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Taking the Kids

Taking the kids and making time for romance



O.A.R.S.' Wine on the River trip (O.A.R.S.)

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Where's the music?

We succumbed to the sales pitch for the "romantic," albeit pricey gondola ride early one evening on Venice's famed canals, but our gondolier, decked out in the traditional striped shirt, didn't sing, much less talk to us. I don't think he spoke English and our Italian didn't go beyond buon giorno.

Still it was fun gliding on the narrow canals past [Marco Polo's](#) house, Mozart's House, the famous Bridge of Sighs (legend has it, that the bridge takes its name from the sighs of prisoners stealing their last look at freedom before making their way to their cells from the Doges Palace.)

As for the romance, honestly, we just laughed at the kitchy-ness of it all. At least we could relax and not worry about the kids' reaction — (so lame ... I can't believe you spent money for this!) That entire trip to [Italy](#) and Croatia, in part on a Windstar Cruise (www.windstarcruises.com) last fall, was full of moments like that — just-us time, sans kids — no sibling squabbles to mediate, no children's opinions, no juggling different agendas, no playing psychologist, nurse and cook.

Of course, I love traveling with my children, their pals and various other pint-sized relatives. I do it all the time. (Read my trip diary about our most recent family trip, sailing in the Caribbean, <http://www.takingthekids.com/category/travel-diary/>).

But there's something deliciously decadent about an adult-only trip, whether you manage just a night away in a nearby hotel ([Affinia](#) has a "[Kiss and Tell](#)" deal starting at \$139 in [New York City](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#), \$149 in [Chicago](#), complete with a list of the most romantic spots to kiss) or a trip of a lifetime to Patagonia. (Tierra Patagonia, www.tierrapatagonia.com, offers guided adventures during the day — think horseback rides to view nesting Andean Condors — and luxurious accommodations at night in the 40-room lodge, complete with signature spa treatments.) If you choose instead a few days of kicking back in the sun or on the slopes, rather than the practical condo, opt for a quaint B&B like the Red Clover Inn in Killington, Vt., www.redcloverinn.com, or boutique hotel like The Sky Lodge (www.theskylodge.com) in Park City, Utah.

There are plenty of bargains — even to Tahiti. They're touting deals including airfare starting at \$1,699 per person, from Los Angeles. Check out websites like www.luxurylink.com that promise unique experiences at five-star accommodations around the world, at up to 65 percent off best-available rates, or [Groupon](#) Getaways with [Expedia](#) (<http://www.expedia.com/p/info-other/groupon-tab.htm>).

"Even a few days alone can help couples recharge and reconnect with each other," said Dr. David Fassler, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and professor at the University of Vermont Medical School. No wonder nearly 70 percent of travelers polled last summer said their personal romantic relationships would benefit if they vacationed more together, Hotwire reports.

So this Valentine's Day, instead of the chocolate and flowers, give your significant other a promise of a just-us, guilt-free break in the months to come. "Letting your kids stay home while you go away can also support their growing sense of

independence and autonomy," Dr. Fassler added. "Although kids certainly miss their parents, short-term separations can actually enhance resiliency by helping them develop new coping skills."

So now that you've let go of the guilt, where to go? Obviously somewhere you won't be surrounded by other people's children. Consider the, adult-only new Travaasa resorts (www.travaasa.com/home/) in Hawaii and Austin, Texas that integrate local activities and organic culinary programs.

The 29-room Kenwood Inn and Spa (www.kenwoodinn.com), located in Sonoma, Calif., respectfully has a no-children policy, which, they promise, will enhance romance. Did I mention the guests-only restaurant serves farm-fresh, Italian-inspired cuisine?

Since you don't have to worry about the kids' happiness, try something you've never done. Take a glass-blowing class with the Hotel Murano's Hot Piece of Glass Package (<http://www.hotelmuranotacoma.com/>) in Tacoma, Wash., which has emerged as the center of the American art glass movement.

Put your romance on ice and go ice fishing with your honey and then cuddle up at the Blue Harbor Resort and Spa on Lake Michigan (www.blueharborresort.com). Located in Sheboygan, Wis., the Blue Harbor is just two hours from Chicago.

Climb one of St. Lucia's famous pitons or zipline under the stars in Antigua. Be a castaway for a day on a deserted island in the Bahamas, complete with beach chairs, drinks and lunch, of course. (Island Routes Caribbean Adventure Tours, www.islandroutes.com, can arrange it all.)



Learn all about the farm-to-table movement from the resident forager at the Ocean House in Watch Hill, R.I., (www.oceanhouseri.com) where you can take an "In the Kitchen" workshop focused on seasonal ingredients. (The deluxe hotel has a first-rate spa, too, and you can snare good off-season deals.)

See more of Italy than Renaissance art and churches with customized Country Bred Encounters tours (www.countrybred.com/encounters/), whether you want to make parmesan cheese on a cheese farm or make ceramics with a master in Umbria.

Combine gourmet dining, wine with the adrenaline rush of river rafting with O.A.R.S on special Wine on the River Tours (www.oars.com).

Go camping — without all of the work — with El Capitan Canyon

(www.elcapitancanyon.com/). Along California's central coast, you'll stay in a furnished safari tent and pick up your barbecue kit at the Canyon Market. At Orenda (<http://camporenda.com/>) in the Lake George area of New York's Adirondacks, all meals are provided and outdoor activities are customized.

Volunteer working with children in Cambodia, playing with lions in Zambia or building a house in Uganda. Go Voluntouring, www.govoluntouring.com, offers many options.

As for us, in Europe, we had a blast without the kids doing things they would have never considered — like our overpriced gondola-without-the-music tour of Venice.

Sometimes a little imperfection, I told the kids, just adds to the romance.

(For more on Eileen's trip without the kids to Europe, read her trip diary at www.takingthekids.com and also follow [@TakingtheKids](https://www.instagram.com/TakingtheKids), where Eileen Ogintz welcomes your questions and comments.)