

The Gift Of Travel



The Retreat offers panoramic ocean views and convenient access to Laguna Beach attractions

(www.waikoloavacationrentals.com,
www.parkervillas.com)

Give Young Parents A Break

Maybe more togetherness isn't what the folks on your list need. Many parents today work hard at their jobs while raising busy families. More than anything, they'd like a responsible adult like you to take their place for a long weekend so they can reconnect. The destination doesn't have to be exotic. Loews Coronado Bay Resort feels a world away from San Diego and even offers romantic gondola rides. North County couples might opt to stay downtown or in Little Italy, which is now home to some of San Diego's best restaurants. (www.loewshotels.com/coronado-bay-resort)

If the parents-who-need-a-break have more time and you have more money, there are few places more relaxing than Turtle Island Resort in Fiji. This all-inclusive private island accommodates up to 14 couples at a time in luxurious thatched bures fronted by private beaches. Guests snorkel, scuba dive, horseback ride, wind surf, dine on delicious food, and enjoy

There's much to like about December, but for most of us holiday shopping isn't one of those things. Seriously, regardless of how loud they play "Jingle Bells," do you really look forward to spending time amid crowds of anxious — err, merry — fellow shoppers?

How about giving yourself a break and making your friends and family really happy by giving them the gift of travel? They won't have to find a place to put it, dust it, or insure it — or worse yet — hide it in a closet and remember to pull it out whenever you visit.

Let's start with the kids. Do they really need more toys, clothes, or electronic gadgets? Wouldn't they rather have quality time and shared experiences with mom and dad, grandma and grandpa? Maybe instead of repeated trips to Toys 'R Us, you would be better off surfing the Web for a vacation rental at a ski resort or on a tropical island. This one gift could deliver holiday joy to your whole family and create memories that would last a lifetime.

Our three-generation troupe has enjoyed several villa rentals. Favorites include one that was steps from the beach on Hawaii's Big Island. We still talk about the special children's luau we attended and laugh about our pathetic performance during the hula lesson we attempted.

We also really loved the villa we rented in the Tuscan village of Radda in Chianti, and continue to reminisce about the great little gelato place we visited on a regular basis. These bonding moments are a priceless treasure.



Radda in Chianti is one of Tuscany's most picturesque villages

in-room spa treatments. Tip: I highly recommend the four-hand lomi-lomi massage. (www.turtlefiji.com)

While this send-the-parents-away gift sounds super altruistic, it's actually mutually beneficial: Whether you are the aunt, uncle, grandparent, or a great friend, you'll have quality time at home with the kids without the parents stealing your thunder.

A Great Summertime Trip

The Pageant of the Masters takes place in Laguna Beach, about an hour north of San Diego, every summer. Tickets go on sale December 1 (yes, this month) and sell out quickly in spite of the fact that performances take place July 7 through August 31, 2013. Lodging is hard to find in Laguna during the summer, so definitely include it in your trip gift. The Retreat offers eight villas with kitchens on a bluff overlooking the beach on the west side of Pacific Coast Highway. This is a great spot to watch the sunset and keep an eye out for dolphins, and it's only a ten-minute walk into the village (where parking is very scarce). I love the old-fashioned Orange Inn around the corner from The Retreat, which *Sunset Magazine* says serves "the best roadside breakfast in Southern California."

(www.theretreatinlaguna.com)

The Key To The Perfect Gift

The secret to a successful trip gift is honing in on your recipient's passions. Send golfers to St. Andrews in Scotland and make reservations for them to stay at the Old Course Hotel or the Fairmont St. Andrews. Alternatively, sign them up at the Kapalua Golf Academy in Maui and book their lodging at the Ritz-Carlton. Hale

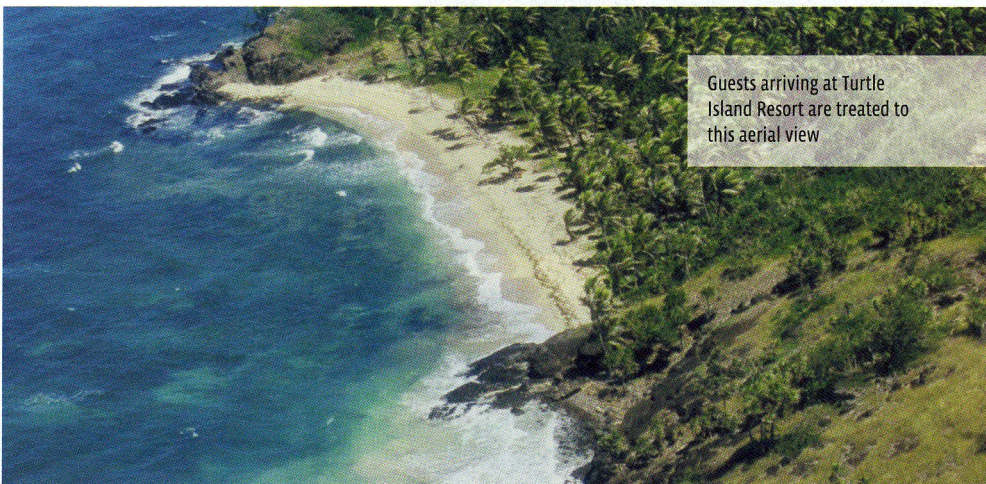
Irwin designed this golf facility, which is widely known to be Hawaii's most complete, state-of-the-art school and practice facility.

(www.standrews.org.uk, www.kapalua.com/golf/kapalua-golf-academy)

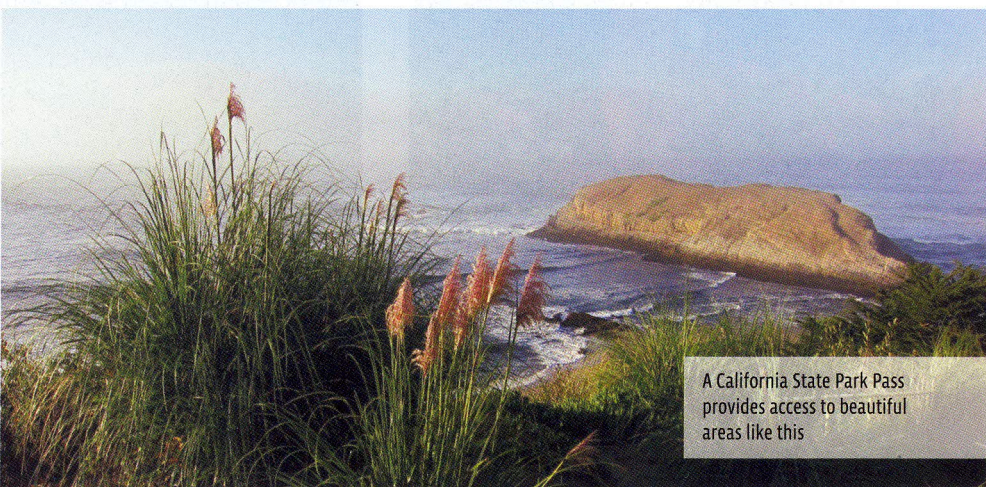
Gardeners would love to visit The New York Botanical Gardens in the Bronx, and you could package that treat with theatre tickets and a reservation at The Pierre. If you're feeling flush, a trip to Kirstenbosch Gardens in Cape Town, South Africa would be a huge thrill for >>



The New York Botanical Gardens are some of the most impressive in the world



Guests arriving at Turtle Island Resort are treated to this aerial view

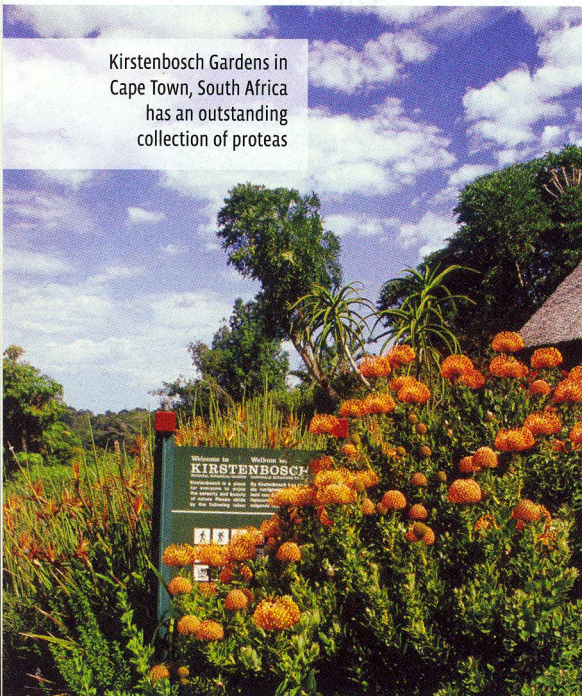


A California State Park Pass provides access to beautiful areas like this

<< any plant person on your list. In Cape Town, I like the centrally located Cape Grace Hotel and the Steenberg Hotel located in a beautiful wine district slightly out of town. (www.nybg.org, www.sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch)

The perfect cooks' tour? These days cooking classes are as

Kirstenbosch Gardens in Cape Town, South Africa has an outstanding collection of proteas



common as city tours. We took a Thai cooking class at the Anantara Resort in the Maldives, which proved to be embarrassing since I don't cook and didn't even know the right way to hold the knife. (Note to Santa: no cooking tours for me, please.)

Having said that, it seems that everyone but me wants to learn to prepare the local cuisine. You can search online and find lots of choices. One program that is particularly well known is the market tours and cooking classes offered by The Metropole Hotel in Hanoi, Vietnam. In Italy, you can find out about cooking classes from Hello Italy and others. (www.sofitel-legend.com/hanoi/en/extra-facilities/ecole-cuisine.shtml, www.helloitalytours.com)

The Gift That Keeps On Giving

Last year we gave the most important people on our gift list a California State Park Pass, which they have put to good use. Depending on the proclivities of

your family, you might also want to consider a National Park Pass, or an annual pass to the San Diego Zoo or SeaWorld.

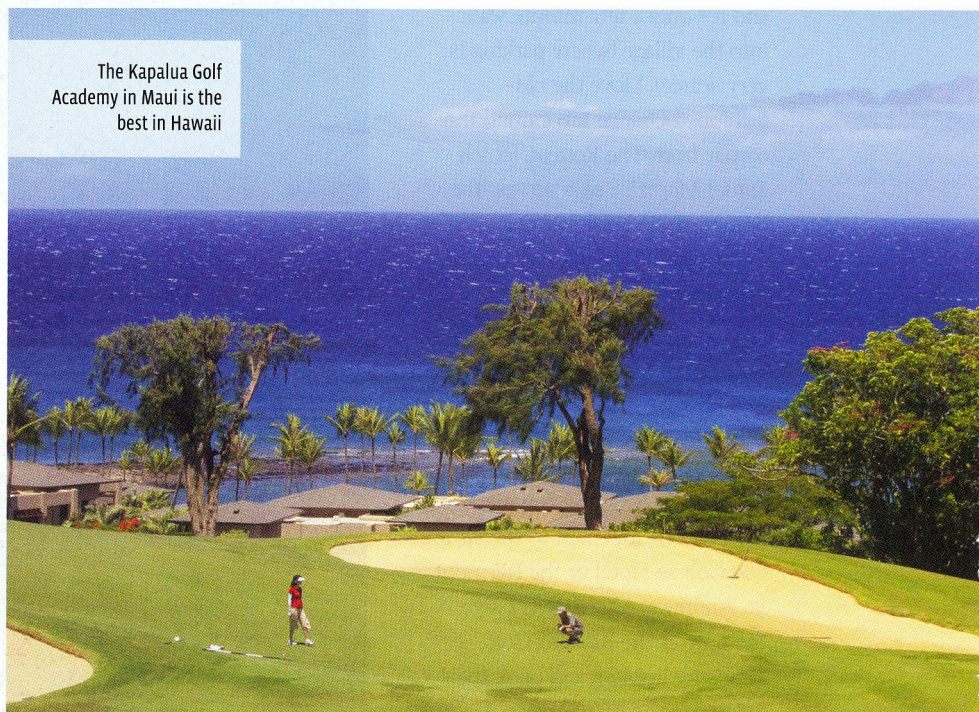
(www.parks.ca.gov, www.nps.gov/findapark/passes.htm)

Wrapping Your Package

I'll never forget the look on my husband's face when I handed him a gift-wrapped tie box on his birthday shortly after we were married. However, "disappointed" turned to "shocked" when he took the lid off and found tickets to London, a hotel confirmation, and three sets of theatre tickets. It took a bit of sleuthing to make sure his calendar was clear before I confirmed the non-refundable bookings — but that was part of the fun. To this day, it remains one of our best trips.

You might also want to tuck tickets into the appropriate guidebook or present your trip gift at a corresponding ethnic restaurant. Figuring out how to package your present is just part of the fun of the gift of travel. ELIZABETH HANSEN

The Kapalua Golf Academy in Maui is the best in Hawaii



Winery tours and tastings are highlights of visits to Tuscany

