

8 fabulous family holiday ideas for 2014

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Bored of the same old family holidays? Make 2014 the year you try something new and exciting, says William Gray, editor of 101familyholidays.co.uk. Over to William:

Don't get me wrong – we love a beach holiday as much as any family. Just occasionally, though, it's good to venture beyond the pool and kids' club and step into the liberating realm of 'alternative' family holidays. Here are eight ideas to tempt you.

1. See Paris in a new light

You probably remember the French capital from those romantic weekend escapes you took before you had children. But Paris can be just as much fun *avec les enfants*. Admittedly, you can expect a meltdown on the Champs-Élysées if you don't spend at least one day at Disneyland during your visit, but most kids will love the imaginative, Mickey-free range of activities on offer from [Family Twist](#). Their family breaks in Paris take care of everything, from transport and accommodation (including some cool city-centre apartments) to fantastic activities, like treasure hunts in the Louvre, bread-making sessions, boat trips on the Seine and city tours in a vintage Citroen 2CV or horse-drawn carriage.

2. Walk with a donkey in Spain

We've found that if there's one thing guaranteed to keep young children going on a walking holiday, it's having a donkey handy. "Carry me!" No problem. Just pop them on the back of your trusty steed – all part of the package from [Inntravel](#) which offers four- and seven-night walks with donkeys in northern Spain. Your luggage is transported between hotels, leaving you to walk (or trot) along gentle trails, following detailed route notes and enjoying the scenery and wildlife.

3. Share a Cornish farmhouse with friends

If a year goes by without even a short break in a Cornish cottage, we feel almost bereft. Last summer, however, we tried something a bit different. Instead of limiting ourselves to a 'cottage that fits' we teamed up with another family and shared the cost of a much larger, more lavish property. Tucked away in the Far West, a short walk from beach beauties like Porthcurno and Nanjizal, Glossop Farmhouse sleeps up to 12, boasts a fabulous kitchen/dining room and even has an annexe, children's playhouse and shower room in separate outbuildings surrounding a courtyard. [Classic Cottages](#) has around 600 others to choose from.

4. See Santa and the northern lights

Father Christmas is at home in Finnish Lapland and you can visit him in his log cabin deep in the forest on a special three- or four-night break with [Santa's Lapland](#). There's nothing contrived or commercial about these festive pilgrimages – you're even met at the airport by elves and reindeer. There's an extra sprinkle of magic up there at the moment, though, because we are currently smack bang in the middle of an intense period of northern lights activity – another reason to make your children's faces light up.

5. Learn with an expert

A great guide. That's what makes or breaks a family adventure in our opinion. Transforming the world into one great big classroom, the [Family Adventure Company](#) has developed an inspiring range of small-group, expert-led family trips, offering families the chance to learn about everything, from stargazing and photography to Ancient Egypt and tiger tracking. We particularly like the sound of their sailing trips along Italy's Amalfi coast (new for 2014) where you can help to skipper the boat and learn about the region's culture.

6. Ride out in Africa

This is a once-in-a-lifetime trip – riding on horseback through the wilds of Africa, mingling with giraffes and zebra and staying in a luxurious bush home with its own outdoor pool. Ant's Nest in South Africa is a fantastic destination, whether you're keen riders or complete novices. It combines really well with a traditional safari in Madikwe Game Reserve (also malaria free) and a couple of nights enjoying the waterpark, elephant riding and other activities at the supremely family-friendly Sun City. [Aardvark Safaris](#) know the area well and can tailor-make a self-drive trip for you.

7. Get all sporty

Bored? Not a chance at [La Manga Club](#) in southeast Spain where children can enrol in sports academies ranging from tennis, golf and football to rugby, sailing and athletics. The Real Madrid Foundation Campus Experience allows 7-17 year-olds the chance to learn how to train like Bale and Ronaldo, while the 28-court tennis centre will take your mini-Murray or wannabee-Williams from the tender age of three. Parents can be as active or laid-back as they like – there's plenty in the way of golf and tennis etc, or you can practice relaxation at the resort's luxury spa.

8. Do your bit for the planet

Volunteering holidays used to be the domain of gap-year students, but now even families can get involved by joining a meaningful project with [Hands Up Holidays](#). A combination of volunteering and sightseeing (in comfort), their family trips include destinations ranging from Costa Rica and Ecuador to Morocco, India and New Zealand. In Costa Rica, time is split between touring the country's breathtaking beaches, rainforest and volcanoes and working on a project to reintroduce animals to the wild that have been kept illegally as pets.



Father of 13-year-old twins, William Gray is an award-winning travel writer and photographer, and the editor of [101familyholidays.co.uk](#).

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