

Ep #143: Europe Travel with Kids: Traci's Hotel Booking Strategies for Families



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Ep #143: Europe Travel with Kids: Traci's Hotel Booking Strategies for Families

Alex: Booking hotels on points in Europe can be a little tricky for families, especially where a lot of hotels only allow occupancy for 2. Today, we have a special guest on to share all of her tips and tricks on how to make booking hotels in Europe for families so much easier.

Welcome to *Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad*. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. Today, Traci, our wonderful TMS copy editor, is back, and we are talking all about hotels in Europe for families. And you might be wondering, why do we need an entire episode dedicated to booking hotels for families in Europe? Well, it's because it is very different if you've only ever booked hotels in the US.

You know, taking your family to Europe is a whole other beast because of occupancy limits. A lot of hotels have a maximum occupancy of 2. And so if you are traveling with 3 or more people, that's going to totally change the dynamic of your booking process and your strategy and everything.

So, first, we are going to touch on hotels that do accommodate 4 people without hassle. I just want to say this is not going to be an exhaustive list because I just know that after the show, someone will message us and be like, well, you didn't talk about this hotel and this one sleeps 4. This is not an exhaustive list. This is just ones that we've stayed at ourselves or we have followers who have stayed at and reported back on.

Then we are going to go over options for booking 2 rooms with points. That's often necessary if you're booking for a family of 4. There's also some other

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creative ways you can book rooms for families on points. We're going to talk about booking potentially 2 rooms with points and cash. That's an option too. And then strategies about how to find options that will work for your family.

So Traci, first of all, welcome back.

Traci: Thank you.

Jess: Second of all, let's start off with some unicorn points options for families.

Traci: Yes. Okay. So, like Jess said, if you grow up like I did, when you go to a hotel or a motel on a road trip or whatever, and you're used to packing the whole family in one room with a rollaway or even kids on the floor or whatever, that does not fly in Europe.

You don't want to run afoul of the occupancy rules because I have heard stories of people being turned away if they try to book a room that's ostensibly for 2 people, and then they show up with 2 kids, and the hotel will make you leave. Like they will not honor your reservation a lot of the time. There's chances it could possibly work, but I would not chance that. Like, I'm not showing up and not having a place to stay for my family. So you really do need to be cognizant of the occupancy rules.

Jess: Because often you have to present your passports at check-in for everyone in your party. And so it's not like you can just say, oh, my kids don't have passports. You know, it's just not going to work.

Traci: Right. Yeah, although lately I haven't been like I've been saying, oh, do you need my passport when I check in? And they're like, no, I don't need it. And like, okay, you used to need it.

Anyway, so the unicorn points options for families are the things that everyone is looking for, right? This is the easiest thing. You can just book on the website with points and know that it will sleep 4 people, right? That is rare to find, but there are some.

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So one of the ones that's like the most expensive option is a category 8 Hyatt in Florence, Il Tornabuoni. We've stayed there before. It was great. You can book a suite that has 2 queen beds, but it's a lot of points, right? So that's something to be aware of. There's the Hyatt Regency Lisbon, which I know Alex has stayed at, and I think Jess and I are staying there later this year, and you can book a room that will accommodate 4 there. I know Alex has stayed at the highest Hyatt Regency Paris Etoile. That also, if you can book it early and get that room, they have a good option. It's I think it's really 2 connecting rooms, right?

Alex: Yeah, I think so.

Traci: Yeah. Like a lot of these hotels, they'll say they have a "family room," like in air quotes, but it's really 2 connecting rooms and they just make sure that it's all set up for you. So it's basically like a guaranteed connecting room.

There's the Tribune in Rome. They have a room that will sleep 4. There's the Schloss Roxburghe in the Scottish Borders, where we just stayed. We actually had 2 rooms just because our kids are teenagers and we don't want to have to share a bathroom with all of them, but they do have a like a courtyard duplex suite where you, it's like a two-level thing and you can book it straight away on points. And it's only a category 4 hotel, which is awesome. I loved that property. I thought it was great and they have a ton of things that are really fun for kids to do.

So that is something I think everyone should star on their list. I would try and go there if I had if I was looking for a family option for 4 people with little kids, I would go there. And then there's the new The Standard partnership with Hyatt in London. There's the new Standard. I think it's near King's Cross. And I've heard stories that people can even sometimes get a 5th person in their room. Like, if you email ahead, I think it's tight from what I've seen. It's a tight fit, but...

Jess: I feel like London hotel rooms are already tight. And then add in 5 people into one room. I don't know how like relaxing that vacation would be, but I guess if you're just looking to get the most bang for your buck, hey, it might be worth it.

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And I do want to say like, so not all of these hotels that you've mentioned, the standard room sleeps four. Sometimes you're going to have to book the standard suite or the premium suite to be able to fit 4. But if you want to cover the entire thing on points and all be in one room, they are good options.

Traci: Right. And it's an option, these are all options where you can literally just go onto the Hyatt website for that hotel, and you can just book it outright with points and be done. You don't have to email anybody, you don't have to ask special permission. It's just simple to book by yourself.

And I will say talking about the room size is really important because you might think, oh, well, if the room is big enough, surely they'll just let us bring in extra rollaways or whatever. That is not true a lot of the time. Like, they are very strict with the occupancy rules. So even when you're like, oh, this room is really huge, it should have plenty of room, shouldn't be a problem. You have to get permission. Like you can't just count on being able to do that.

So those are some really good Hyatt options in Europe that you can book with points. There are a lot of really good IHG options. So I would say if you're sleeping on IHG and you're thinking about taking a family of 4 to Europe, don't. You need to get maybe at least one IHG card. Holiday Inn Expresses can be great. We've stayed at one in London before, and they often have 2 queen beds. So that's perfect, and their occupancy is very clearly stated. Like when you look up a hotel, there's a little person icon and a 4 or a 3 or a 2 or whatever. And so you know off the bat, like yes, this room will work for us. It says a 4. So you're good.

Sometimes you'll have a queen with a sofa bed, and that also works if your kids are little. But like they have Holiday Inn Expresses that sleep 4, with rooms that sleep for in like London and Germany and Italy, and France, and a lot of places. And also sometimes they include free breakfast, which is good.

There are some Crown Plazas that have 2 queen beds. We've stayed at a Crown Plaza, I think at Manchester Airport, back when Singapore had that nice flight from Houston to Manchester. And they had a queen and a sofa bed, and so our kids stayed in that.

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There's also Staybridge Suites in a couple of random places in Europe, in like there's a Staybridge Suites in Cannes that has a queen bed and a sofa bed. So like if you want to go to the south of France and have a vacation with your kids, you stay at the Staybridge Suites. Like it doesn't have the same cachet as, like, the Hotel Martinez or whatever, but it'll do, right? But they have lots of those in the UK and big cities, and then there's one in Malaga, Spain, also. So that's kind of cool. I was looking that one up, and I was like, really? I'm going to stay at the Staybridge Suites in Malaga. But and then like the Intercontinental Malta, that's a really nice upscale brand of IHG's, and they have a room that has enough room for 4.

And then in Spain, there's this chain of Iberostar resorts that are usually beach resorts. They're with the IHG program, and they always have like family rooms that you can book. So those are also some really great IHG options.

I also really like Choice Hotels. They are very niche. Like there are there are some gems and then the rest of them, I'm like, meh. So I have stayed, and I know Jess has stayed too at the Hotel Aquarius in Venice.

I loved that property. I thought it was a great value. It was super cheap on points because if you use Citi ThankYou points to transfer to Choice hotels, it's a 1 to 2 ratio. So like if you transfer 10,000 points, you get 20,000 Choice hotel points. And then, like the cost of the suites and the rooms, it's like 20,000 points. And even in the peak summer, we got 2 rooms that were, I think they were both technically suites. And one of them slept 3 and one of them just slept 2, but it was a deal. It was a real deal, and it's in a great location. Like we loved it. So that's a really good option.

And then I was poking around yesterday, preparing for this and seeing if there were any other gems I could find and like recommend to people. There's a really cool Choice Hotels hotel in the Faroe Islands that looks awesome. And it was really cheap. It's called the Hotel Føroyar, I think.

Jess: I'm not even going to attempt to pronounce that.

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Traci: It was it looked really cool. Like it was all like modern and sleek. And the Faroe Islands would be really interesting to go visit. And then there's also a really great looking one in Sorrento and Italy that that looked great. And the way I would say to strategize looking at these Choice hotel options, if you can find a gem, is look for their Ascend Hotel Collection®. That's their like premier brand. I mean, they also have things like comfort suites and stuff like that. So if you're comfortable with that, you could look at those options, but if you're looking to be a little bougie with your family, look, check out the Ascend Collection, and you can filter by what countries they have those hotels in, and then just look and see each property.

Alex: This is like super helpful. Like, I'm learning stuff as I'm listening like, oh, I need to start checking out the Ascend collection more. Like because we've got 6. So I mean, you know, we're probably going to need to get 2 rooms regardless, but sometimes in Europe, if we have 6, you'd have to get 3 rooms. And so if we can even cut it down to 2, that's great.

Traci: Yeah, well, there's actually a couple of Ascend hotel options that I saw that sleep 6. Like they'll have 2 queen beds and then bunk beds or something. And I think I told you there was one in Japan, which you know, isn't Europe, it's not what we're talking about today, but there are some options that actually do sleep 6. So if you have more than 2 kids, like don't don't think there's nothing for you, there's still can be some, it's still worth looking into.

Alex: Yeah.

Traci: So anyway, those are some really good options if you have ThankYou points, you can transfer to Choice Hotels. There's also some good Marriott options. There are Residence Inns in Europe, and like there's one in Edinburgh that is in a good location, and it's like 54,000 points a night. So if you have Marriott points, that could be a good option. And then there's a couple of Hiltons. There's like the Hilton Edinburgh Carlton.

Jess: I've stayed there.

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Traci: Nice. There's a Hampton by Hilton in Dublin in the city center. That also takes 4 people. I think you'll get a better value for your points if you can transfer from if you either have Hilton points or you can transfer from Amex when there's a transfer bonus, because the Hilton and Marriott sort of points variability tied to cash, that's not as good of a value as Hyatt, but it's still a good option, especially if you're just like, I just need us all to be together. I don't have, I don't want to go book 2 rooms, that's not an option for me. Then that, you know, maybe outsized value isn't your priority, maybe your priority is just being together and cutting down costs as much as you can, right?

And then another option that it's not like great, but it could be useful in certain countries or cities is the Accor program. So their loyalty program is called Accor Live Limitless. And their points are really weird because they're tied to cash. So I think it's like, what is the ratio? I think it's 1,000 Accor points is equal to €20 off your bill. And the way you do it is you just you book what you're booking for your hotel and then at the end, it's like apply points to cost. And then you just get a discount based on how many points you have.

But because they're tied to the cash rate and because it's like a static sort of exchange rate, it's kind of it ends up being like 1 to 1 after you transfer from credit card partners. And they transfer from I think Cap One and Citi.

But sometimes they have transfer bonuses. And if they have transfer bonuses of 50% or more, then you're basically getting like 1.5 cents per point, which I don't usually care much about the cents per point stuff, but just as like a rough guideline, about is this a good deal or not, or am I wasting my points? Because this is a weird program, like nobody uses it. It could be useful. Like, if you're in a city where that's your only option for having everyone together in one room, and like that's your priority, this discounts your hotel stay. So like it's a win, right? So that's another program worth looking at.

So across all these different programs, there are different options of things you can do. And it's just it's kind of it's frustrating because it's kind of uneven and you have to do the research each time. You can't go into it thinking, well, I want to stay in this city, and it has to be this program with these points that I have and

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it has to be a room with all 4 of us in one room. Like you might get lucky and that might happen. You might find it, but it's going to take a little digging, probably. So just be willing to do that.

Alex: I think that's kind of an example of how having a bunch of different types of points can come in really handy. Like if you're like, I only have Hyatt points and there's not a Hyatt available. You know, or I only have Chase Ultimate Rewards®.

It could probably be helpful too for families to do the research and figure out where we want to maybe stay and then get those specific type of points. They feel like, oh, I really love this Marriott property. We're going to go stay here. Then you'd prioritize, okay, I'm going to try to open some Marriott cards when they have better offers. And so just like you said, like planning ahead a little bit and doing the research.

I think it's really promising though, because I think there's a lot of people like I even just saw this in one of the Facebook groups this morning, where somebody was like, "I have a family of 6, like we're trying to earn more points. We've kind of exhausted Ultimate Rewards and Southwest. Don't really see us being able to go to Europe because we're a family of 6 and, you know, just the hotel situation there."

But I feel like this is really promising that it is doable. Like you said, it just might take a little more effort and research to, but you know, not even that much research. Traci just listed off like 10 hotels that you can do.

Traci: Yeah. And it all depends too on if you know what you're looking for, how you're searching, which properties aren't ever going to have something. Like, I don't think a Park Hyatt's ever going to have like what you're looking for, probably. But if your goal is to just be together in one room at all costs and also save money, there are lots of options.

If your goal is to get the perfect redemption with just Hyatt points and have a magical unicorn room where all 4 of you can be together, and it's also a steal, you can get lucky at those properties we listed, maybe some others, but like

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that's not, don't go into it expecting that. It's going to be a little trickier because your priorities are different from someone who's just traveling with 2 people or whatever.

So I wanted to talk next about suite options or ways you can get you can get suites without you can still use points, but maybe it's a little trickier. So one of the things that popped into my head for this was when Jess was talking in a in the podcast episode a long time ago about her stay at the, in Greece at the Canaves Oia Epitome. Did I say it right? I don't know.

Jess: Yes. I think so. That's how I pronounced it.

Traci: And you booked it with Hilton points and free nights, I think. And then you paid to upgrade to a suite, right? And the suite, I remember you saying that the suite would accommodate 5 people. And like alarm bells went off in my head, and I was like, oh, that's a really great idea. Like, what if you just book a standard room and then pay to upgrade?

Jess: Yeah.

Traci: So you can do that. I know one place that we've thought about doing it where we didn't, but it was like the Hyatt Centric in Morano near Venice. Lovely property, easy little Vaporetto ride over to Venice proper. And they have a duplex suite. You can book with points and cash, or you could book a standard and then try and upgrade with cash just, you know, email the hotel. So you can book a suite outright sometimes with just points. Sometimes it's a points and cash option, depending on the hotel.

You could also, if you're trying to get a suite, you could book a standard room with points for 2 people and then email the hotel and say, hi, I've booked this room. I was wondering if there are any opportunities to upgrade to a suite for my family. You know, is there anything you can do to accommodate us? And then see what the options are. You know, so that can be an option too.

Jess: That's actually been my go-to method lately because especially with programs like Hilton, because, like with Hyatt, if you find a like at Schloss

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Roxburghe, it's a category 4, and so getting 2 rooms there on Hyatt points might make a lot of sense. You know, it's not a ton of points, but like next summer we're going to Italy and I booked Grand Hotel Victoria for our family of 5, and that would normally require 3 rooms for our family of 5, which it's 140,000 Hilton points a night.

So I booked 2 rooms and I emailed them and said, can I add a 3rd person to a room? Like, can I upgrade to a room that sleeps 3? It's like €130 a night, which to me, I would much rather pay €130 a night than another 140,000 Hilton points a night. And so that, we did that in Iceland. We did we did that in Ireland. Like that has been my go-to because I find it such a great option to save some of your points, but still get a room that has enough space for your family.

Traci: Yeah. And I think it's really important, and this is a good opportunity to outline, don't be afraid to email the hotels. Like I think a lot of people like I see, especially like in the Facebook group too, like people are like, I you know, I don't know if I can get this. Do they have any rooms that sleep 4 people or whatever? Just email them. And I know it can be tricky sometimes to find the email. I've actually started collecting the email addresses of a bunch of Hyatts that I'm thinking about going to one day.

But last fall, like, there was one point where I was just like, you know, I need a break from work. I'm going to just email a bunch of Hyatts that I'm thinking about staying at in the future and just ask them, do you have any rooms that sleep 4 people? If you don't, do you participate in the Hyatt family plan rate? And I got responses back from a lot of them. And then I know what to book, and I know what options won't work. And then I have it in writing, which actually turned out to be really helpful when the Thompson Madrid tried to tell me that my kids were too old to get the family plan rate, and I was like, but it's in writing. So.

Jess: You're like, but I'm a lawyer and I have everything in writing.

Alex: I think too, a lot of people think you're not contacting Hyatt's general line. You're not contacting Hilton's general line. You're contacting the hotel directly. If you try to contact like just general Hyatt, they're not going to be as help. They're

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not going to know. They're not going to be that helpful. They'd probably have to contact the hotel. So you always just want to go like straight to the hotel.

Traci: Yes. Yeah. And it it'd be nice if their email addresses followed a formula that was predictable so you could just sort of like if it's like Hyatt, you know, if it's like London Blackfriars at Hyatt.com, then you would know that it would be like Albert Embankment at Hyatt.com, but it's not, you know, like you never know what it's going to be. It's always some variation that makes sense, but not predictable enough to just guess. So I would say just like try to find them and just email wherever you're thinking about going and just ask because the worst they can say is like, no, we can't accommodate you, and then you know, and you don't have to guess, and you can make plans.

Jess: Yeah. And I emailed way in advance. Like, our stay is not till next summer, and I was like, hey, I have a stay in June 2026. Here's my confirmation number. Can I? Like, so don't wait.

Alex: Did you already pay for it as well?

Jess: No, you pay at I just they like add it to my bill.

Alex: Gotcha. But it's already that room has already set aside for you. Like no one can take it because there have been times where we did this when we went to the Thompson Madrid, and I had to pay for the upgrade ahead of time. So they like sent me an email like with the secure payment, and I paid, you know, months before we went. So it can kind of vary.

Traci: Yeah. But I think it's it's really important to do it as early as possible if you know that you're going because there aren't that many like family accommodating rooms in these properties sometimes. And so if someone else gets it before you do, they can't put you in it because it doesn't exist anymore. It's already taken. So it's really good to plan ahead.

Okay, so that was suites and the upgrade possibilities. So now let's talk about something that I don't usually do, but I've been actually looking into more because I think there's an opportunity here. And that's using the travel portals.

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Because, okay, so I don't really use travel portals for flights because flights get changed so often. I don't want to deal with, you know, if there's an issue, whatever. Hotels, I haven't had a problem with hotels. Knock on wood. But booking a hotel through a portal, I do it already because I've got my Venture X \$300 credit. I use it for hotels or rental cars.

So if you look, especially at the Chase travel portal right now, if you have okay, if you've found a property, let's say it's a Hyatt, and you know that they have a room that says like family room or family suite or something like that, but you can't book it on points, right? And let's say that if you book it through the Hyatt website, it's like points plus cash, and the cash rate is like €500 a night or something, whatever. So that's a lot.

You could go onto the Chase travel portal and find that same Hyatt. And they have way more of a selection of rooms available. And with either the like I'm still on the 1.5 X value for my Chase Sapphire Reserve, but if you have the Points Boost because you've gotten the reserve recently, since the new offer, you can get the Points Boost rate. And it's actually can be cheaper than booking it through Hyatt directly. And obviously, if it's a suite that you can't book through Hyatt itself, that's not even an option.

So that can be a way that you can still use points, even Ultimate Rewards points, you know, which I would just transfer to Hyatt anyway, and just book it through the Chase portal. And that way you get the room you want.

So a couple of examples in that like, and this isn't a Hyatt example, but I was looking at like in the Chase portal, I did a search for London for 4 people, and I searched it by like 4 stars and up, right? Because we got to be bougie. And so if you wanted to book the London Bloomsbury Holiday Inn, it for one night that I looked in October, it was like 73,000 IHG points for a room that has 2 queen beds. But if you booked it through Chase Travel that same day, same room, it was 21,562 Ultimate Rewards. Now, like I don't usually use Ultimate Rewards on IHG. I use them on Hyatt. But I would spend 21,000 Hyatt points for a room that could get all 4 of us together. And so that's a really good deal to me.

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And then the great thing about booking through the Chase portal now is I think on most of the time, you can get your elite qualifying night credit for it. And if you have Globalist, you can get benefits through that now. So I think that's really kind of a game changer because that was sort of the one sort of sticking point before that you wouldn't get like your credits or whatever if you book through a portal, but now that they seem to have made that situation better, that could really be a good deal for people.

There was another search I did for like the Hotel Indigo in Kensington in London, and it was like a 2 queen room, and it was \$370 a night. But if you booked it through the Chase Travel portal, same night was 21,000 points. So again, like that's a pretty good deal, and Hotel Indigos are nice. Like, I'm good with that.

And then there was a hotel in Copenhagen that I was looking at, and I don't think it's affiliated with any program, but Copenhagen is a hugely expensive city. There's no Hyatts. I think there's like a Mr. and Mrs. Smith or something. There's there's a Hyatt in Malmo, Sweden. You can go across the bridge, but whatever. But there's a 2 queen room, and it was like \$260 a night or 15,000 Ultimate Rewards points. And it's a 4 and a half star hotel. And I'm like 15,000 Ultimate Rewards in Copenhagen and you can all be together. That's a unicorn, right?

Alex: Yeah. That totally is.

Traci: So I think the portal is opening up more opportunities. So don't sleep on the portals.

Jess: I can see the wheels spinning for Alex, and she is like, oh my gosh, I have so many options for my family now.

Alex: No, they really are. This is like so this is great, Traci. This is so helpful. I just think it's like I don't know, it's really exciting for us big families to be like, okay, there are some good options. And I think when Points Boost kind of came out, I was like, okay, we'll see how this goes. I don't really book in the portal, and I don't really see myself booking in the portal much, even with this new change.

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But now I'm like, oh, I can't be sleeping on the portal with this Points Boost for some situations. Like that's crazy that it'd be 73,000 points for that, that one in London, or 21,000 through the portal. Or yeah, like that's just so much cheaper. And you're, that's like paying, if you had to get 2 rooms, it'd be like, oh, that's 10,000 points a room. Like that's wildly cheap.

Traci: And the benefit for this, and I'm just thinking of this as we're talking, like if you're someone who goes for Globalist, I know you guys both do. If you're booking 2 rooms, you're only getting one night of elite credit, right? But this way, if you're all in one room and you're booking through the portal, but you're still getting your elite night credit, you're not wasting, you know, wasting that extra room's value of points. You're still getting it because you're all in one room. If that makes sense.

Jess: I feel like Points Boost really opened the door to making Chase points valuable for hotels other than Hyatt because yes, I do think that Hyatt will typically still be better value booking direct, but something like IHG or Hilton or Marriott or even these other brands that don't have a you know, you can't transfer to are you know, stepping, it's they're on the table now as like options with really great value for your Chase points. So I'm actually really excited about the Points Boost changes. I was skeptical at first.

Alex: I am too. Yeah, because I think like I, and I would think the same is probably true for most of us. Our go-to reaction is I'm booking a hotel. What Hyatts do they have? Like, where's a Hyatt that I can book? And now it's like, oh, wait a second. Let me check the portal and see like if there's any Points Boost options as well as, you know, and maybe I would spend less points or fewer points than I would if I was transferring to Hyatt and we get to stay together.

Traci: Yeah. And in a lot of places that you might want to go, there might not be a Hyatt at all. And then like I, when we went to Annecy with the kids a couple years ago, like there were no Hyatts there. So I'm we used our Capital One travel credit to book a hotel that was, I don't even remember what hotel it was, but you know, it opens up more options for you. And in a lot of places too, like in

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rural areas, like in the Alps, in like the Tyrol and Northern Italy, there are all of these like family resort things that you can, you know, stay out with your kids. And like, I think you can book some of those through the portal too. So it really does open up a lot of options. And I just, I have to remind myself like, oh, I should start checking the portal because I'm so used to not even checking it. But that's a really good option.

All right. So now that we've covered suites and regular unicorn rooms, let's cover booking 2 rooms. Okay. I know a lot of people have sort of like an aversion. You're like, oh, 2 rooms. It's so weird. Like, is it going to work? And here's what I have to say. When your kids are little, I totally get it. You don't want to do 2 rooms. Got it. When your kids are teenagers, you want 2 rooms, and it's not anything against teenagers. It's just like you want your space, you want your downtime, and you want the extra bathroom. So, like don't be afraid of that when your kids get older.

Jess: I 100% agree with you. And like, there have been times where like, yeah, technically, we could all fit in one room. Do I want to do that? Absolutely not.

Traci: Yeah. Once you've tried it, it's like, oh, this is actually kind of nice.

Alex: No, we're kind of getting to that spot too. Like we were just up in Park City at a Hyatt Place, which those sleep 6. Like we have room. We've got you know, the 2 queens and a sofa bed. And I used free night certificates for our 3-night stay. And so Mitch was like, hey, was there more availability? Maybe we should use points, like it'd be 45,000 points for the 3-night stay to book another room. And I was like, well, I don't know if there's availability. We've already booked. It was like the day before we were leaving.

So I was like, let's just see how it goes this 3 days. And maybe next year, because we go up there every summer for a few days. Maybe next summer we'll book the 2 rooms because even in a place like that, like having 2 bathrooms is so nice. And my, you know, I got a teenager now, and then my next one's turning 12 here in a few months. And so, like we're getting to that point now, too, where we're not going to want to share a room with 4 teenage boys. Like that's going to be horrible.

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Traci: Yeah, it just makes bath time, like or shower time, like whatever age your kids, makes it so much easier because you can put one kid in one bathroom and the other kid in the other bathroom and they go to bed earlier or, you know, whatever. And then it's also nice too, like when the kids are, you know, you've sent them to bed, like you can still stay up if you want, you don't have to like hide in the bathroom or something.

Alex: Yeah, and you can watch the show you want to watch. You don't have to watch like Thunderman's for the 80th time. Which, it's a good, it's a good show, though. I will say that. Thunderman's is a funny show.

Traci: I've not seen it. I guess I'm lucky my kids...

Alex: It's on Nickelodeon.

Traci: Okay. So if you are booking 2 rooms, what can you do to save money? Obviously, I know you guys have talked about this a lot. There's the Hyatt Family Plan rate. So that's when you book one room either with points or cash, and then the 2nd room, if you have kids with you, is 50% off of the cash price. So you can't book the 2nd room with points. It has to be cash, but it is 50% off. But it's 50% off of the standard rate. It's not 50% off of like the advanced member rate or whatever. So take that into consideration.

Also, if you're going to book that, you have to like email the hotel itself. Don't don't just call regular Hyatt and, you know, get the main line. You have to like find out if that specific property honors it. If they honor it, ask what ages they cut it off at because a lot of places will cut it off if your kids are older than 12. And I know some of them let you do it until 17. I we've stayed at the Andaz Liverpool Street in London before and they let our kids benefit from that and our kids were over 12.

So it does vary by property. I will say publicly, the Thompson Madrid told me in writing that our kids who were going to be 16 would qualify for it. And so I made plans based on that. And then when I tried to book it, they were like, oh, I'm so sorry, it's 12 and under. And I said, no, no, no, we've got this. And I was able to

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get them to waive it for me. So I don't know if that's something that they're going to ever allow anyone else to do, but that's my case.

Alex: I really don't like that they do that so young because like to me, it doesn't make a ton of sense because what, like you're going to stick your 5 and your 6-year-old in their own room that's like not even connecting? Like to me, that's when it even makes more sense that you're like, oh, I feel comfortable with my kids since they're a little older to have their own room.

Traci: Right. And it's not like they're losing money...

Alex: And they're kids. They're like, my 13-year-old's not very big. So to think like you couldn't qualify for family plan rate at some stuff is kind of like silly to me. Like, it's just they're still kids.

I agree. I think it's kind of silly. I mean, it's nice that they have the policy at all. Oh, and I wanted to add too, like when I talked before about the Accor hotel option, that's not that great of a value, but it could be useful, they also have a 50% off for the 2nd room booking too. So keep that in your, in mind if you're thinking about that.

But definitely just make sure that the ages that you're going to be in compliance with the ages at the specific hotel if you use the family plan rate. But that can be a really good way to save some money on a 2nd room.

Also, when you book, you can request adjoining rooms. We've had that like at the Andaz London Liverpool Street. They had adjoining rooms for us. So like we just propped the door open all night. If you have little kids, you might want to bring something to put up high, like in the door jamb to keep, you know, you don't want them to be able to like take the thing out to like close the door accidentally or something, but just like I'm a big fan of putting things out of reach for little kids so they don't get into trouble.

And the other thing to think about for if you book 2 rooms, if you have a Guest of Honor award or you have Globalist privileges, my experience is that, like I don't I've never been Globalist, but sometimes I'm lucky and get Guest of Honor

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awards from really nice people I know. But every time we've been at either an Andaz or a Park Hyatt and I've had a Guest of Honor award for one room, they have always honored it for the 2nd room just like as a courtesy, which is really nice.

I will say that every time we've been at an Unbound Collection hotel, they've never done it. Like categorically did not offer it, didn't even act like it was an option. So you may find yourself like, oh, this is a nice surprise. We didn't have to pay for half of our breakfasts. We only have to pay, we don't have to pay for any breakfast. So I wouldn't count on it, but I wanted to ask like, what is y'all's experience with do you always book a Guest of Honor for your 2nd room, or do you sometimes actually get the Globalist privileges for your 2nd room anyway, just as a courtesy?

Alex: I always book the Guest of Honor for my 2nd room. Or it's like we go with my mom, and she's Globalist, and I put 2 of my kids on her reservation. So I haven't ever had the experience of not having Guest of Honor for the 2nd room.

Jess: Yeah. I think I think I've had a couple like the Hyatt Regency Amsterdam, I think. I booked 2 rooms and they gave us breakfast for everyone. But I try to book Guest of Honor. A, for the benefit, like to ensure that we get benefits for both rooms, but B, so that way, Ted gets Elite it's not wasting the Elite nights like you said, because I'm getting Elite nights for my room. He's getting Elite nights for the Guest of Honor room, and then everyone's covered for the Globalist benefits.

Alex: Yeah. I will say to the Hyatt Regency Amsterdam, the rooms will sleep 3, like so 2 adults and a kid. So not 4, but we it was worked well for us. We had to book 2 rooms instead of having to get 3. So, you know, and I will say people are like, well, do the rooms, they don't really fit 3, I wouldn't say. So if you have like older kids, it's not going to be ideal, but we had like Mitch and I in one room, and then well, we did, you know, I split us up so it would be an adult in each room and a kid in each room, but where we actually slept varied. But it was like 2 twin beds and one king bed. So it's not like you have the bed space for like 3

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teenagers, but it works well if you have younger kids. That's just another hotel to keep in mind.

Traci: Yeah, that's a good option. And then I also wanted to add, sort of like I was trying to think about, because my situation is different. I have twins, so they've always been the same age, but I was trying to think like because there's some there's some rooms where you can get 2 queens, right? And there's some rooms where it's like a queen and a sofa bed. And I was sort of thinking that maybe there's like a nice rule of thumb that, like, if your kids are still little enough to fit in the sofa bed, then you should all be in one room. But if your kids are too big for the sofa bed, maybe that's like a natural progression to a 2nd room. Like, I don't know if you feel like it works like that, but I was sort of like, hmm, maybe that's a good option. But we don't have that issue.

Alex: Yeah, I know my 13-year-old, when there's a sofa bed, he's kind of like, oh, I have to sleep on the sofa bed. Like he'll do it, but...

Jess: Molly hates a sofa bed. So that was kind of a natural progression for us. Definitely.

Traci: Okay. So another option you can do for points is you could always either use a cash back card or use, like, your Capital One points or, you know, any points really, to do like a statement credit for a VRBO or an Airbnb. There are a lot of times when I think having a VRBO or Airbnb makes way more sense for families, especially with little kids. When our kids were little, that's basically all we ever did because you get so much more space. You can have a fridge, you can have like breakfast at your place. You don't have to go out. There's often a washer and dryer. There's often like a balcony or something.

And depending on what city you're in, it can be way more economical. Like we went to Lisbon with the kids a few years ago, and hotel prices even with points, like it was a lot of points. But VRBOs were really cheap. Like barely over \$100 a night, and we got like 2 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms and a kitchen, and it was in a great location. I was like, why would we waste points on that when we could do this? So we just paid for that. And like a lot of times, that will be more affordable than you think.

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Don't forget to sort of compare. While you're doing all this extensive research on how can I get us all together, look at the portal, look at Hyatt, look at, you know, other brands, but then also take a look at VRBOs because sometimes they can be super cheap. Like, there I was like messing around a couple months ago like looking at different islands in Greece, and you can rent a whole house for like really cheap, and why would we use points for that? So

Alex: And sometimes they'll even like have toys for the kids to play with or high chairs or pack and plays. Like they'll have that stuff that you would like to have when you have a little toddler or baby.

Traci: Yeah. And I know Megan just, she rents VRBOs too, and like when they were in Croatia, they had, you know, a house and and that worked out really well. So I think when you've got little kids, it can really be a good option just because you get so much more space and you don't have to go to bed when they go to bed and you don't have to like hide in the bathroom with the light off or whatever.

Jess: I think my biggest hesitancy with VRBO and Airbnb is, I guess, the cancellation policy kind of stresses me out a lot of the time because yes, it's convenient when you're traveling with a family, but also when you're traveling with kids, things are unpredictable. And kids get sick, and you have to cancel, and you have to change your dates. And if you if you're if the cancellation policy is 2 weeks before or 30 days before, you usually don't find out your kid has the flu until the day before you're about to leave. That's how it always works out. And so I have so much peace of mind with booking with points, but I also definitely see the value of booking a VRBO or an Airbnb, too.

Traci: Yeah. I think the key with that is having like booking it on a card like a Sapphire Reserve®. You know, where you have some of those protections in case.

Jess: But I don't think they would cover it if you had to cancel because your kid got sick. I think they would cover it if like...

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Traci: But if the like travel illness or sickness insurance might pay you for the missed trip, then you could use that to pay the VRBO and maybe not be in the hole, maybe. Depending on the circumstance. Depending on the sickness, I guess. But it's something to look into for sure because you don't want to be locked into something that you can't cancel because it's like, oh no, my kid got, I guess kids don't get chicken pox anymore, but whatever, like, yeah. But yeah, so and I know like you had a trip canceled that was like to the Big Sur, right? And Molly had the flu and so you had to cancel. It's like, yeah, but if...

Jess: And they were super, like I called them, and I was like, I really want to, trust me, I really want to be there. My kid has the flu. Like I want to go to the adults all-inclusive resort. And they were like, it's fine. We'll refund, like they were so nice about it. And I was like, if I had booked a...

Traci: Please don't bring the flu here.

Jess: Like if we had booked a VRBO, we would be screwed. So

Traci: Yeah. Okay. So one more thing I wanted to cover is sometimes, don't be afraid to just pay cash for a hotel. And this is one example where I told Alex about this a few weeks ago. I was just looking at new Hyatts that come out because, you know, that's my thing. I like to see what Hyatt's up to. And there's a new Hyatt Centric opening in Reims, France, that has a room that has bunk beds and sleeps 6 people. And some of the dates I was looking at, the rate for just cash was like €250 for 6 people in one hotel room, in a nice Hyatt Centric.

So there are options out there. Don't like we actually ended up, this isn't Europe again, but it's, similar issue. In Japan, when we went to Kyoto, we paid cash for the Hyatt Regency Kyoto because the cash rate was so good. It didn't make sense to use points on it. So that can be an option sometimes.

And if you're staying at certain Hyatt properties, like Regency sort of level and above, you could also look into booking through the Hyatt Privé program, which gives you the same cost. It's through like a travel agent who has Privé privileges, and it gets you free breakfast, upgraded room, like a property credit, all that stuff.

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So if you're ever booking a cash stay with Hyatt, make sure you look into that to see if it's an option because it can help. Then it's kind of like you're a Globalist even if you don't have Globalist because you get the upgrade and the free breakfast and everything.

Jess: Exactly.

Traci: Okay. So, how to strategize if you're like, well, I really want to go to Europe with my family, where do I even start? What do I do? What do I need to know?

So number 1, be flexible. I'm not saying you have to be like, oh, I'm going to find a hotel somewhere in Europe that will fit my family, and then we're just going to book our trip around that. But like, if you're not, if you just want to go on a trip and you're like, I don't know where to go, that could be a good way to start. You know. Book well in advance. Like you should be if you're looking for a family room, they're not going to have a ton of them and you want to be the one to get them and don't wait until someone else has snapped those up.

Jess: And I would say especially if you're traveling over something like spring break or summer, or the holidays when everyone else is also traveling.

Traci: Yeah. And that's the bad thing about traveling with kids, is like you're traveling at peak time all the time because that's what makes peak time. It's when the kids are out of school. So, unless you've just got toddlers, in which case, you know, you've got other issues. Good luck to you.

But yeah, so don't be and also, like I've talked about this before, but like don't be afraid to just email the hotel and ask the questions. Do you have a room that will accommodate 5 or 6 or 4? Are there any options to upgrade? You know, what can you do? Then you'll know the answer, you don't have to wonder, and then it's in writing whatever answer they give you. So that can be really useful.

I would say overall general strategy is if you don't if you can just sort of divorce yourself of the idea that you have to be in the same rooms, like if you're willing to split up, like put one parent and a kid in one room and one in another, booking

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2 rooms with Hyatt points can often just be the best option like value wise, points value wise. And sometimes they'll, you know, they'll guarantee a connecting room. I know Hilton actually has a connecting room guarantee. Hyatt will connect them if you ask, like just write to them and say, you know, can you get us a connecting room?

And if your kids are like even if your kid is are in the other room and you and your spouse are in the, you know, room next door, as long as your kids like can't reach the deadbolt of their door, like it's kind of like they're still in the same room with you if you prop the door open. Like it's not, it doesn't have to be, I know it's a huge mental hurdle sometimes for people, like 2 rooms just sounds crazy, but it can work. Like it's not a big deal sometimes.

With teenagers, like I said, you sometimes want the extra room, you want the extra space. With little kids, maybe VRBOs do make more sense and don't feel like you have to get everything on points. Like getting all your flights on points and just paying for lodging, that's still a really good deal. And if it allows you to travel and you're not as stressed about, like, what hotels, like do the thing that isn't stressful. You know, no one's making you do everything on points.

And then also, this is a really little thing to note, but when you are reading hotel descriptions for Europe, when they say double bed, they don't usually mean an American double. Like, they don't mean the size that's smaller than a queen. They usually mean a queen. Sometimes it even means a king. Usually, when they say double, they just mean 2 people. So don't let that freak you out if you read double bed. I don't want a double bed. Like in Europe, that doesn't mean that. And those are sort of the overall sort of big picture things to think about.

And then if you want to do specific searches, like especially just for Hyatt, here's what I do and I don't know if you guys do it a different way, but like I'll go to a hotel website and in the left upper corner, it'll, you know, drop down, they'll say rooms and suites. So I go to that, and then I read through the descriptions for all the different rooms and suites, and sometimes they'll have one that says family room, right?

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So I go to the family room and I look to see if there's a room available with cash for the dates I need. If there's a room available with cash, that's the family room, then I'll switch the toggle to use points to see if it's bookable with points. If it's not bookable with points, then I can either recalibrate and maybe book the 2 rooms, or ask about the family plan, or I could go to the portal and see if I can book that family room through the portal using points. And if it is available with cash, you just won the lottery.

So yeah, so that's how I search on Hyatt. Different hotels, you know, Hilton, IHG, and everything will work a little differently, but just make sure you're reading the descriptions for each type of room to see what the maximum occupancy is because they mean it. So, yeah.

Alex: I think it's really just helpful because I think a lot of people just think, well, it says this is what it is, this is what I have to do. Like, I just have to book this or that. And so many times, like in Jess's situation lately, where if you just email and ask, there's they're willing to take your money if you're willing to give them money to pay for an upgrade so you can have more people. So if they have the availability, I feel like that's a really successful way to go about it. More times than not, it seems like it's working out for people.

Traci: And it's definitely in this type of situation, specifically, it's way better to ask in advance for permission than it is to just show up with extra kids and tick off the hotel and maybe get your reservation canceled.

Jess: You will never catch any of the of the 3 of us just showing up with our extra kids because we are way too type A and planners and rule followers, especially in Europe. Like I might try it in Arkansas on a road trip, but I'm not trying it in Paris, just showing up randomly. So yeah.

Traci: But there, I think it's important to know that there are a lot of really good options. I think we've covered a lot of them. And some of them might not be like the ultimate best super outsized Hyatt value that we're all used to for just like 2 people's stays, but if it cuts your cost down and it lets you take your family to Europe and have this wonderful experience and show your kids, you know, trains and history and Kinder surprise eggs and, you know, that's worth it, right?

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So just don't let it be a huge hurdle that keeps you from going, and just assume that there are no options for your family. Just start investigating, start digging, and, you know, start with the list of unicorns or like be like, well, I don't know where we're going to go on our trip, but I know that there's a hotel in Paris that sleeps 4 people. So let's start there and, you know, let it sort of let it take you on a trip.

Jess: Well, thank you so much for being here, Traci, and sharing your hotels in Europe for families expertise with us. We are always excited to have you on the podcast. I'm sure our listeners found this very helpful. I'm sure Alex found this very helpful. And I even have some ideas now. I want to go to that Intercontinental Malta that you talked about. So thank you so much again. And if you found this episode helpful, we would love it if you would share it with a family, you know, that needs to take a vacation to Europe on points.

Traci: Yes. And I think that's everyone. Everyone needs to.

Alex: Yeah.

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