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INDIAN EDITION

## FAMILY FUN

Plan your perfect holiday—from India's top 20 child-friendly hotels  
to 20 amazing experiences for kids in Asia

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# GET AWAY

HOW TO PLAN THE PERFECT FAMILY HOLIDAY **ODISHA**



## 20 AMAZING EXPERIENCES FOR YOUR KIDS IN ASIA

Skip the clichéd US and Europe tours and give your children holidays that are meaningful and unique, right here on the continent. By **Puja Disha Bharwani & Samira Sood**



## WITH KIDS

### STAYING ON A HOUSEBOAT

**WHERE:** Jammu & Kashmir, India

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** Jannat, heaven, paradise—Kashmir justifies every cliché and defies every superlative. And one of the most magical experiences to be had here is a stay in a houseboat in Srinagar. While the shikaras on the famous Dal Lake are great for short rides to explore floating markets, serene Nagin Lake, nearby, is perfect for an overnight stay for the whole family. **WelcomHeritage Gurkha Houseboats** ([www.welcomheritagehotels.in](http://www.welcomheritagehotels.in)) offers a number of beautiful stays. Each has three or four spacious rooms with basic facilities and lovely views of flowering trees. This is the kind of holiday that's all about lazy meals, reading and playing board games.

### TREE-HOPPING

**WHERE:** Phuket, Thailand

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

Let your kids live out their *Jungle Book* dreams as they zip line through 8,61,110sq ft of gorgeous rainforest, with intermittent views of Phuket's coastline. **Flying Hanuman** ([www.flyinghanuman.com](http://www.flyinghanuman.com)) is one of the few flying fox companies set in a natural rainforest that children as young as six can sign up for. The platforms are supported by industrial-strength cables and the landscape is easily navigable, so kids shouldn't feel too scared to try it out.

Below, clockwise from top left: **a leopard moray eel on a reef in the Maldives; giant mantas in the Maldives; a diver swimming through a school of bannerfish in the Maldives.** Previous pages from left: **a girl snorkelling in Thailand; orangutans in Borneo**



A man zip lining through forest



### SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELLING

**WHERE:** Maldives & Thailand

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** Take a leap with the family and watch in amazement as your children discover the underwater world and all its denizens. Scuba diving is an ideal way for your older water babies to learn about the sea, and there are a number of diving schools in the Maldives, such as **Prodivers** ([www.prodivers.com](http://www.prodivers.com)) to help you plan the perfect diving vacation. The dazzling blue waters are home to schools of tiny, colourful fish, sharks and turtles, but the highlight of the atolls are the manta rays, which glide effortlessly through the waters. Snorkelling is a bit easier for beginners and younger kids, and the gentle waters around Thailand's Phi Phi Islands, near Phuket, are the ideal place to get them started.

### HANGING WITH ORANGUTANS

**WHERE:** Borneo, Malaysia & Indonesia

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** It's important to instill in your kids a respect for nature, and one way to do that is to take them to see these fascinating creatures in Borneo's rainforests. Native to Indonesia and Malaysia, orangutans are considered the most intelligent primates. Because of human activities such as logging, mining, and construction of palm oil plantations, their habitat is under threat and they are now classified as endangered. Take your kids to see them while you can, and use your holidays to contribute to conservation efforts. **Borneo Eco Tours** ([www.borneoecotours.com](http://www.borneoecotours.com)) organises a variety of adventure experiences that are suitable for different age groups.



## WITH KIDS

### BALLOONING OVER BAGAN

**WHERE:** Bagan, Myanmar

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

After decades of political and military turmoil, the country is finally getting back on its feet, and its tourism industry is beginning to take off. This is great news, since it is a beautiful place, with much to offer. A major tourist attraction is the temple town of Bagan, and one of the most fun ways to see it all is in a hot-air balloon. Watch dawn break in all its pink and orange glory over the tops of temples and pagodas as you soar above it. It's a great way to expose your children, especially teens, to a place that's not likely to be on most tourists' radar.

**Bagan Balloon** (<http://bagan-balloon.com>) offers rides that are followed by Champagne (for you) and refreshments (for the kids).

### LEARNING KALARIPAYATTU

**WHERE:** Kerala, India

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

A great way to bond with your kids is by taking a learning holiday together. One of the most enriching experiences for children is to learn an art form. And Kalaripayattu, one of the oldest martial arts in the world, is a fascinating way to introduce your teenagers to Kerala.

Sign up for a course at one of the many schools across the state. **CVN Kalari** and **Kalari Dharmikam** offer courses for all levels, as well as ayurvedic treatments to treat those sore muscles after an arduous class. It's a good way for you to stay fit and do something fun. Take a break from all the weapons and war cries with a chilled-out, peaceful boat ride across the backwaters. ([www.keralatourism.org](http://www.keralatourism.org))

### STAYING ON A FARM

**WHERE:** Punjab, India

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

You know all those stories about farm life you read to your kids? You can make those tales come alive by taking the whole family to live on a farm for a few days. **Punjabiyaat** ([www.itmenaanlodges.com](http://www.itmenaanlodges.com)), in Saidowal-Gunopur, about 70km from Amritsar, is one of the best such stays, suitable for all age groups. Begin your day with a hearty outdoor breakfast of parathas and fruit. Take the kids to help out in the fields, learn about farming practices in this agrarian state, bathe in the tube well tank, ride tractors and even milk cows at the dairy farm a short bicycle ride away. At night, have an outdoor tandoori barbecue. There's no better way to get your children out of their city-slicker mode.

### CRUISING ON EMERALD WATERS

**WHERE:** Ha Long Bay, Vietnam

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

The UNESCO World Heritage Site is known for its hundreds of majestic limestone formations. These take the shape of pillars, caves and arches that are topped by dense green jungle. The region features a variety of ecosystems, including mangroves, coral reefs and beaches, and is home to monkeys and antelopes. Luxury cruises and sea kayak expeditions take visitors past islands named for their unique shapes, such as Stone Dog and Teapot. Check out **Luxury Halong Cruises** ([www.luxuryhalongcruises.com](http://www.luxuryhalongcruises.com)) for a variety of options. Kids of any age will enjoy the peaceful ride, and it's an easy way for you to spend some quality time with them, too.



Hot-air balloons soaring over the pagodas of Bagan, Myanmar



## WITH KIDS

### SCORING THE BEST FISH IN THE WORLD

**WHERE:** Tokyo, Japan

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:** If your child's showing signs of a master chef in the making, make a trip to Tokyo's famous Tsukiji Market. The largest wholesale fish and seafood market in the world is a 57-acre wonderland of food. The kids will watch in awe as chefs rush about to score the best of the 2,000 tonnes of seafood that goes in and out of the space. While it can be a bit overwhelming for younger kids, your teenagers might enjoy observing how fish is cut, and sampling some delicacies alongside. Make sure you take them before the market shifts to another location in November. ([www.jnto.go.jp](http://www.jnto.go.jp))

Clockwise from right: **Tiger's Nest monastery in Bhutan;** camels in Jaisalmer

### TREKKING UP TO A MONASTERY

**WHERE:** Paro Valley, Bhutan

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

Disconnecting the kids from their daily grind is one of the best ways to get them to connect with their surroundings. And few places offer the kind of peace one finds in Bhutan. The trek to the Buddhist monastery of Taktsang Lhakhang, or Tiger's Nest, is unsuitable for little ones or those who aren't outdoorsy, but a great experience for athletic teens. Perched on a cliff about 10,240ft above sea level, it is built at the spot where the seer Padmasambhava, credited with introducing Buddhism to Bhutan, is said to have meditated in the 7th century. Whether you believe it or not, the majestic beauty all around will make you and the kids forget all about those burning calves. ([www.tourism.gov.bt](http://www.tourism.gov.bt))



### DESERT SAFARI

**WHERE:** Rajasthan, India

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

Few experiences can beat riding a camel through the vast, sandy expanse of Rajasthan desert. The Golden City of Jaisalmer, a World Heritage Site, is a wonderful place for kids, especially older ones, to engage with India, the luxurious stays and historic forts juxtaposed with the realities of daily life in this part of the country. If you're keen to camp out, but don't want to compromise on comfort, check out **Rajasthan Desert Safari Camps** ([www.desertsafarijaisalmer.com](http://www.desertsafarijaisalmer.com)) which has comfortable, pretty tents.

### SKIING DOWN SLOPES OF POWDER SNOW

**WHERE:** Niseko, Japan

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

When we think of skiing, we think of European resort towns like Zermatt and Verbier, but any skier worth their pole knows that Niseko snow is special. The Hokkaido town is one of the world's best places to experience powder snow, which is light, dry and great for beginners. Kids as young as three can be seen sliding happily down the bunny slopes, while older ones can try some of the more challenging paths. ([www.nisekotourism.com](http://www.nisekotourism.com))

“Few experiences can beat riding a camel through the vast, sandy expanse of Rajasthan desert”



## WITH KIDS

### VISITING A KINGDOM

**WHERE:** Siem Reap, Cambodia

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

A great mix of history, art, and adventure, Siem Reap is perfect for older kids, especially those interested in different cultures. The quaint resort town is the gateway to Angkor Wat, the largest religious monument in the world, built by the Khmer king Suryavarman II in honour of Vishnu, in the 12th century. Spend a few days walking through the stone temples of the ancient city of Angkor and explore the art and architecture all over the massive complex. ([www.tourismcambodia.com](http://www.tourismcambodia.com))

### WHALE WATCHING

**WHERE:** Sri Lanka

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

Introduce your children to the blue whale, the largest mammal on Earth. Between December and April, they swim close to the Sri Lankan coast. Stay at the **Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort** ([www.tangalle.anantara.com](http://www.tangalle.anantara.com)), which organises whale-watching tours for its guests.

### SWIMMING WITH DOLPHINS

**WHERE:** Sentosa, Singapore

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

Dolphins are known to be friendly to humans, so taking the kids to meet them would be fun. **Dolphin Island at Sentosa** ([www.rwsentosa.com](http://www.rwsentosa.com)) is a sheltered enclave where children of all ages, even those who aren't too good at swimming, can safely and comfortably interact with Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins. Trainers and marine mammal experts are at hand to supervise.

### HOLIDAYING FOR A CAUSE

**WHERE:** Nepal & Cambodia

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

While Nepal and Cambodia are major tourist spots, much of their population is poor. Volunteering is a great way to help out and see a new place. In Nepal, the effects of the 2015 earthquake are still being felt. Sign your older kids up to help build homes or teach at schools, with **Himalayan Voluntourism** ([www.himalayanvoluntourism.org](http://www.himalayanvoluntourism.org)). In Cambodia, the **Angkor Marathon** ([www.angkormarathon.org](http://www.angkormarathon.org)) raises funds to support those who have been victims of landmines.



The North Gate of Angkor Thom, in the city of Angkor

PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTT A WOODWARD



## WITH KIDS



A child playing with a cantaloupe. Below: the Great Wall of China

### STAYING IN A WATER SUITE

**WHERE:** Maldives

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

There are beach holidays and then there are beach holidays. At the **Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa** ([www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com)), you and the family can stay in a Water Suite, which comes with up to three bedrooms. Each suite is raised on stilts above a lagoon and looks right out to the endless, dazzling ocean. The precarious positioning of the rooms makes it better suited for a lazy seaside vacation with your teenagers, who can go snorkelling or sailing. Younger kids might enjoy the fish feeding and beach walks.

### WALKING ALONG THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

**WHERE:** Beijing, China

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

It would be near impossible to walk along the entirety of one of the greatest wonders of the world, but there's nothing to stop you from doing a day trip and seeing even one section. There is so much history embedded in each brick, each stone, each piece of wood that different emperors have contributed to its creation. Older kids, especially those who are history buffs, will get a thrill out of being in the presence of this engineering marvel and learning its many stories and legends. ([www.cnto.org](http://www.cnto.org))

“The family that cooks together stays together. Being in the kitchen with your kids while learning to whip up new dishes is great for bonding”

### GOURMET COOKING CLASSES

**WHERE:** Bangkok & Phuket, Thailand

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

The family that cooks together stays together. Being in the kitchen with your offspring while learning to whip up new dishes is great for bonding as it gives you a chance to engage in great conversations about family traditions and secret recipes. At **Blue Elephant Cooking School** (<http://blueelephantcookingschool.com>), which has branches in Bangkok and Phuket, you and the fam can sign up for lessons on how to make those much-loved curries and more. You can even opt for private six-day classes. It's a super-fun way to hang out with your kids, plus, there's great food in the bargain.

### QAWWALI NIGHT

**WHERE:** New Delhi, India

**WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL:**

India is home to vast multitudes of people from different faiths, with diverse cultural practices. It's important for children, especially when they're older, to understand the value of this diversity, and there's no better place to start than the country's historic capital. Take the kids to the **dargah of Nizamuddin Auliya**, the 14th-century Sufi saint after whom the neighbourhood is named. Every evening, the place resonates with the sounds of qawwali by the resident singers, the Nizami brothers. It's a wonderful experience, made all the more so by the delicious kebabs and meat stews you can devour at the many eateries in the area. ([www.delhitourism.gov.in](http://www.delhitourism.gov.in))



PHOTOGRAPHS: VICTOR TORRES/STOCKSY; ALAMY