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The worldview from Los Angeles

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## Four Secrets of a Multi-Generational Vacation

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The multi-generational vacation requires meticulous planning, diplomacy and a healthy supply of sippy cups and shot glasses. If your destination were a corporate brand, it would need to hit a sweet spot somewhere between Disney Channel and AARP, with a free [Apple \(/companies/apple/\)](/companies/apple/)

[AAPL -0.46% \(/companies/apple/\)](/companies/apple/) gizmo for everyone in the group. Thrills for the kids, check. A quiet brunch place for grandma, yes. But also cocktails and massages by the adult pool. [Carmel Valley Ranch \(http://www.carmelvalleyranch.com/\)](http://www.carmelvalleyranch.com/) turns out to be the trifecta of family getaways.

Two hours from San Francisco and five and a half from LA, the resort on 500 acres in the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains near Big Sur is a one-for-all-and-all-for-fun spot with ageless appeal. Years ago, I visited to write a story on “buddy vacations.” Don’t ask. It was for a men’s golf magazine that’s no longer around. But the assignment reflected the rowdy ethos of the Ranch back then. In a 48-hour span, my bros and I (okay, one was a woman) golfed, drank whiskey, shot skeet, flung arrows, flew in gliders and drove race cars at nearby Laguna Seca speedway. My core muscles still hurt.

Carmel Valley Ranch launched a \$35 million renovation in 2011 of its 151 guest rooms, and it continues to tweak its offerings. This summer the resort adds 30 larger indoor-outdoor suites and studios — think cushy daybeds, soaking tubs, stone mosaic showers — that can be configured for families and groups. The restaurant opens a 1,500-square-foot dining terrace, and there’s a new

wellness pool area (grownups only, thank you) with a hot tub, cabanas and no Xbox Kinect.



For my father-in-law's 80th, we checked in with three generations, seven different agendas and a few unspoken fears about being holed up in the rain playing Boggle all week. That never happened. What follows are some takeaway lessons about what turned out to be a stellar family getaway.

#### 1. Seal the Perimeter

What's great about Carmel Valley Ranch is that it's a closed ecosystem. That's important with a multi-age group. Once you're inside the gates, you're safe to let older kids and grandparents roam as freely as the wild turkeys gobble-gobbling around the grounds. Our 11-year-old son and his 15-year-old cousin took the shuttle to the kid-friendly River Ranch (picture: pools, ping-pong, bocce, Wii) before my wife and I could unpack with our welcome drink. The boys basically spent the rest of their waking hours there.

#### 2. Immerse the Grownups

The first full day, four of us golfed the 18-hole Pete Dye-designed course that seduces you with an easy front nine before chewing and spitting you out on the mountainous backside. The next day, the younger adults (I dare not say middle aged) and our kin ATV'd to the new Equestrian Center for some saddle therapy. Cowgirl Molly led our happy band of cowpokes on a hillside path through oak chaparral and redwoods. I don't think I checked my Facebook (<http://www.forbes.com/facebook-ipo/>) feed once on either day. Okay, maybe once.



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### 3. Keep Them Separated

When it comes to group getaways, I believe firmly in the rule of threes: three nights is best; three activities a day at most, and, if you're traveling with three families, you need three separate accommodations. We had three One-Bedroom Hilltop Ranch Suites, with a bedroom and separate living room with pullout sofas for the kids. No matter how lovey-dovey your family is, it's essential to build in private time away from each other. If nothing else, it makes every dinner feel like mini reunion. :)



### 4. Eat Locally

Carmel-by-the-Sea is one of America's most idyllic small towns. The white beaches, the adorable shops and restaurants, the Clint Eastwood t-shirts. The main drag of Ocean Ave is a quick ten-minute drive from the resort but some days we opted to stay put. The restaurant is one of the finest in the region. Carmel Valley Ranch executive chef Tim Wood was named best chef in Monterey County for 2015 by the local weekly, and it's easy to see why. His menus don't just tell you where he sourced his local flavors, they say exactly who did the sourcing. The fresh fish is caught by Jerry Wetle. Mark Marino tends the organic garden. Bob Kirkland dishes the salt. My favorite was the acclaimed honey-chili chicken wings: sweet and gooey with a dash of fire. I had them every time we sat down in the restaurant. Then it hit me: We might just have to make them a family tradition.