

AFAR

My Favorite Wellness Travel Tip? Take Your Kids. Really.

Spas, saunas, and hot springs that welcome kids offer the opportunity to rethink what the wellness experience actually is—and who it is for.

I know what you're thinking. Kids? At the spa? Is nothing sacred? And, believe me, several years ago, when I was in the throes of exhausted early motherhood, I was sleep deprived enough to probably whack someone over the head for even suggesting such a thing.

After all, spas and hot springs are supposed to help heal our frayed nervous systems, right? And last time I checked, there was nothing chill, zen, or even remotely quiet-zone-esque about kids. But perhaps, like many things, it's simply about a slight twist in perspective. In many places in the world, spas and natural springs are intended to be a more communal, all-ages event.

Our first encounter with a family spa experience happened by accident. During Thanksgiving break in 2023, while visiting [Yosemite National Park](#) with my husband, mother-in-law, and our two kids (then aged four and seven), we were told that the little ones were welcome to experience the wellness facilities at [Rush Creek Lodge and Spa](#). Each day, the property's on-site spa hosts "morning family time" (from 8 to 11 a.m.), when kids and adults can enjoy the spa area, including a mineral bath with a granite waterfall, a Himalayan salt sauna, cooling shower streams, and relaxing loungers with views of the surrounding forest.

On the morning we planned to try it out, we arrived minutes before the family time was over (it's impossible to get anywhere on time with young kids). We rushed to the dressing rooms to change and hurried to the tubs, showers, steam room, and sauna. While it was a short stint, I was moved by how excited my kids were to be included in an experience often reserved exclusively for adults.

That was the beginning of what has evolved into an ongoing exploration of spas and hot springs with our offspring. Each time we have undertaken this multigenerational bathing, soaking, and soothing ritual as a family, it has further exposed me to just how fun and, yes, even relaxing it can be.

It occurred to me that if we help children find mechanisms to regulate their nervous systems, they in turn won't always make ours go so haywire. Perhaps they, too, could use some tools to help them de-stress and should learn a thing or two about hot and cold plunges, deep breathing, and mineral waters.

If you are interested in having a family-friendly hot springs experience, here is a collection of locations that includes both those we have tried ourselves and those that are on our list to explore next.

Rush Creek Lodge and Spa, Yosemite National Park, California

What better way to recover from days spent hiking through old-growth forests and along granite peaks than with a soothing soak for all ages? Families often start their days with a bang, but the "morning family time" at [Rush Creek Lodge & Spa](#) is an ideal way to kick off the day more slowly and with greater intention, recognizing that always being on the go-go-go isn't necessarily, well, necessary.

Rush Creek's underaged spa offerings (complete with a boulder fountain and warm river rock beds where you literally lie down on a bed of rocks in warm water) complements the property's exceedingly kid-friendly amenities, such as indoor and outdoor play areas and arts-and-crafts activities, plus a pool. This is a great way to dip your toe, so to speak, into an all-ages wellness experience.