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Family Spring Break and Early Summer Specials

By Charis Atlas Heelan

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As spring break is upon us, the family travel season moves into high gear. With the value sliding of the U.S. dollar, many families may be re-thinking a vacation abroad and concentrating on destinations closer to home, or at the very least, traveling to countries where the dollar still has some clout. Here are a few options for saving those hard-earned dollars while traveling with your family this spring and summer.

New York shines in the spring, with colorful flowers in bloom and a plethora of family activities to choose from including Broadway shows, zoos, shopping and some of the best museums in the country. The price of accommodation in the city can be rather daunting and for those of you who have visited before, you will know that finding a hotel room large enough to accommodate a family of four is no easy task. The **Buckingham Hotel** (tel. 888/511-1900; www.buckinghamhotel.com), located a few short blocks walk from Central Park, offers spacious suites with kitchen facilities that are perfect for families. They currently have a special New York Museum of Natural History package for stays until June 30, 2008 with prices starting from \$299 per night with a minimum two-night stay. For this price you will the Hotel's "Passport to Earth and Space Package" which includes admission for two adults and two children to the American Museum of Natural History, the Hayden Planetarium, space shows at the Rose Center and special exhibitions plus tickets to an IMAX and souvenir astronaut ice creams. Blackout periods apply and taxes are additional, but this is still a pretty good deal considering admission to the Planetarium and space show alone for a family of four is \$86 and for the Museum plus the Dinosaur IMAX film, admission is \$70. If you are just looking for accommodation and happen to be arriving in town by ACELA train, take advantage of the Buckingham's special Acela package which offers spacious suites for four people from \$219 per night if you show your Acela ticket stub on arrival.

Still in New York, there are several **Affinia Hotel** (tel. 866/246-2203; www.affinia.com) properties in the city and the hotel group is offering a special Family Package priced from \$239 per night plus taxes at four of them -- the **Affinia Dumont**, the **Affinia 50**, the **Affinia Manhattan** and the **Affinia Gardens**. The package includes overnight accommodation, a complimentary gift bag stocked with a *Frommer's New York City with Kids* guide book, a deck of 52 travel activity cards, a Disney Digital Camera and scrapbook with city stickers plus access to a "Fun-For-Family Chest" stocked with board games, a selection of DVDs, arts and crafts kits and books for use during stay. And for those wanting to visit the windy city, the **Affinia Chicago** also offers the Family Package.

Although you would generally think that staying at Bed and Breakfasts was the pursuit of those seeking romance or a quiet getaway for two, Bed and Breakfasts can also be surprisingly family friendly. The BnB Finder website (www.bnbfinder.com/familyTravel.php) offers links to hundreds of bed and breakfast properties that welcome children and you can search for

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properties by state. They also offer tips for family-based get-aways staying a bed and breakfasts with additional activities. For example, a family farm vacation at **Weatherbury Farm** (tel. 724/587-3763; www.weatherburyfarm.com) in Avella, Pennsylvania combines bed and breakfast accommodation with life on a working farm and the chance to get your kids actively involved. Animals on the property include goats, rabbits, ducks, chickens, geese, sheep and cows. Families staying for two nights or more are invited to participate in the "Official Weatherbury Farm Kid" program. Younger children will do chores and complete a picture worksheet while older children will have fun doing chores and learning with a "Farm Workbook." Children who complete the program will be awarded an "Official Weatherbury Farm Kid" certificate. Accommodation with breakfast daily (and plenty of old-fashioned hard work on the farm) is priced from \$137 per night (for a minimum of two nights) for a family of four staying in one room, or \$181 staying in a suite. There are discounts of up to 20% for longer stays.

Cranmore Mountain Lodge (tel. 800/356-3596; www.north-conway.com) and EMS Climbing School & Guide Service (www.emsclimb.com/packages.htm) in North Conway, New Hampshire have designed a Family Adventure package for families seeking some outdoor excitement on their vacation. The package includes two-nights lodging at Cranmore Mountain Lodge, two full days of adventure with EMS Climbing School & Guide Service, a full country breakfast every morning for everyone in your party (children under ten stay free), afternoon refreshments and use of a year round outdoor hot tub and seasonal heated pool. EMS Climbing School & Guide Service will give you a guide for two days to lead you through a variety of activities. You can choose from technical rock climbing, hiking in the White Mountains or Geocache treasure hunting (using Global Positioning System equipment), with all technical gear needed. Packages for a family of three to five people start at \$775 per family. The inn-keeper was actually a former child care worker so children of all ages are welcome, plus in-house babysitting can be arranged.

Marriott and Renaissance Caribbean and Mexico Resorts (tel. 888/727-2347; www.paradisebymarriott.com/TaxRefund) have put together a "1040 Family Travel" package in honor of tax season, your impending tax return and the forthcoming stimulus package "rebate." With savings of up to 40% off regular prices, a five-night Caribbean and Mexico family vacation (land-only) is priced from \$725 including breakfast for two adults and two children daily and perks like an in-room family pizza party complete with movie and a nightly turndown service of milk and cookies. Depending on the destination chosen, families can also indulge in a wide selection of add-on activities like volcano climbing on St. Kitts, zip-lining through the treetops in Puerto Vallarta, swimming with dolphins in Cancun or a submarine tour on St. Thomas. This package is available at nine beachfront resorts in seven family-friendly tropical destinations, including JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa, CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta Resort & Spa and CasaMagna Marriott Cancun Resort in Mexico; Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino and Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino in Aruba; Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort in St. Thomas; Marriott Beach Resort & Emerald Casino in Curacao; Marriott Resort & The Royal Beach Casino in St. Kitts and the Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort in the Cayman Islands (in-room movie is not included in the package at the Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort and Curacao Marriott Beach Resort & Emerald Casino). Many of the resorts require a minimum stay of three to five nights. Children 12 and under are free with a paying adult. This promotion is valid for travel from June 1 through August 31, 2008 but must be booked by May 31, 2008. Blackout dates may apply. When making your booking, ask for promotion code C8L.

For a bit more of a Caribbean splurge, two of Antigua's luxurious oceanfront Elite Island Resorts (tel. 800/858-4618; www.eliteislandresorts.com) are getting especially family friendly this spring and summer -- the St. James's Club & Villas and The Verandah Resort & Spa. Kids under 12 stay and eat free while their parents enjoy a 15% discount on stays from May 28 to June 30, 2008, and a 20% savings July through August 15, 2008. The "Stay and Dine Free" summer special allows one child to stay and dine free per adult when sharing the same accommodations, with a maximum of two adults and two children per room. Regular rates start from \$495 per day at The Verandah and \$520 for St. James's Club including all food, beverages, room accommodations, taxes and gratuities. With the 20% discount, the new starting rates are \$396 and \$416 respectively for a family of four land-only.

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