

Soak up the sun and invigorating island beauty on a tropical vacation

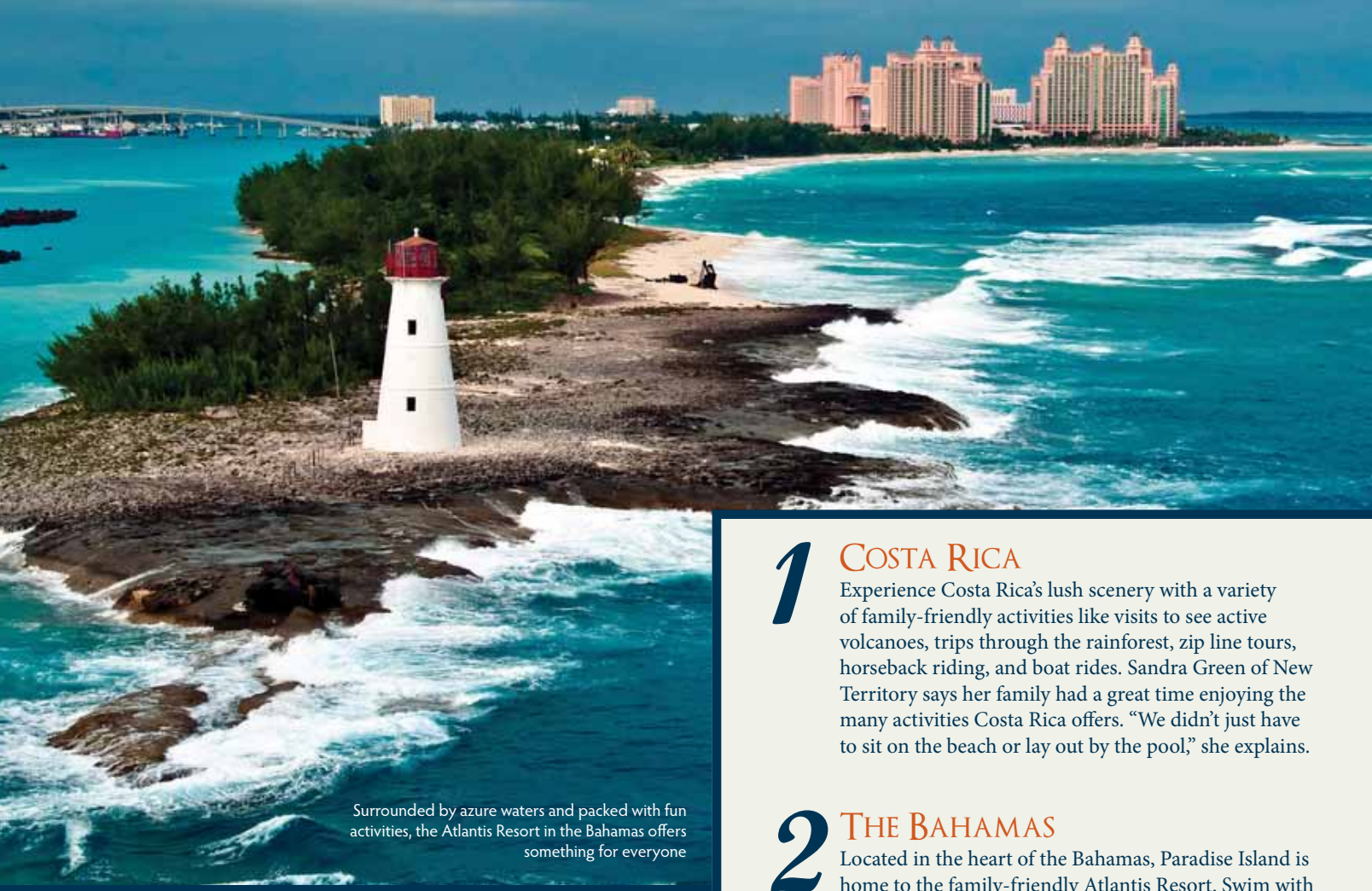
10 TROPICAL GETAWAYS

Where Fort Bend Families Go for Fun in the Sun

By Tonya Ellis and Mary Hogan



Whether you're looking for a remote island hideaway for two or an all-inclusive resort for the whole family, these 10 island destinations are some of the most popular for Fort Bend area residents.



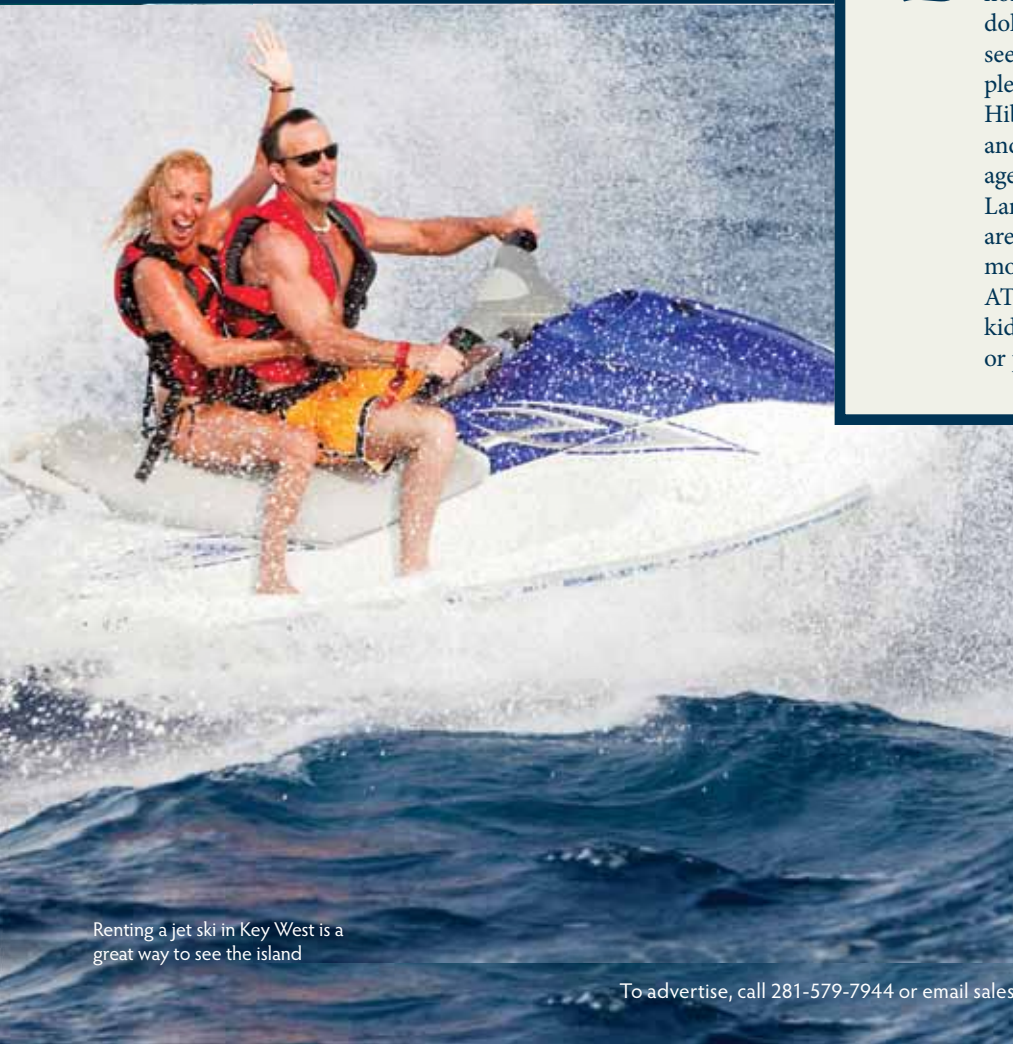
Surrounded by azure waters and packed with fun activities, the Atlantis Resort in the Bahamas offers something for everyone

1 COSTA RICA

Experience Costa Rica's lush scenery with a variety of family-friendly activities like visits to see active volcanoes, trips through the rainforest, zip line tours, horseback riding, and boat rides. Sandra Green of New Territory says her family had a great time enjoying the many activities Costa Rica offers. "We didn't just have to sit on the beach or lay out by the pool," she explains.

2 THE BAHAMAS

Located in the heart of the Bahamas, Paradise Island is home to the family-friendly Atlantis Resort. Swim with dolphins and sea lions, enjoy the Atlantis water park, see tropical fish and sharks up close at the Mayan Temple Lagoon, or enjoy feeding native Green Sea Turtles at Hibiscus Lagoon. Tropical resorts are becoming more and more popular with Sugar Land families, says travel agent Deborah Brown with Travel Leaders in Sugar Land. "Most of the hotels are family-oriented. They are worry-free. It's all there when they get there: non-motorized water sports, snorkeling, canoeing, motor ATVs, [and] parasailing," she says, adding, "They have kids' clubs where the kids can do treasure hunts, color, or play video games, and it's all supervised."



Renting a jet ski in Key West is a great way to see the island



Ocho Rios in Jamaica, Atlantis in the Bahamas, and many other island resorts offer dolphin encounters



3 KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Key West offers families an island oasis close to home with a unique history. Visit the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum, discover nature at the Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservancy, take a Dolphin safari charter boat, or embark on the Conch Tour Train. A host of beautiful locations are only a short flight away from Sugar Land. “Only two- to three-hour flights from Houston makes it cheap to get to where you need to go,” says Jay Islam, owner of Grand Travel and Cruise of Sugar Land. “You can take a vacation where you can take your 2-year-old and not pay an \$800 airfare.”

Key West has a unique island culture and history

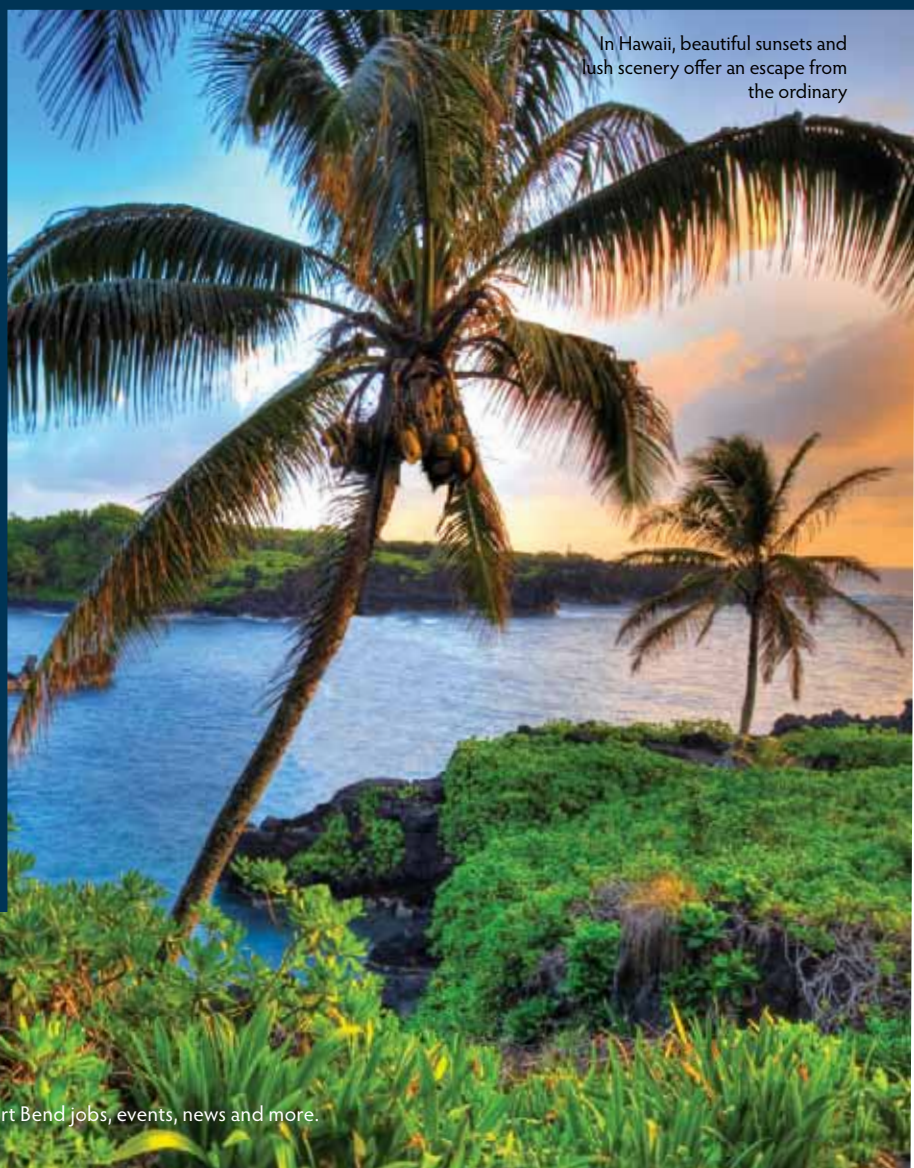
4 OCHO RIOS, JAMAICA

If you’re searching for a relaxing family vacation to Jamaica, Ocho Rios offers an array of kid-friendly activities, like horseback riding on the beach, jungle river tubing trips, Jeep safari tours, and bamboo rafting. Enjoy a day exploring a replica pirate town as you embark on ocean adventures at Dolphin Cove theme park.

5 MAUI, HAWAII

With fun activities like glass bottom boat tours, visits to a working tropical plantation, and whale watching, the island of Maui is a top family vacation destination. Enjoy feats like kite-surfing and authentic luaus while taking in its world-renowned beaches. With a variety of tropical locales offering all-inclusive resorts, your family can feel at home while minimizing costs. “If the kids want another soda, you get another soda,” says Green. “The kids could go get a drink and eat. If you stay at the Ritz Carlton or something, it can add up.”

In Hawaii, beautiful sunsets and lush scenery offer an escape from the ordinary





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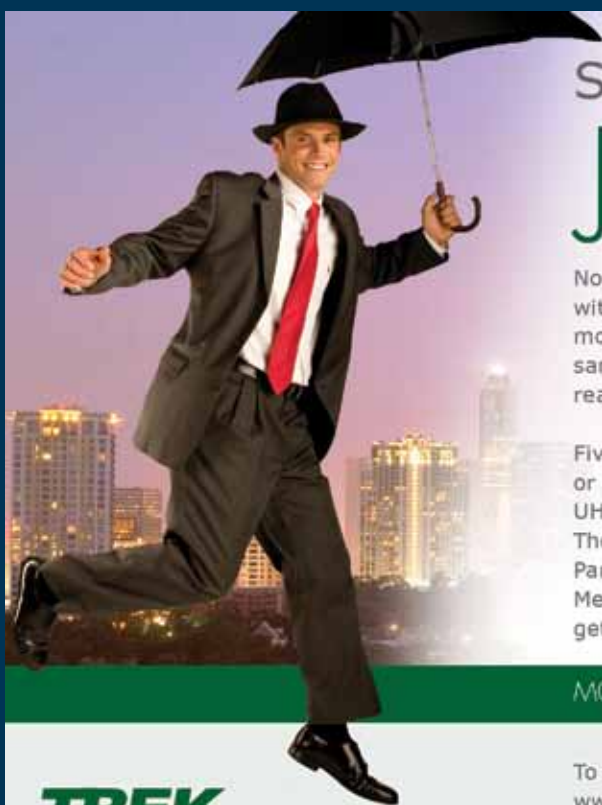
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Taking a short sailing trip is a great way to see the sparkling blue waters of Jamaica

6 TURKS AND CAICOS

Providenciales, one of the most settled islands in Turks and Caicos, remains a hidden jewel of the Caribbean. Embark on a kid-friendly Ocean Outback adventure aboard a glass bottom boat and enjoy snorkeling and exploring Pirates Cave, with treasure maps etched into the wall and centuries-old artifacts.

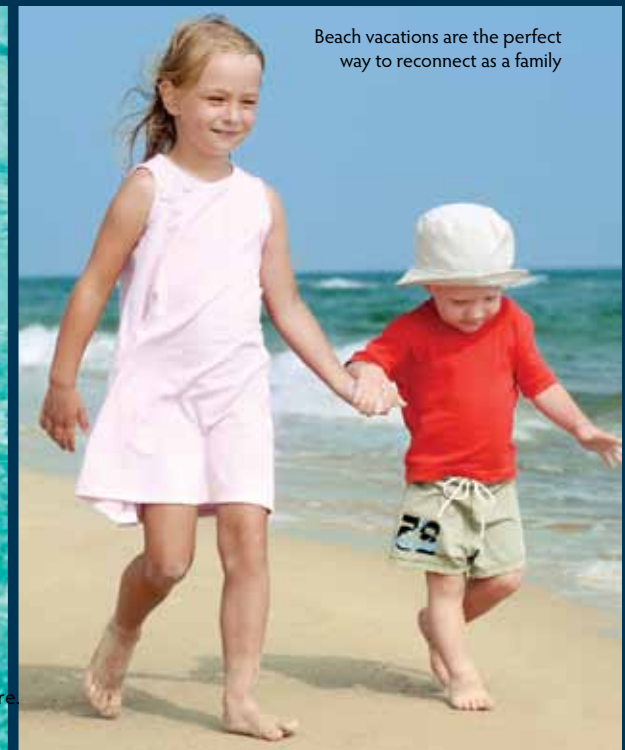
7 GRAND CAYMAN

Surrounded by azure waters, Grand Cayman offers a fun-filled beach getaway. Visit the Stingray City sandbar and see gentle stingrays up close or embark on the Cayman Pirate Encounter, where you can experience a mock attack on a pirate ship. Many tropical resorts allow families to pre-pay for their stay and activities, allowing for a more relaxed vacation. “The pre-pay aspect of family resorts is a definite plus,” says Brown. “You’re done when you get there. I’ve gone and stayed three days and spent \$20, and that was to bring a gift home.”

Grand Cayman’s Stingray City lets families see stingrays up close



Beach vacations are the perfect way to reconnect as a family



Fiji's Taveuni island is one of the most spectacular diving spots in the world for beginning to advanced divers



S Fiji

Fiji's largest island, Viti Levu, is filled with island paradise resorts such as Arts Village that offer children's activities like rainforest hikes, snorkeling, sand castle building, and lessons in local dances. Families can explore Fijian life with the Waterfall Tour, where they can learn about folklore, visit the home of a village chief, swim in the sparkling waters of a waterfall lagoon, and hike through the lush rainforest.

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5 Tips for Planning Your Family Retreat

- 1 NON-STOP FLIGHTS** - You want things to be as stress- and hassle-free as possible when traveling with children.
- 2 KIDS' CLUBS** - Family resorts provide fun, day time activities for kids, such as crafts, sports, and video game rooms, giving mom and dad some time to themselves.
- 3 CHILDREN'S GEAR** - Does the resort provide cribs, strollers, children's toys, and other amenities you might need?
- 4 COMPLIMENTARY ITEMS** - Resorts sometimes offer free meals and accommodations for children.
- 5 BABYSITTING** - Many resorts supply evening babysitting for a fee.



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Tahiti's secluded huts offer relaxing getaways and breathtaking views



9 TAHITI

Along with gorgeous beaches, Tahiti is home to the Botanical Gardens and Mount Aorai, where families can experience the island's beautiful scenery. Kid-friendly activities like swimming with dolphins, snorkeling in the island's surrounding coral reef, and kayaking let families see nature up close.

10 U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

St. Croix is full of secluded beaches where families can reconnect or enjoy activities like kayaking or horseback riding through the island's lush forest. Buck Island National Park offers kid-friendly snorkeling and sailing trips and Heritage Trail is a great way to see the local culture and natural beauty of St. Croix.

From the Caribbean to the South Pacific to the southern shores of the U.S., Fort Bend families are discovering unique tropical getaways that offer something for everyone. With all the kid-friendly choices of island destinations, the next question you should be asking yourself is, "How soon can I get there?" SLM

Children can experience nature close up at Trunk Bay in the U.S. Virgin Islands

