

FAMILY FUN

Vacation Destinations

Written by Jason Soroski

A Quick Start Guide for Katy Vacationers

Whether you're looking to get away for a few weeks or just a week-end, Katy families know how to leave their worries behind and find their way to fun.

The first step to planning the perfect vacation is deciding on what kind of vacation is right for your family. Will you want to stay close to home or venture to an exotic destination? How long do you plan to be away? What is your family's budget? Will you take a road trip, airplane, or cruise? Here are some of Katy's favorite family fun destinations close to and far from home.

Traveling in Texas

From beaches to hiking to historical trips, there is plenty to do here in the Lone Star State, and much of it accessible on one tank of gas. Here are some popular hot spots for those with limited travel time.

The Riverwalk, San Antonio

Head west on I-10 for a few hours and you'll drive right into San Antonio where you can sight see and learn about history. A trip to the Alamo is free, offers great lessons on Texas history, and is within walking distance of the famous San Antonio Riverwalk. There are many hotels situated along the Riverwalk where you step out of your hotel room and into a fun atmosphere. From



A river boat cruise on San Antonio's Riverwalk

fabulous dining to romantic walkways and river boat cruises, the Riverwalk is the place to be in San Antonio. While in San Antonio don't forget that Six Flags Fiesta Texas, SeaWorld, the Tower of the Americas, and the Natural Bridge Caverns are all here and offer lots of family fun.

Galveston and South Padre Islands

A little over an hour's drive from Katy, Galveston offers great fishing, delicious seafood, and beaches for the kids. Take your family to the historic Strand district or visit Moody Gardens to see one of the largest aquariums in the world or take in a movie at the IMAX theatre. Don't forget to beat the heat at Schlitterbahn before you head back to Katy. South Padre Island, another seaside community just a few hours drive from Katy, has great beaches, fishing and fun in the sun too.



Galveston is a popular getaway for Katy families



Many Caribbean cruises depart from Galveston

Cruises and Tropical Ports

Many Katy families are choosing the convenience and affordability of a Caribbean or Mexican Cruise, sailing right out of Galveston. Cruisers can choose a 3, 5, or 7 day cruise to a variety of tropical retreats. "A cruise is a really great getaway without having to fly someplace. Cruises offer something for everyone, lots to do for all ages," says Karen Quinn, of Quinn Travel Services in Katy. The cruises out of Galveston sail to Mexico, Jamaica, Cayman Islands, and other exotic ports of call. When the cruise ship docks, cruisers may purchase extra excursions such as snorkeling and diving trips, swimming with the dolphins, and a variety of fun island adventures. Cruises are less in demand while school is in session, so budget conscious families with children not yet in school can get a great deal, says Quinn.

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California's Disneyland is a truly magical experience for kids of all ages

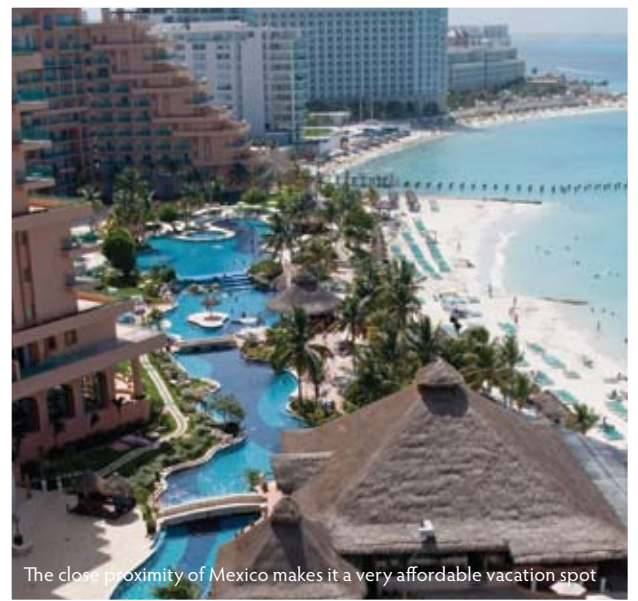


California Dreamin'

If a trip to Los Angeles is of interest, you'll find lots to do beyond Disneyland (admittedly a dream vacation for most kids by itself). Watch the sunset over the Pacific from the world famous Santa Monica Pier, stand in the footprints of your favorite Hollywood star in front of Grauman's Chinese Theater, or have your picture taken near the famous Hollywood sign. Another great attraction in the Los Angeles area is the Universal City Walk, where you can take in the sights and sounds of Hollywood, find great food and entertainment, and search the shops for that perfect souvenir. If you're willing to drive a bit, you can also visit beautiful San Diego or ride in a convertible along Highway 1, the breathtaking coastal highway. Katy families traveling to Northern California can be beach bums, mountain adventurers, or city tourists. San Francisco, Lake Tahoe, Monterey/Carmel and Yosemite should be first on your list of places to visit in Northern California.

Mexico and Costa Rica

Set your sights south of the border if you're looking for a trip that can also be an adventure for your family. Quinn says many Katy families are booking all-inclusive vacations to Mexico. "The most popular is the Riviera Maya area south of Cancun," says Quinn. "We have wonderful packages available that include nonstop air, transfers to and from the resorts, and accommodations at family-oriented resorts. All the food, entertainment, and children's activities are included for one price. It's really a great vacation for one price."



The close proximity of Mexico makes it a very affordable vacation spot

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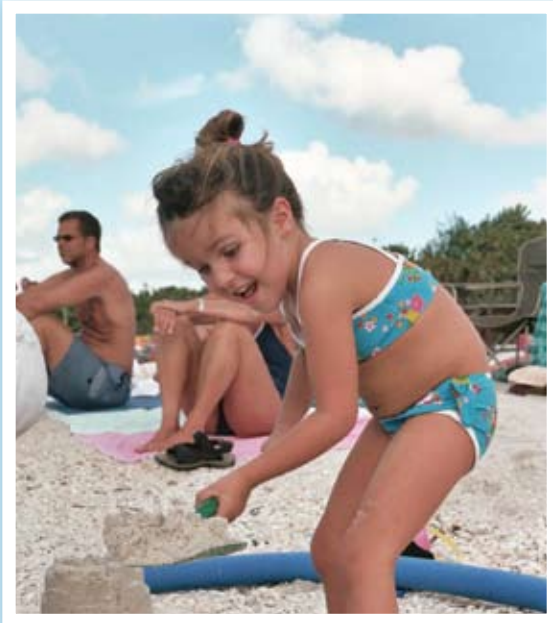
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According to Quinn, Costa Rica is another south of the border trip that many families enjoy. "Houston has several nonstops per day to Costa Rica. This is a family adventure destination, with rainforests, an active volcano, zip lines through the forests, and beaches. Accommodations range from eco-lodges in the rainforest to luxury resorts."

Most families agree it's not the destination that matters, but how you spent time making memories with the people you love the most. The best part of any vacation is spending time together doing something you and your family will enjoy and remember for a lifetime. **KM**

JASON SOROSKI loves traveling with his wife and five kids, but mostly looks forward to the trip back home to Katy.

Katy Cutie Allison makes a sand castle during a recent family vacation



KATY VACATION PLANNING TO DO'S

- Get your passports well in advance if you are traveling outside the USA.
- Check their expiration dates on current passports, especially those of your children as they expire every five years.
- Assure every child has his own passport.
- Make sure the name on your airline ticket is the same as the name on your passport.
- Make time for downtime – try not to pack in too many activities.
- Plan early and travel in the off season to save costs.
- Plan out your itinerary before arriving.
- Check with various airlines and travel sites for specials.
- Lave plenty of time for getting to and from the airport and through security.

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