

Free spirits

When it comes to bagging a family holiday bargain, getting the right deal is of the essence – and offers such as free child places can make or break a booking.

But can they secure your clients genuine savings, or are they just marketing spiel offset by higher overall rates? We've spoken to the experts to wade through the masses of information and cut straight to the good stuff.

▶ WIN SOME, LOSE SOME

Child-free deals certainly have their benefits, and many of them mean significant savings, according to Malcolm Davies, product destination manager at Funway Holidays. He says: "It's always going to work out cheaper using these offers, unless clients are perhaps going for a much lower standard of accommodation."

Alongside the money-saving element, operators point to other pluses. Since the best deals are often secured earlier on, they can be a handy tool for encouraging clients to book without delay, says Elena Ahmadian, marketing executive at Cyplon Holidays.

They can also help draw your attention to the most family-friendly spots, according to John Parker, product manager at Premier Holidays, since hotels with these deals are typically among the most child-oriented.

But there can be catches. First off, they normally mean putting kids in the same room as the parents, which might not appeal to those at the upper end of the age limit. Second, they can mask higher overall prices, according to Costandinos Christofi, sales manager for Columbia Beach Resort in Cyprus (which features first-child-free offers). "Sometimes offers on children do mean the overall adult rate has been bumped up to compensate for the saving, so we would recommend being wary," he says. "We would suggest looking at resorts and seeing what else they offer, such as included activities and kids' clubs offered on a complimentary basis."

▶ ADDED EXTRAS

So how can you avoid the cons, and which resorts offer the best extras that go beyond just sticking a child in a shared family suite? Caribtours suggests

Kids-go-free offers sound rosy, but are you always getting the best deal? Laura French investigates

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➔ looking at meal plans as well as just the accommodation, and points to Long Beach, Mauritius, which offers free beds as well as food for up to two children, on the same board basis as their parents.

Antigua's Carlisle Bay takes it up a notch with complimentary all-inclusive stays for youngsters (for Beach Suites, between April 23 and November 30), while the Oblu Select at Sangeli in the Maldives ups that even further, with a complimentary speedboat transfer in addition to free all-inclusive board and accommodation.

Olympic Holidays, meanwhile, says demand for free child places is especially big among all-inclusive hotels which have added extras such as water parks and kids' clubs. Olympic Lagoon Ayia Napa in Cyprus and Labranda Marine Aquapark Resort in Kos are among its most in-demand.

Tui and Jet2holidays add free flights and transfers on top of both food and lodging on their kids-go-free deals, offered at certain resorts, which makes an even bigger difference. All of these are worth pushing to clients after some genuine savings.

But there are still restrictions: some of these offers are limited to under-12s, and they're generally based on two adults sharing, leaving single-parent families out of the loop. St Raphael Resort in Limassol, Cyprus, overcomes that by offering a first-child-stays-free deal for those travelling with one adult paying a single room rate. And Moon Palace Cancun lifts the age limit, letting under-17s stay and eat free, making a big difference for parents travelling with teens.



Other deals worth looking out for include early-booking discounts, free kids' club activities and childcare facilities

SEASONAL OFFERS

It's not all about the extras, though. It's also worth looking at resorts where the free child places are seasonal rather than year-round to make sure you're getting a genuine bargain.

Blue Palace, A Luxury Collection Resort & Spa in Crete, for example, is offering a stay-free half-board deal for up to two children for families travelling in April, May and October this year, giving you a hook to sell the shoulder months. Likewise, Elegant Hotels' Sea Breeze Beach House in Barbados is providing free stays and all-inclusive for

up to two kids from July 1 to August 31.

Atlantis the Palm in Dubai also offers a kids-stay-free deal in certain periods, including summer, while Amathus Beach in Limassol pushes peak months, giving children free full-board dining in July and August.

In the UK, Butlin's has occasional free child places, and is offering a first-child-eats-free deal during selected school holidays in 2019. Highlight these to your clients and they'll know they're making real savings they wouldn't get at other times of the year.

DEALS AND DISCOUNTS

Of course, there are other deals worth looking out for beyond kids-stay-free offers, so don't limit your family search.

Early-booking discounts, free kids' club activities and childcare facilities are all worth taking into consideration, and some resorts offer reductions on a second room, ideal for families travelling with older children.

The Amari in Koh Samui offers a half-price discount on a second children's room for clients staying at least four nights, for example, while the JA Jebel Ali Beach in Dubai has two-bedroom family rooms that represent a saving of 50% compared to booking two separate rooms. The kids might not be staying for free, but they will get their own space - which can be worth a few extra pounds.

Ultimately it's about finding the offer that suits your clients. If they're travelling with younger ones, then a kids-go-free deal with added extras like meals, activities and transfers might well be worth it. But if it's an older crowd you're trying to woo, it's worth broadening the search to encompass other perks too. **TW**



Travel2 offers a week's all-inclusive at the four-star Moon Palace Cancun from £959 per person, based on two adults and two children staying in a Deluxe Resort Viewroom. The price includes free meals and accommodation for under-17s and \$1,500 resort credit, with United Airlines flights from Heathrow on August 24. travel2.co.uk

Tui offers seven nights' all-inclusive at First Choice SplashWorld Marina Parc in Menorca from £710 per person plus one child free, based on two adults and two children sharing, and including transfers and flights from Gatwick on August 28. tui.co.uk



TOP: Carlisle Bay, Antigua

LEFT: Butlin's, Minehead