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May/June 2002

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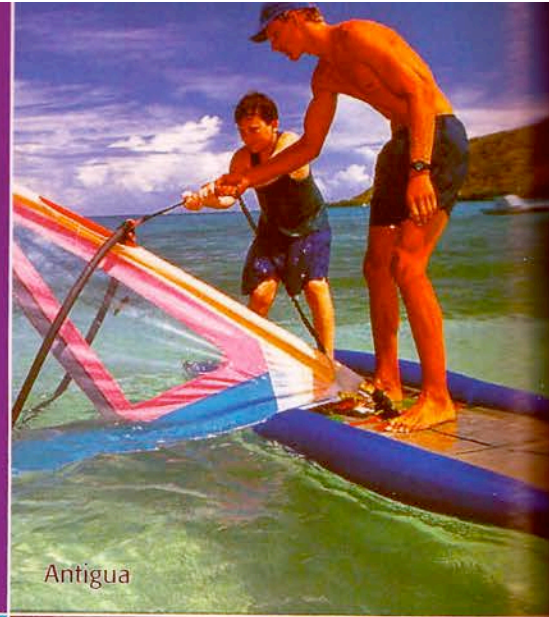


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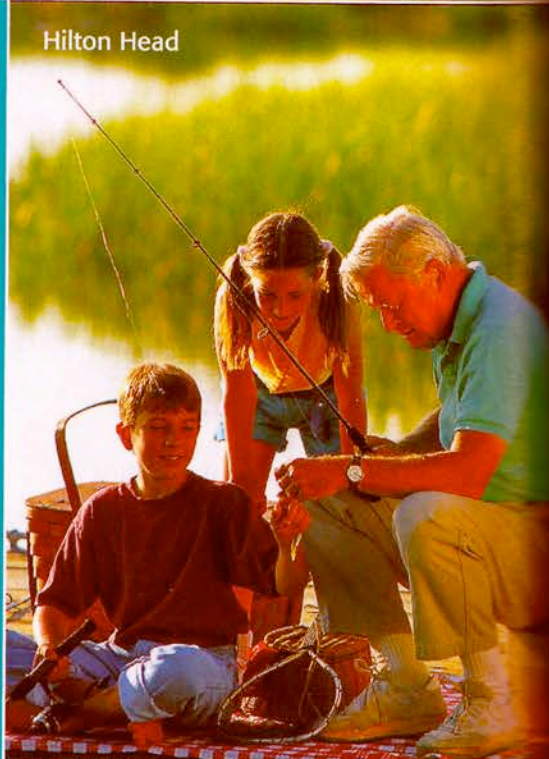


London

- L O N D O N
- A N T I G U A
- H I L T O N H E A D
- O A H U
- J A P A N



Antigua



Hilton Head

# BRING THE KIDS!

A world of fun awaits you and your clan on these family-friendly islands.

BY CATHRYN RAMIN



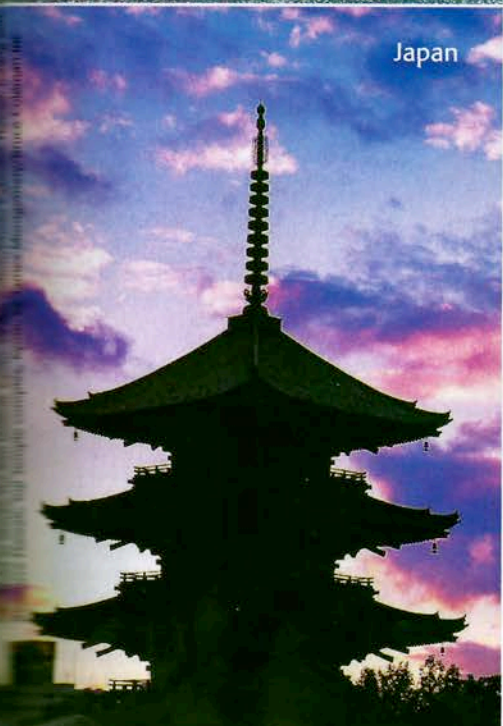
Oahu



Antigua

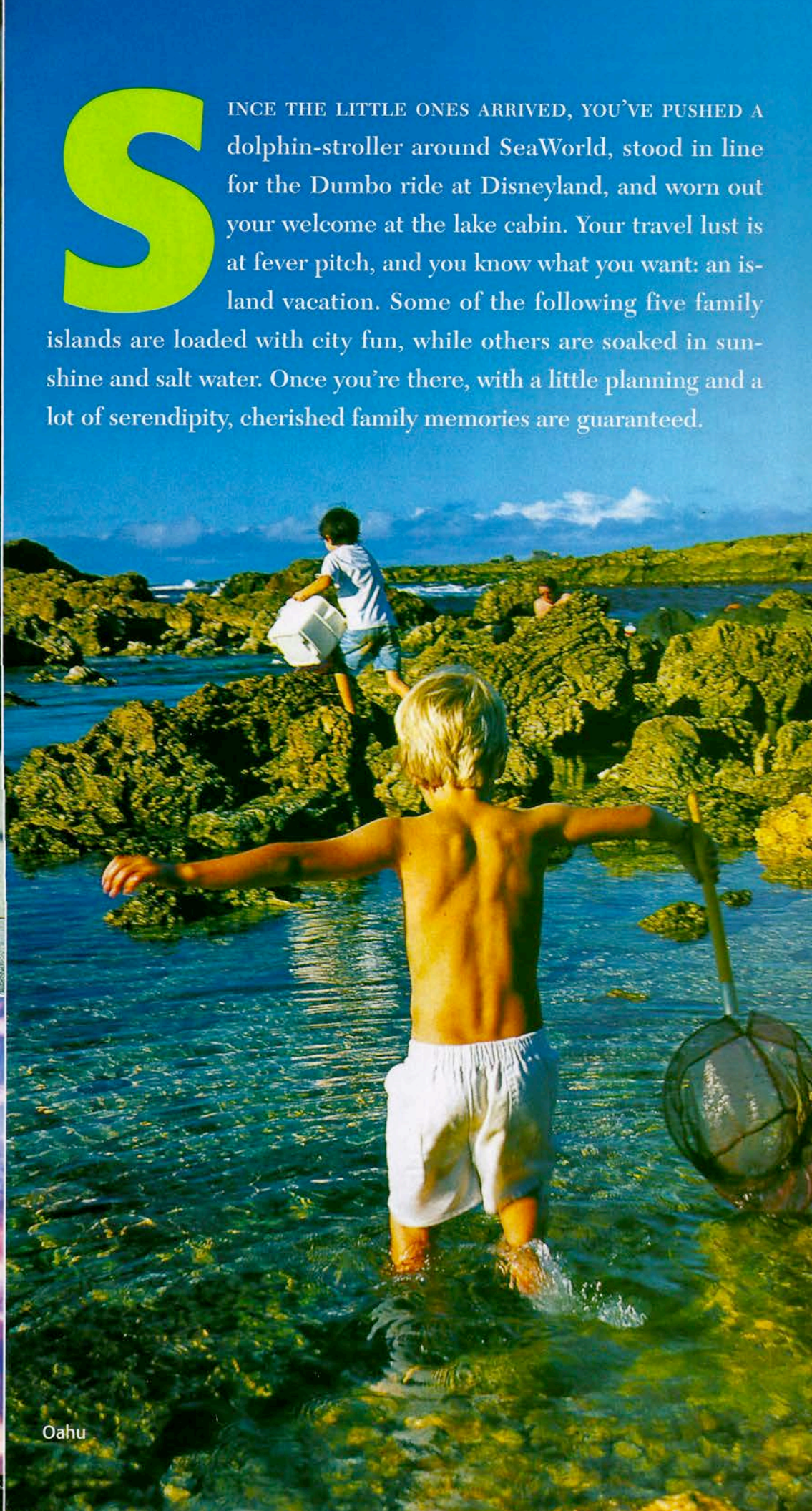


Japan



Japan

**S**INCE THE LITTLE ONES ARRIVED, YOU'VE PUSHED A dolphin-stroller around SeaWorld, stood in line for the Dumbo ride at Disneyland, and worn out your welcome at the lake cabin. Your travel lust is at fever pitch, and you know what you want: an island vacation. Some of the following five family islands are loaded with city fun, while others are soaked in sunshine and salt water. Once you're there, with a little planning and a lot of serendipity, cherished family memories are guaranteed.



Oahu

## LONDON

A FEW WEEKS AFTER WE RETURNED from London, my father asked my five-year-old what he liked best about his trip. “The food,” he said solemnly. “Especially that chocolate-bar machine in the Tube.”

OK, I thought, *so maybe he was a little too young to appreciate the finer things, but Cadbury, he knows.* And he won't forget Buckingham Palace, because it was there, amid a sardine-tin crowd of a thousand or so, that he was escorted by guards to what he is certain was the Queen's toilet, owing to its elegant leather seat cover.

The point is that jolly old London is a great place for kids. Just getting around the city is fun; you can buy tickets for one of the bright red double-decker buses, and hop on or off where you want – to rest your legs, take in a new sight, or head for another part of town. Kids love the old-fashioned black London taxis with jump seats, but the Underground (or “Tube”) is big entertainment even without the chocolate bars. (It was also efficient, whisking us from our beautiful town-house hotel in Little Venice to central London in less than 15 minutes.)

Plan to spend at least a day at the



A beefeater memory at the Tower of London.

Tower of London, where your tour guide will be a real beefeater, at the Queen's service. Before you start, pick up one of the printed age-appropriate treasure-hunt forms for the kids (great for honing their observation skills). We enjoyed three consecutive viewings of the Crown Jewels. Around and around we went on the electronic sidewalk that swept us past the Koh-I-Noor

diamond and other outside gems. Also on the grounds is the scary Bloody Tower, where many English notables were imprisoned and murdered. And nearby, the London Dungeon is a kind of chamber of horrors that will delight children aged ten and up.

Britain's National Museum of Science and Industry is the kind of place where you could spend a week exploring and not come close to seeing everything. On our day there we “launched” a helicopter, admired a rocket ship, and had a friendly chat with a bloused-and-knickered actor as Thomas Crapper, inventor of the toilet (a recurring theme for our clan in the U.K.). Crapper explained the development of the flush mechanism, while my son asked enough questions to qualify for employment at Kohler.

Every afternoon, precisely at four, we destroyed our dinner appetites with afternoon tea, stuffing ourselves with scones, cream, and jam in whatever café was at hand. At other meals, we availed ourselves of the family rooms of pubs, where we discovered the simple, inexpensive, kid-pleasing cottage pies, beans-on-toast, bangers and mash, fish-and-chips, and grilled ham-

## HINTS FOR KIDS

Traveling with children? Here's how to make sure the whole crew's happy.

**Keep it simple.** When you're out and about with children, don't plan too many activities for one day. Be spontaneous, crossing items off the schedule if the troops tire or an unexpected attraction pops up.

**Get out!** Most young children can only stay indoors at museums, shops, and the like for about an hour, so be sure to include activities that let them roam and run in the fresh air.

**Plan ahead.** Whenever possible, purchase tickets in advance to avoid lines, and visit

busy attractions early or late in the day to miss the crowds.

**Free yourself.** Paying separate entry fees can really add up. Ask tourism offices about free days at museums, child or family discounts, and no-cost events and performances. Before you go, make a list of kid-friendly sights and attractions and carry it everywhere.

**Take it with you.** Carry a change of clothes for small children in case of accidents, from spilled drinks to bathroom emergencies.

**Seek treasure.** Museums can be fun for children – if they have something to do there. Check to see if the one you're visiting offers any “search-for” games or similar

activities; many do. If not, create one yourself by having your kids look for an interesting object in a gallery of paintings (a clock, a lamb, a castle), or making up stories about what they see.

**Ruck and roll.** Prevent hissy fits by carrying a couple of your kids' favorite snacks and bottles of juice or water in a day pack. Take along coloring books, reading books, playing cards, or just paper and pencils or crayons to help them pass the time.

**Use some sense.** Kids love sound, color, and motion, so take them where you're likely to find all three: Ceremonies, special events, street parades, festivals, flea markets, bands, and processions are perfect for your active set.

and-cheese sandwiches. Sometimes we'd drop everything to browse one of London's fabulous toy stores; Daisy & Tom's in Chelsea was our hands-down favorite, mainly because they served excellent ice cream in the café.

The London Transport Museum in Covent Garden has enough buses, trains, and trolleys for an hour's worth of climbing for the kids. Just outside the front door lies an afternoon of low-cost entertainment in the form of jugglers, street musicians, and mimes. (The kids can toss coins into the hats.)

We carried a pint-size football with us wherever we went and used it to make friends. In Holland Park, Regent's Park, and Hampstead Heath, we sought out an area where ball-playing was allowed, and in no time had a game on. No small British boy could resist the opportunity to toss the unfamiliar pigskin around, nor the temptation to give it a wailing hard kick into the air.

"They know the stuff that's fun for kids, don't they?" my son said after a trip to the London Zoo via the Waterbus Company's canal barge. "I wouldn't mind if we lived here sometime."

Neither would I.

## ANTIGUA

ANTIGUA IS A LAND OF STUNNING beaches – the ultimate kids' playground. (Add a mask and tropical fish and say good-bye to the Game Boy.) But there's much more here, too, most notably living history. Antigua was once home to a thriving sugar industry, thousands of slaves, and 31 fortifications built by the British to maintain control of their domain. The result, more than 200 years later, is a fascinating living classroom.

Start your tour around Redcliffe Quay in the capital of St. John's, where

you'll find brick warehouses built to store sugar, rum, and molasses prior to export, as well as the barracoon and auction courtyard where slaves waited to be sent to plantations. You'll need a car or a taxi to reach the fortifications at Shirley Heights, Fort Berkeley, or Fort James; at each you'll find extensive collections of military rubble, plenty of cannons, and uniformly fabulous views.

Since nothing is roped off or protected, there's no end to the scampering young legs can do here.

Southeast of Parham, on the road to Devil's Bridge (where erosion has created a spectacular seaside geologic formation), you can explore Betty's Hope, an impressive sugar estate built in 1650. Kids will love examining the workings of the operating windmill and the cane-crushing machinery, and proficient readers can learn plenty from the exhibits in a former horse stable that has been converted into a small museum.

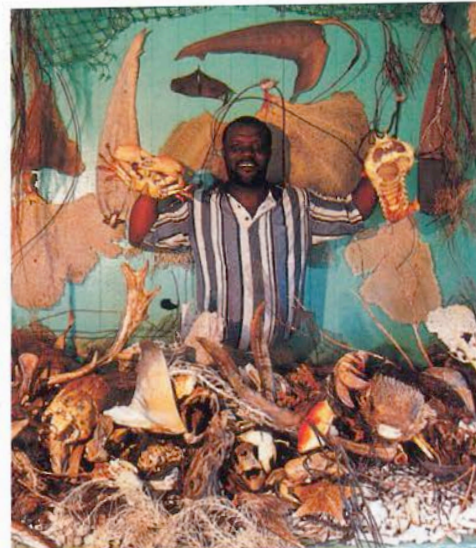
With cravings for sugar history satisfied, you can move on to the south side of the island to wander the famous Nelson's Dockyard Museum and National Park in English Harbour, the world's only surviving Georgian dockyard. Built in the 18th century, it provided safe haven for Britain's West Indies fleet. Many of the handsome buildings were constructed from bricks and stone that ships carried as ballast when sailing from England, to be exchanged for paying cargo in the form of sugar, rum, and molasses. Adm. Horatio Nelson, for whom the dockyard is named, actually had little to do with the place; arriving in English Harbour when he was 26 for a three-year posting, he referred to Antigua as "this vile spot" and "this infernal hole."

Your clan will no doubt come to a very different conclusion, especially if

you take them to seashell-laden Darkwood Beach on the southwest side of the island. Colorful fish scurry through narrow underwater canyons just off shore, casuarina trees keep things cool on the beach, and a small beach restaurant serving local food makes lunch easy and fun. Be sure to treat your kids to *ducana* – a hunk of grated sweet potato and fresh coconut steamed in a banana leaf.

I wouldn't leave the island without spending a day with Eli Fuller, who runs Adventure Antigua and is intimately acquainted with the ecosystem of the north coast. Aboard his small motorboat, you'll learn about the endangered hawksbill turtle, which, between May and November, lays its eggs on the beach at swanky Jumby Bay Resort. Look for ospreys, frigate birds, herons, and pelicans. With the help of Fuller's keen eye, you'll also likely see spotted eagle rays, stingrays, and barracuda gliding by below. He'll also teach your kids about the importance of healthy mangroves, take you snorkeling at Pelican Island, feed you lunch Robinson Crusoe-style on deserted Guiana Island, and lead an exploration of Hell's Gate's hidden caves.

Your last stop will be Great Bird Island where, depending on what time of year it is, you might add falcons, noddies, terns, and tropic birds to your life list. Settling back with a rum punch



On Antigua, Winston Hazzard's "Nature of Things" has sea stuff that kids love.

while the kids swig local island juices – passion fruit, tamarind, guava, and lime – you can watch the sun set, and contemplate a full day whose memories are sure to linger for a long time.

## HILTON HEAD

LOTS OF ADULTS COME TO HILTON Head Island, sign the kids up at a resort camp, and head out for a day on the tennis courts or the golf links. But there's plenty to do as a gang, too. Hilton Head is stroller-friendly and full of restaurants with chicken nuggets on the kids menu and clowns and jugglers

*Toss your line in and chances are you'll find a big bluish-green fella on the other end.*

for the floor show. It also has some of the best family bicycling anywhere.

Rent a bike with a baby seat or a trailer, or get a tandem or even a tiny trike, and pedal off with a picnic in your backpack. Forty miles of bike paths crisscross the sandbar island, from Sea Pines Circle in the south to Hilton Head Plantation in the north. Spend the day pedaling from one resort to another, stopping for a round of miniature golf (keep an eye peeled for alligators as you pass the real courses), a frozen custard treat, or a dip in the ocean.

On another day, introduce the kids to crabbing, a favorite Hilton Head pastime. All you need is a bucket with a little water in it, some string, and a hook baited with a bit of raw chicken. (Necks and gizzards work well.) Toss your line into the ocean or a brackish lake or creek, and chances are you'll soon find a big bluish-green fella on the other end. Measure your trophy to make sure it's legal – more than six inches across and not a female "in sponge" (packing orange eggs on its underside) – then pop it into the bucket and plan your own crab boil.

Hilton Head's wilderness is stress-free – neat and well-marked with plenty of restrooms. Sea Pines Forest Pre-

serve is one prime spot; the 600-acre parcel on Sea Pines Plantation, among the island's most pleasant resorts, offers seven miles of trails. You can tour the preserve in a hay wagon, by horseback, or on foot. Stroller-accessible trails lead through various ecosystems with fantastic names: A magnificent meadow of yellow and purple blossoms runs along the edge of the Vanishing Swamp, home to large black-and-gold butterflies; the Boggy Gut wetland is home to graceful willow trees and cattails, as well as frogs and yellow-bellied turtles that stare into the sun while standing sentry on fallen logs. It's an enjoyable piece of the real, timeless Hilton Head.

## OAHU

THIS ISLAND ABOUNDS IN BOTH CITY and country fun. Whether you take a surfing lesson or venture over the waves in a traditional outrigger canoe at Waikiki, visit the USS *Arizona* Memorial at Pearl Harbor, hit the museums, or drive the coast, Oahu is family vacation central.

The busy streets of Honolulu have their own appeal. Your kids will want to check out the endless rows of souvenir stands. Let them browse, but make sure it's in the direction of the Bishop Museum. Brimming with masks, weapons, and musical instruments, and home to a feathered cloak made for King Kamehameha I, who united the Hawaiian Islands, the Bishop is widely considered the best Polynesian anthropological museum in the world.

Just about four miles from Waikiki is Chinatown, and a walk through its center (especially around Maunakea and North King streets) is a great way to spend part of a day. Start early at the nearly century-old Oahu Market, on the corner of Kekaulike Street and North King, where you'll encounter the incredible sight of 100 or so just-caught tuna laid out side by side. Don't forget to play *What the heck is it?* as you travel the aisles, with the kids *ee-yucking* away at displays of octopus and salted jellyfish. Wander the tiny shops set in wood-frame buildings along the side streets, and let the kids pick out snacks

of mooncakes and dim sum at Mei Sum Chinese Dim Sum on North Pauahi Street. Stop in at Cindy's Lei Shop to see the fragrant strands being made, and leave with garlands of orchids and plumeria for everyone. While you're in the neighborhood, stop at Yat Tung Chow Noodle Shop (150 North King), to see noodle dough in nine sizes being rolled out before your eyes.

On another morning make the beautiful ten-mile drive east of Honolulu to Haunama Bay, a world-class marine preserve with a mile-long white-sand beach, plenty of lifeguards, and lots of services. Even nonswimmers can see fish by wading along shore, and bigger kids and their parents can fin over multihued shallow-water corals. The fish here school by the hundreds. (Try to get there by 9 A.M. or so to beat the crowds.)

From Haunama, head north along the windward coast. After stopping to watch the bodysurfers and body boarders at Makapuu Beach, continue past Sea Life Park (it's much like similar attractions elsewhere) and enjoy the scenery of the next 30 miles, with the fluted flanks of the Koolau Range on your left and mile after mile of sandy beach on your right. Rainbows will likely appear between the peaks, and you may see hang gliders soaring from the mountaintops. In Waimanalo Bay, a rural town of fruit farmers and cowboys, stop at Dave's Ice Cream to try the exotic flavors – *azuki* bean, cotton candy, *poha* (made from gooseberries), and guava and passion-fruit sherberts.

Another day trip worth making takes you west out of Honolulu and past Pearl Harbor and the old pineapple-growing areas to the famous North Shore, home of Sunset Beach and the Banzai Pipeline, where the world's top surfers gather in winter. Pull up a patch of sand to catch the amazing action, but heed the lifeguards' warning and keep the kids – and yourself – well away from the very dangerous water. (In summer the North Shore is calm and the beautiful beaches are safe even

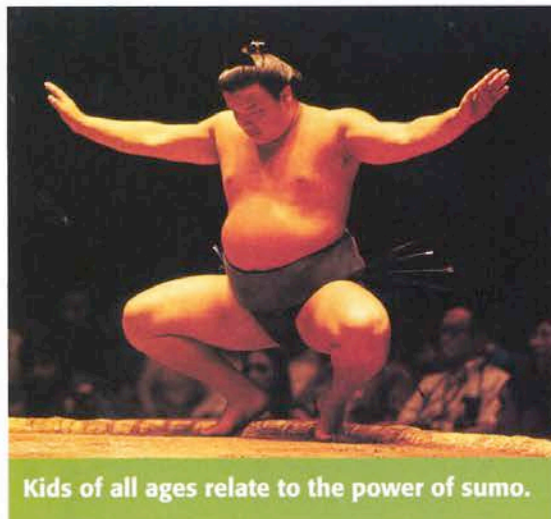
for novice swimmers.) Stop in the charming town of Haleiwa for lunch or a picnic. Join the surfers at Kua-Aina for hamburgers or mahimahi sandwiches, and for dessert, hit Matsumoto's for a shave ice – the Hawaiian snow cone – flavored with guava, mango, passion-fruit, or watermelon syrup.

Waimea Valley Adventure Park, a tropical preserve covering 1,800 acres, is a combination botanical garden and cultural theme park where trails lead to the ruins of a Hawaiian village. Have lunch at the Proud Peacock, or have a picnic by a waterfall that's just a tram ride away. There you can swim and watch cliff divers plunge 60 feet into the waterfall pool. Frolic in a butterfly house, see exotic birds, learn to hula and make a lei, or go for a ride on a mountain bike or a horse. That's Oahu, the "all-around" isle.

## JAPAN

A YOUNG WOMAN IN A CANDY-COLORED *yukata* and wooden sandals stows her cell phone, mounts her hot-pink motorbike, waves at our admiring family, and roars away. A man waiting in line at a festival food stall turns and hands an American boy behind him a tasty plate of *omiyaki*. A quick trip to the bank to change traveler's checks becomes a mesmerizing 30-minute floor show involving tea drinking and much bowing between clerks, some of whom are women dressed in proper kimono.

Moments like these make Japan a wonder for kids *and* their parents. Because Japanese culture is so



Kids of all ages relate to the power of sumo.

unique, so formal, and so aesthetically exciting, entertainment for American children is everywhere. The kids might not be thrilled by a Zen garden, but they'll probably like the color, the scent of incense, and the activity at a temple, especially on a festival day. At a neighborhood yakitori bar the size of a closet, my sons engaged a couple in a heated discussion of baseball and left (2 hours and 23 beef skewers later) with a photo of the prime minister; the young man had taken it that afternoon.

Riding bikes is fun in small towns (bring helmets with you because they are almost nonexistent in Japan), and exploring a supermarket for an exotic and cheap lunch is a fine do-it-yourself diversion. Japan tends to be hot and humid in summer (spring break is a great time to go), a good reason to hit the ubiquitous corner vending machines for drinks or ice cream. Convenience stores, too, are loaded with brightly packaged, intriguingly named drinks, candies, and snacks. Arrange a crack-of-dawn visit to a *beya* – the home “stable” for sumo wrestlers in training, to watch the jumbo athletes practice their skills while dressed in traditional suede loincloths.

Japan has plenty of fancy hotels with outrageous prices, but I'd suggest heading for a *minshuku* (a casual B and B set in a private home) or a *ryokan*, an inn where a family of four can have a good night's sleep on futons, usually with breakfast included, starting at about \$150. (Remember to request a “set breakfast” American-style, unless your kids like fish, soup, and multicolored pickles first thing in the morning.) Watch as your children settle into the rhythm of the inn; once they get hooked on the pleasure of the *furo* (bath), they'll be the cleanest they've been since infancy.

If possible, plan your trip around a festival – easy to do, since hardly a week goes by without some notable celebration taking place somewhere in the archipelago. Kyoto is scorching in July, but the Gion Matsuri – a cross between the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and a huge street carnival

(one that dates back to the ninth century) – is something special. Every family for miles turns out for this weeklong street party that celebrates the happy end of a plague long ago. The curbs are lined with food vendors and the alleys are packed with giant wooden-wheeled floats draped with tapestries. *Chimaki* – lucky charms said to bring good health – are tossed from the floats where flutists and drummers ride, sending dissonant music echoing along the streets, just as it will echo forever in your memories of the city. ♦

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