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**Teenagers Find Their Places in the Sun**

By JANE MARGOLIES



**V**ACATIONS for Shelley Metcalf, a San Diego photographer, and her daughter, 15-year-old Ashley Peck, have usually meant flying to a rough-hewn place like Montana or Washington State, to see friends and go horseback riding. But last summer Ms. Metcalf found herself checking the two of them into the \$270-a-night Victorian-era Hotel del Coronado, just 15 minutes from home. The reason? Ashley had heard about the hotel's Coast Club Teen Lounge and Lucky Chick spa package, and talked her mother into a visit. "I played pool in the teen center, and got my first facial," said Ashley, a 10th grader. "And it sure was nice not having to go somewhere cold for a change."

For families who travel, the teenage years are the great divide. Suddenly, the 12-year-old who happily went along for a week at the lake has morphed into a sullen teenager with something a little cooler in mind. To appeal to these teenagers, resorts and cruise lines have been adding everything from special spas (with black-lighted rooms and System Blue facials for breakout-prone skin) to 18-and-under lounges with Web access and PlayStation games. The goal: to lure not only them but more important, their parents, who are the people who actually pay for it all.

"Designing teen programs gives resorts a better chance of capturing those family customers," said Scott Berman, a hospitality analyst at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Indeed, a recent survey by Yankelovich, a marketing research firm in Chapel Hill, N.C., found that more than half of teenagers helped their parents choose a family vacation spot, a 24 percent increase from a decade ago. A quarter of teens even helped select a hotel. And while some parents admit they might be spoiling adolescents by letting them pick a week on the Disney Magic cruise ship (its Stack lounge for teenagers has Web access and a smoothie bar) over a trip to Europe, others say it is simply a matter of self-preservation — they do not want their vacations ruined by whining.

Sandi Wolens and Michael Feldman, of Madison, Wis., let their 13-year-old daughter, Ellie Feldman, pick the site of their most recent vacation, Atlantis, in the Bahamas. (She chose it because "it looked really cool in Mary-Kate and Ashley's 'Holiday in the Sun,'" Ellie said.)

And while they did find the resort pricey — rooms run about \$350 a night — it did keep everyone happy. Instead of spending the week missing her friends, Ellie "met other kids and was able to I.M. her friends back home," Ms. Wolens said. "During the teen years, peers and socializing are so important."

That is a lesson that Aleta Martinez, an administrative assistant in Pinole, Calif., wished she had learned before taking her daughter, then 13, on a weeklong trip to Victoria, British Columbia, a while back. Nothing she proposed — looking at lighthouses ("this is boring"), hiking on beaches ("let's go back now"), eating at fancy restaurants ("I want McDonald's") met with the girl's approval.

Finally, fed up, Ms. Martinez cut the vacation short by three days. "I drove all the way back with just a four-hour nap at a truck stop," Ms. Martinez said. "I couldn't get home fast enough." Now she takes her two daughters (her oldest has turned 18; the younger one is 12) on cruises. "It's so much easier," she said.

Not all parents, of course, are willing to let adolescents call the shots. And there is still the traditional strategy of allowing teenagers to bring along a friend (half the families planning vacations with his agency do that, according to Mike MacNair, president of MacNair Travel Management, which has two offices in the Washington, D.C., area). Or some parents just leave the teenagers at home with a relative and head to Paris on their own.

But for those who want to travel together, the new programs can help ensure familial peace. For their family's winter vacation, Sue and Brad Aman, of Mount Vernon, Ill., let their three teenagers have a say in the decision to go to Beaches Boscobel, a resort in Jamaica with a program for teenagers. Their 17-year-old son and 14-year-old daughter were so enthralled with the activities (volleyball games, pool tournaments, disco nights with limbo contests) that they actually got up by 8 every morning because they did not want to miss anything; even the Amans' eldest, a junior in college, had fun.

"It was so much better than our vacation in Cancún, where the kids spent much of their time watching HBO in the room," Ms. Aman said.

Ken Arlen, who heads a wedding and corporate events band in Chicago, and his wife, Nancy, do more than allow offspring to register an opinion. They let their son, Gordon, plan all the family trips.

So far Gordon has led family members to Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks in Utah, on a Caribbean cruise ("I'm more of a land person," Mr. Arlen said) and, last summer, when he was 19, on a jaunt through Scotland. There, they ended up in a hotel where the cast of "Harry Potter" had stayed. "It was fabulous," Mr.

Arlen said.

But not all teenagers are likely to choose a visit to a World War I museum or a shop that sells bagpipes. Especially when hotels and resorts are offering teenager-only excursions on rented powerboats (at the Westin St. John Resort and Villas in the Virgin Islands), Caribbean-style braiding in their own spa (called the SPAhhhT at Hyatt's Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa in San Antonio) or the chance to shoot digital movies on board the Disney Magic cruise ship.

NONE of this is cheap, either. Melody Campbell-Goeken, director of public relations at the Regency Hill Country Resort, said the SPAhhhT program was "a nice nontraditional source of revenue for the resort."

Not surprising, given that the spa's 10 hair braiders and four manicurists were kept busy all summer long at \$3.50 per hair braid (average number of braids per child: six) and \$30 for manicures. System Blue facials for teenagers at the Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes are \$120. And the Hotel del Coronado counted \$2.85 million in revenue from families with offspring who purchased smoked chicken quesadillas and cappuccinos in the teenagers' center and had mud wraps in the spa last summer.

Even more important, resorts say, the programs are a way of building loyalty for the future — after all, the American teenage population is expected to top 34 million by 2010. "We want to capture them as teenagers so they come back as young adults, honeymooners, and eventually as parents with their own families," said Charly McDonald, a youth activities specialist for Royal Caribbean cruise lines, where teenagers make up 7 percent of the on-board population.

But as any parent knows, catering to the whims of teenagers can be a risky proposition. Unlike younger children, whose parents sign them up for kids' clubs, adolescents mostly make their own choices about participation.

At the Sandy Lane resort in Barbados, the spa was inundated with requests for services for teenagers, said Brigitte Laurayne, the director of leisure. So on Dec. 1, it introduced new treatments for 9- to 16-year-olds. And how many people signed up over the Christmas break? Two. "To be perfectly honest," Ms. Laurayne said, "we have not had the kind of response we expected."

Indeed, selling programs to the Hilary Duff set can take perfect pitch. "Teens want to meet other teens, but they don't want to be corralled as a group," said Laura Chandley, director of children's programs for Beaches resorts. "If we put up a sign saying this is the teen room, there won't be a teen in it."

And staff members need to be hip enough to pass muster with their trend-conscious clientele (on Royal Caribbean's cruise ships they hand out copies of Cosmo Girl and Teen People magazines as study aids). "They have to be young enough for teens to relate to but old enough to supervise," Ms. Chandley said.

In the end, adolescents may just not know what they want. Fourteen-year-old Solana Olmer has traveled all over the world with her family, horseback riding in Chile, sailing down the Adriatic coast to the port of Dubrovnik in Croatia. But what she and her two sisters really wanted to do was go to Club Med or Hawaii like all their other friends.

After listening to years of complaining, her parents, Ksenija and Mirek Olmer, finally gave in and booked a

week at a hotel on Kauai last July. But after three days of going back and forth from the pool to the beach, the children were restless. "After being to so many places that really awe you, there really wasn't that much to do in Hawaii," Solana said. "We actually got pretty bored."