

A grand plan

Struggling to keep the whole family happy on holiday? Katie McGonagle gets the lowdown on multigenerational breaks

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Finding a family holiday can be tricky at the best of times: balancing the needs of stressed-out parents and lively little ones, finding the right destination on the right dates, and within the right budget. Add grandparents to the mix and it's a wonder anyone manages to find a family holiday at all.

Then again, if you get the formula right, it's a special experience that all generations will treasure, making the extra effort worthwhile – and rewarding you with better commission.

It's not just about sharing special moments. Part of the growth in demand for three-generation breaks is the fact that grandparents – often with more disposable income than their thirty or fortysomething

offspring – are footing the bill. So brands that focus on the older generation are spying an opportunity to get those clients to book a family break, too.

Saga Holidays managing director Maria Whiteman says: “We receive a lot of requests from customers who want to plan a celebration with their families while on holiday. This is a definite opportunity for Saga. Many people over 50 will have adult children and grandchildren that they love spending time with, so this is absolutely something we're looking at doing.

“Our plans are to look at multigenerational groups on private tours, so they can have a wonderful family trip without impacting on other Saga groups who may not want to travel with children. We're still working on our offering, but we're already looking at options to



→ open it up in a couple of areas.”
With so much to consider, what are the ground rules in selling a multigenerational break?

PLAIN SAILING?

Ocean cruise lines have been capturing the family market for some time now, kitting out ships with climbing walls, kids' clubs, zip lines and more, but now, even river ships and lines that don't boast the bells and whistles are looking to get in on the act.

A-Rosa offers free sailings for under-15s on all departures and all itineraries, with one child cruising free for every full-paying adult. There are no set dining times and with more kids' clubs available this year – at Easter, autumn, Christmas and new year, plus its first kids' club on the Seine – the line has family cruisers firmly in its sights. It seems to be working, with 1,600 children sailing in 2016 and 2,000 last year.

UK and Ireland head Lucia Rowe says: “Multigenerational holidays are definitely on the rise at A-Rosa. A holiday on the river is not necessarily what many agents or customers think of for a family holiday, and cruise operators and agents need to work together to change perceptions and prove this type of holiday lends itself

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We need to prove a holiday on the river lends itself perfectly to all generations travelling together

RIGHT:
Bridge visit, Cruise & Maritime Voyages

BELOW:
Butlin's, Minehead

perfectly to all generations travelling together.”

Ocean lines that have traditionally appealed to mature cruisers are also expanding their family offer, while still preserving an adult-only atmosphere outside school holidays. Fred Olsen Cruise Lines last year added a Little Skippers play area on four ships, while Cruise & Maritime Voyages found its trial of two multigenerational cruises last year was so successful that it has eight planned for 2018. *Magellan* and *Columbus* will sail to Amsterdam during the Easter holidays, to the Norwegian fjords in spring half term, and to Spain,



Portugal and Gibraltar in summer.

Head of trade sales Lisa Jacobs says: “Although we essentially operate adult-only ships, many of our guests tell us they would like the opportunity to take children and grandchildren. There are no specific children's facilities on board; the emphasis is on family fun with all the generations joining in.

“Multigenerational cruises present agents with a fantastic opportunity to encourage existing cruise customers to bring the family, thereby increasing the size of the booking and commission earnings.”

Children's fares start at £99 when sharing with two adults.

roast dinners will appeal to young and old.

Suggest spacious lodgings such as the new West Lakes Chalet Village at Minehead, where chalets hold up to eight, with a living room and large kitchen.

Sister brand Haven can also provide space for large families to stretch out: Beach House Rentals at Perran Sands include a private hot tub with sea views, outdoor veranda with barbecue, sun deck and private garden – though grandparents will still find a way to reminisce over their past caravan holidays when they see other holiday homes on site.

STORY TIME

That sentimental side might also help sell a hotel or theme park break, as grandparents relish the opportunity to share in the magic while kids are still young enough to believe.

The Fairytale Forest at Efteling Theme Park Resort in the Netherlands is a prime example, telling the stories of Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm to charming effect. There are newer, flashier attractions elsewhere in the park for teenage siblings in need of rides and rollercoasters, but the gentle, low-tech forest ticks all the boxes for younger children.

They must be doing something right, as 10% of visitors last year were aged 55-plus, and with easy transport (including by car



HOME FROM HOME

Three-generation breaks can also be an excellent addition to a family's main summer holiday, which is where a UK short break, avoiding the hassle of an airport, can come in.

Ramp up the nostalgia factor by recommending Butlin's; grandparents might even remember their own childhood holidays here, since the first resort opened in Skegness in 1936. It looks different these days, but that classic combination of old-fashioned seaside entertainment – Mr Men and Little Miss, Danger Mouse and pantomime Cinderella Rocks are all on the books this year – plus crowd-pleasing eateries serving fish and chips or

➔ and ferry, if a flight doesn't appeal) and self-catered group accommodation at Efteling Bosrijk Village, it's a practical option for larger families.

If they don't mind the long-haul flight, however, there are plenty of magical options farther afield. Family brand Beaches has also taken inspiration from traditional tales with a new series of interactive shows, *Creativa*, which feature modern remakes of classic stories such as *Treasure Island*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Jungle Book*.

There's a chance for parents to enjoy a bit of alone time by dispatching little ones to the kids' club (staffed by fully-certified, autism-aware nannies) or getting grandparents to babysit one night while they enjoy a glass of wine at the Sky Bar rooftop bar.

▶ SPACE RACE

Factoring in alone time is probably the single greatest key to ensuring a successful multigenerational break, and the easiest way is by booking interconnecting rooms, a family suite or even a villa that gives everybody space to spread out. Whether that lets young kids wake up early to watch cartoons while grandad has a lie-in, or teens sleep late while parents and grandparents have a peaceful cup of coffee on the balcony.

If hotels can't guarantee interconnecting rooms – and many can't until arrival – a suite is a more reliable option, if budget allows. Beaches Negril, for example, has two



PICTURE: MARJUN DE WIJ; NIKOLAS MICHAEL



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or three-bedroom beachfront butler suites that accommodate eight or nine respectively – and with the added help of a butler to take care of the details.

Closer to home, many family hotels around the Med offer family suites with separate bedrooms and living areas – essential if grandma doesn't want to sacrifice her afternoon nap – though these might mean kids bunking down

in the living room on pull-out sofa beds, so might not be the best option for teenagers.

Columbia Beach Resort in family favourite Cyprus has 75sq metre suites with three separate areas – a master and second bedroom, both en suite, with a living area and large balcony running across all three rooms.

If that's still not enough space, suggest a villa. Alex Stuart, general manager at villa operator Novasol, says: "Villas and large apartments can offer lots of space, fabulous facilities such as private pools and the ability for all the family to sit down and enjoy meal times together in their home away from home."

He points out they can also be more economical than booking multiple hotel rooms, while self-catering can help keep costs down (provided everyone takes their turn cooking!)

Opt for a destination with plenty of family fun on hand to make up for the lack of hotel facilities. Funway Holidays has a range of Orlando villas with easy access to the theme parks.

Destination product manager Malcolm Davies says: "For larger groups, a villa holiday will usually work out cheaper than a hotel, and booking an entire property can be a great way to share relaxed times with friends or family."

"When selling a villa holiday, it's important to consider the whole family's needs. With hotels often unable to guarantee connecting or adjoining rooms, villas prove popular for multigenerational families, with the added benefits of communal areas and self-catering facilities." **TW**



A-Rosa offers an eight-day Provencal Rhone & The Camargue river cruise departing August 4, bookable through Shearings, starting at £4,756 for a family of four. The price includes seven nights staying all-inclusive onboard, flights from Gatwick to Lyon, and two excursions. shearingsagent.com

A week's self-catering in a villa in Croatian town Fazana, near Pula, with **Novasol** leads in at £1,379 for up to eight people, not including flights. The four-bedroom, four-bathroom property has a kitchen, living room, private pool and children's play area. novasol.co.uk



ABOVE: Gnome Village, Efteling

LEFT: Two-bedroom suite, Columbia Beach Resort