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Away with the kids

A relaxing, stress-free family holiday can be somewhat of a misnomer. It's up there with 'military intelligence' and 'friendly fire' in the oxymoron charts. It appears to be a chance to spend some time together, *en famille*, rediscovering each other's magic. But then reality hits and all you've managed to rediscover is the importance of Cartoon Network and how much you like being at home. And that's before you've experienced the bitter shame of being the family everyone avoids in the breakfast room. The key is to choose your destination carefully, with insight and foresight.

The most important bit of advice when planning a family holiday is to lose any unrealistic expectations you may have. Dealing with children out of their home environment is always going to have its moments. Younger children, particularly those used to a very regular routine, are going to be a bit disoriented, while older ones may well become over-excited as it may be the most they've seen of you for months. Lose the 'blissful idyll' fantasy and manage everyone's expectations, and you're already halfway there.

Destinations

This is by no means an exhaustive list but just some of the many child-friendly establishments available in South Africa.

WESTERN CAPE

WESTERN CAPE HOTEL AND SPA, KLEINMOND (near Hermanus)

This hotel is a wonderfully luxurious getaway right in the middle of some of the Cape's most beautiful landscape. It has one of the country's top five golf courses and one of the world's Top 100 spas. To enjoy all that, you need to know the children are well taken care of. Lil' Capers at Balou's is a kids' programme in a kids' paradise. Balou's has a purpose-built set of rooms that house all kinds of activities with armies of trained staff on hand to play games (indoors and out), read stories and lead all

kinds of arts and crafts. The activities have been devised by an educational specialist and the list changes daily. There's also a 'Kids Night Out' from 6 till 10 p.m. which involves movies, pizza and ice cream so that you can eat in peace. Lil' Capers caters for 5-12-year-olds and there are babysitters for the younger ones at any time of the day (or all day if you really need a break). Kids receive their own posh tog bag and welcome pack on arrival at the hotel and there is a heated outdoor pool. (Check with the hotel for programme dates.)

TWELVE APOSTLES, CAPE TOWN

Nestled beneath Table Mountain, the Twelve Apostles lies at the foot of the Atlantic Ocean. A member of the Leading Hotels of the World, Twelve Apostles is a 5-star hotel which prides itself on its exceptional hospitality, offering guests an unforgettable experience. Ideal as a base from which to explore all the Cape Peninsula's myriad attractions, the hotel welcomes children of all ages.

Children's facilities:

- An extensive Children's menu is available including Purity Baby food. Highchairs are supplied in the restaurant and rooms. Milk and Cookies at turndown
- DVDs, toys in the room, lists of "things to do" in all types of weather, there is a 16-Seater cinema with four screenings a day and outdoor activities are supervised.
- Children's bathrobes, prams, cots, car-seats





and safety items e.g. corner cushions, electric plug socket protectors, doorstoppers and flexi-loop locks are available.

- Tailor-made kiddies programmes are available as well as a list of top family attractions and local emergency numbers.
- Assorted baby products are available from Housekeeping including disposable nappies as well as nappies for swimming, nappy gel, bathing lotion etc.
- Babysitting is outsourced to an organisation with minders aged 20 to 35 who have a minimum of 2 years experience, a driver's licence, a car, a first aid certificate and a qualification in childcare.

PROTEA HOTEL, PRESIDENT, CAPE TOWN

For a hotel offering a resort in a city, look no further than the Protea President Hotel. It's the ideal base from which to explore Cape Town's myriad attractions as it's only five minutes from the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront and Two Oceans Aquarium (a must-visit whether or not you have children!), Clifton and Camps Bay beaches, and 10 minutes from the Table Mountain Cable Way. The Sea Point promenade, popular for both romantic strolls and jogging, starts in front of the hotel and includes a children's park, a putt-putt course, the blue train picnic area and a maze.

Prokidz club (include special registration

upon check in, Kiddies Welcome Pack & gift in room upon arrival and kiddies menu).

DIAZ STRAND HOTEL AND RESORT, MOSSEL BAY

Named in honour of the famed Portuguese navigator, Bartolomeu Diaz, who landed in the area in 1488, the Diaz Strand Hotel and Resort opened in 2004. Offering 86 luxurious sea-facing rooms, each with its own balcony, the hotel is a stone's throw from Mossel Bay's famed beaches.

It's a children's Mecca with both an indoor heated pool and an outdoor rim flow pool, a fitness centre, a water theme park called Lizzy Rivers, and adventure golf courses. An on-site adventure company offers a range of activities including boat trips to Seal Island, whale watching, sea kayaking, abseiling and scuba diving.

KWAZULU-NATAL CATHEDRAL PEAK, DRAKENSBERG

In stunningly beautiful natural surroundings, this hotel has a long tradition of family fun. It's an extremely good choice for families with kids who are between five and 12 as there are things you can all do together – guided hikes (some to bushman paintings), horse riding, beach volleyball, floodlit mini golf, climbing tower, heated pool. There's also an indoor games room, separate children's dining room

and many available nannies. When you've left the tyranny of breast-feeding and nappies behind, this is the kind of place that can get you all back in fun mode.

THE CAVERN, DRAKENSBERG

Here's an opinion from a mother herself: "It's there for families - beautiful setting, loads to do, horse riding, hiking, fishing, walking, picnics, swimming pool, kids' dining room with lots of nannies from 6-9 p.m. which means you eat average chow in peace and quiet. And it's just three hours from Johannesburg."

LIMPOPO PROVINCE PROTEA HOTEL THE RANCH

Situated on 1000 hectares, only 2 hours' drive north of Pretoria on the N1 and 20 minutes south of Polokwane and offers the personal touch and friendliness in beautiful surroundings. The family rooms are en-suite, with satellite TV, air-conditioning and fans.

Sporting Facilities include: horse-riding, swimming pool, jogging track, tennis court and mountain biking. Additional facilities include kids' playground, trampolines and animal farm. A fitness centre, bowls and two golf courses are within 20 kms of the hotel.

On-site activities include The Ranch Lion Kingdom, home to famous lion films with 34 lions, from six-week old cubs to 14-year old adults, as well as a hyena call "Schizo" View the lions and other game from an open Unimog vehicle, Game drives, 4 x 4 track, Mountain Bike Trails. Running Routes, Children's Playgrounds, "Howling Hog" tented camp and Teambuilding High and Low Rope Course.

MPUMALANGA LUKIMBI SAFARI LODGE, KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Situated in the heart of the Kruger National Park, Lukimbi Safari Lodge is part of the Lwakahle concession in the game-rich southern section of Kruger. Luxury is the name of the game at Lukimbi: *Condé Nast Traveller Magazine* selected it as one of the best new properties in the world for 2003. In spite of its exclusivity, children of all ages are welcomed at the Lodge and are entertained by hostesses in their own private entertainment centre which offers various games, jungle gyms, face painting