the fact that remote stretches don't have cell service, so everyone can unplug. **Midgard Adventure** is a family-run tour operator that has arranged private and group outings (from \$96) as well as multiday adventures since 2010. Options might include a hike through Thórsmörk Nature Reserve, an area of highlands surrounded by three massive glaciers; excursions to view the northern lights in some of the island's notoriously dark reaches, between October and April; or guided snowmobiling. Day-trippers can drop their bags at hostel-style **Midgard Base Camp**, a remodeled cement factory in the small southern town of Hvolsvöllur that has family rooms with bunk beds, boxed lunches, a low-key restaurant serving local dishes, and a rooftop sauna and hot tub with views of neighboring ice caps (from \$105). And don't fret: if you do need to check email, the lodge has Wi-Fi. Just don't tell the kids. —M.M.

FROM TOP: TITUS HAUG; COURTESY OF MIDGARD ADVENTURE

**BEST** *Boating Adventures*

Aboard the ferry on the Alaska Marine Highway between Juneau and Haines



**DOMESTIC:**  
*Ferry Ride to Alaska*

Sure, you could get to Juneau on a plane or cruise ship (no roadways make it here), but traveling via ferry is more fun. The state-run **Alaska Marine Highway System** shuttles travelers year-round (with limited winter operations) from Bellingham, Washington, to the capital city in three days, a journey with stops in the southeastern port towns of Ketchikan, Wrangell, and Petersburg. The best part: the ferries, which accommodate from 150 to 499 passengers, access areas of the Inside Passage that massive cruise ships are too large to navigate. You'll spot humpback whales, sea lions, and glaciers en route. Book travel in advance; May to September is the high season. You can select a stateroom that sleeps up to four or pitch a tent beside the solarium. Main-line ferries, which run longer multiday routes, offer table-service restaurants, and nearly all ferries, including those for day trips, have cafeterias (from \$466; \$233 for kids ages six to eleven; children five and under are free). Once in **Juneau**, stay at the Glacier Nalu Campground (from \$45), which will open new tiny-home cabins this May and is just three miles from the Mendenhall Glacier visitor

FROM TOP: ALI AND BOBBY TALLEY/TRAVELING NEWSWEDS; ONNE VAN DER WAL/GETTY IMAGES

center. Spend your days traipsing along the glacier, hiking through rainforests with views of the Coast Mountains, and kayaking (rentals available at the campground), or search for hermit crabs and sea stars in the tide pools at nearby Auke Bay. If you want



Alt-cabin accommodation when cruising the Bahamas

to extend your itinerary from Juneau, you can ferry-hop to communities like Gustavus, the jumping-off point to Glacier Bay National Park. —M.M.

**INTERNATIONAL:**  
*Sailing Lessons, Bahamas*

Captaining a boat is a bucket-list activity for many but also incredibly intimidating, especially if you want your kids along to learn the ropes. Which is why the Bahamas is ideal for novices—not only is the wind consistent and the weather warm year-round, but the limited distance between islands means there's always land in sight, and nobody will suffer from cabin fever, because you can drop anchor every day for a different adventure, from deep-sea fishing and lobstering to snorkeling the underwater cave system of Thunderball Grotto and lazing on remote beaches. Sign up for a seven-day liveaboard course with **Nautilus Sailing** and spend a week cruising turquoise waters in a catamaran, with formal lessons from a captain who has at least a decade of experience sailing the globe. Think of it as the best kind of educational vacation: you learn all the necessary skills, from docking to chart navigation, your kids have a spring break they'll never forget, everyone wins. From \$7,475 —G.A.



**BEST Ski Trip**

**DOMESTIC:**  
*Lake Placid, New York*

If you're a skier, you'll appreciate Lake Placid for its vintage Olympic vibe—the town hosted the 1932 and 1980 Winter Games—and for having the most vertical in the east at **Whiteface Mountain Ski Resort**, 13 miles from downtown and accessible via a free shuttle in the winter. If one of you isn't a skier, or you're looking for off-slope things to do with the kids, the picturesque Adirondack village has activities aplenty. At the **Olympic Center**, watch a hockey game or ice-skate outside on a speed-skating oval still used for Olympic training. History buffs can visit the **Lake Placid Olympic Museum**, and families love dogsledding on frozen Mirror Lake. Just outside town, **Mount Van Hoevenberg** has over 30 miles of cross-country ski trails, as well as a bobsled and skeleton track (for children nine and up) that will test everyone's speed limits. Our pick for posting up is a Scandinavian-style cabin at Eastwind Lake Placid (from \$159), which opened in 2022 along the Chubb River with 17 rooms, eight well-appointed cabins, and one amazing barrel sauna. —M.M.

**INTERNATIONAL:**  
*Portillo, Chile*

The novelty of skiing when it's summer in North America is worth the extra haul it



Whiteface Mountain, a quick drive from Lake Placid, offers 90 runs and boasts the most vertical drop in the East.

takes to get to the Southern Hemisphere in July or August. Portillo is an iconic, all-inclusive ski resort in the Andes' Valparaíso region that attracts families from all over the world for its luxe service and legendary out-the-door terrain.

There are groomed slopes for youngsters and intermediates, but the expert terrain is what brought me here: wide-open, powder-stuffed bowls above Laguna del Inca, the shimmering alpine lake in the middle of the resort, as well as steep chutes through **El Estadio** and access to a legendary backcountry couloir known as the **Super C** that boasts a drop of 5,000 vertical feet. The hotel itself is kid paradise: there's a climbing wall, a craft hour, and movie nights, not to mention free day care and an afternoon tea that was the best après-ski my children have ever experienced. During select weeks (this year, from June 22 to July 6 and August 31 to September 28), one child under 12 per two accompanying adults can stay, eat, and ski for free. For grown-ups, there's live music and Chilean wine tasting in the bar, and a disco that's open till the wee hours. Most guests opt for a full seven-day package (from \$1,450, including accommodation, four meals per day, and lift tickets), but there's a half-week option, too. Other highlights include a **torchlight parade** at week's end and views of the alpenglow from the heated pool. Fly into Santiago, then take a shuttle two hours up a twisting mountain highway into the mountains, something the resort can arrange. —M.M.



Portillo's Laguna del Inca is a focal point for visitors; the hotel and resort's base is just south.

**BEST Beach Trip**

**DOMESTIC:**  
*Puu O Hoku Ranch, Hawaii*

Hawaii is filled with spectacular beachfront resorts, but for something a little more eccentric and out of the way, consider a stay at Puu O Hoku Ranch, a working 1930s-era, family-owned ranch with an organic, biodynamic honey and banana farm on the eastern end of secluded **Molokai**. Stay in a plantation-style cottage on the 14,000-acre grounds (from \$375), where eating local comes easy: the lodge serves farm-to-table meals (try the taro-root chili or venison burgers), or request a box of the ranch's produce and meat so you can cook during your vacation (each cottage comes equipped with kitchen essentials). A yoga platform with ocean views and a kid-friendly pool are nice on-site spots to recharge, or wander to the black-sand beaches of **Halawa Valley** (two miles away), or the white sands of **Murphy's Beach** (five miles) for snorkeling. —M.M.

**INTERNATIONAL:**  
*La Saladita, Mexico*

I'm not much of a surfer, but I was drawn to the Pacific hamlet of La Saladita—known for its legendary left-hand point



The biodynamic garden at Puu O Hoku Ranch

break—because I knew it'd be a good place for my kids to experience a different Mexico than the one on view in the major tourist hubs. Getting there is fairly easy, too: fly into Zihuatanejo, then drive an hour north. The payoff is worth it; there are no crowded resorts,

only quaint, quiet casitas and a couple of beachside surf shops renting longboards and boogie boards by the day. My five- and seven-year-old kids alternated between riding the whitewash and swimming in the pool that came with our rental. They got out of the warm water just long enough to devour fish tacos from the string of nearby open-air cafés, followed by ice cream bars sold by a vendor with a mobile cooler. Each morning we walked the playa looking for green sea turtles and leatherbacks. It was our best spring break yet. We stayed at **La Chuparosa**, an oceanside property with four casitas (from \$135), and **Casa Tortuga** (from \$609)—a newly built compound just down the beach with a three-bedroom house and one-bedroom detached studio—also looked nice. Worth the splurge: hiring a local cook. Ours made delicious huevos rancheros for breakfast and grilled red snapper for dinner. The nearby village of Troncones has more restaurants and lodgings if you're after a livelier scene. —M.M.

*Contributing editor Megan Michelson loves traveling with her two kids, though it's never exactly easy. Correspondent Graham Averill has written about travel and adventure for 20 years, and his favorite experiences involved having his wife and kids along. Andrew Blue Sky is an MFA candidate at the Institute of American Indian Arts and a member of the Oneida Nation.*



Consistent breaks, warm water, and a laid-back vibe draw surfers and families to La Saladita.

FROM TOP: TAMARA SUSA, PAT BLY/WHITEFACE MOUNTAIN

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF PUU O HOKU RANCH; ROBERT CHAPMAN/COURTESY OF LA CHUPAROSA