

Top providers

by [Molly Feltner](#), *SmarterTravel.com Staff* - August 14, 2006

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Here's a look at some of the companies that are leading the way in the family adventure market. All the companies listed discount rates for kids on most trips, although age rules vary by destination and kids must usually share a room with parents to be eligible for lower prices. In addition, all can arrange custom tours as well as set departure dates.

Wildland Adventures

With a focus on ecotourism and authentic travel experiences, [Wildland Adventures'](#) 25 family programs are a good choice for families who want to have fun and learn. Tours make use of indigenous guides and local providers, and feature numerous opportunities for kids and parents to interact with local communities. "Wildland Adventures added lots of special experiences by hiring a local calypso band one night, inviting a children's group to perform traditional dances, and arranging a special visit to a local elementary school. As a result, our kids have initiated a pen pal relationship with students from the school and we are sending teaching materials and playground equipment to the school," says Deborah VanDerhei, who brought her family on the company's Panama trip.

Wildland's family-tour destinations include Africa, Latin America, New Zealand, and Alaska. Prices range from \$1,695 per adult for the eight-day "Undiscovered Belize Adventure" to \$5,595 per adult for the 12-day "Alaska Family Explorer."

Austin-Lehman Adventures

Upscale outfitter [Austin-Lehman Adventures'](#) trips feature adventurous activities like white-water rafting and rock-climbing, as well as luxurious accommodations and meals. "A hallmark of our family adventures is our food," says Dave Wiggins. "For family dinners, we choose casual restaurants with delightful family fare and excellent service. Adults and children also have opportunities to eat apart. Mom and dad can dine on black-pepper gnocchi in the wine cellar while the kids eat pizza by the pool."

Austin-Lehman has almost 20 family tours, which mostly focus on North American national parks, although the company also has a Costa Rica and a Galapagos tour. Prices range from \$850 per adult for the four-day "Canyonlands Rafting Adventure" to \$2,848 per adult for the six-day "Kaua'i: The Garden Isle" trip (custom trips only).

Thomson Family Adventures

One of the few providers that focuses solely on family tours, [Thomson Family Adventures](#) is a pioneer in family adventure travel. "With years of our own family experiences we know a lot about putting together the right combination of activities, downtime, culture, and adventure to satisfy everyone," says Moo Bishop.

Thomson runs trips in 10 destinations (Alaska, Belize, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Panama, Peru, Tanzania, and Turkey), although the 11-day Tanzania family safari (\$3,940 per adult) is its signature trip; its parent company [Wineland-Thomson Adventures](#) has been running Tanzanian safaris for 25 years. Thomson's other tours range in price from \$2,090 per adult for the nine-day "Costa Rica: Volcanoes, Cloud Forests, & Beaches" tour to \$7,090 per adult for the 19-day "Kilimanjaro: Teen Adventure."

O.A.R.S.

Specializing in rafting trips on North America's great white-water rivers, [O.A.R.S.](#) has been leading family trips since 1969. O.A.R.S. rates its family trips according to age-appropriateness, with gentler options for kids as young as four and more challenging trips for kids ages 12 and up. On family trips, one guide is designated as the "Fun Director" whose focus is keeping the kids happy.

O.A.R.S. has 15 different family trips, including several kayaking and multi-sport adventures. Rates range from \$80 per adult for a half-day "Yellowstone Lake Kayak" tour to \$4,237 per adult for a full-length "Grand Canyon Rafting" tour.

