

With the heat index reaching 105-110 degrees this past summer, those of us living year-round in the Lowcountry dreamt of cooler days. Now that they're here, and the calendar has reached November, holiday travel thoughts are foremost in our minds.

There are many ways people celebrate their holiday – be it with friends & family... or as an escape from them. Years ago while living in New Hampshire with most of my husband's family close by, we

decided one year that, instead of the usual gifts that usually got re-gifted, we'd all contribute what we'd normally spend for holiday gifts toward a week's stay at a condo on a beach in Florida for the holidays (ah, the promise of a no-snow Christmas!). Those Christmases continued for about five years, and we cherish those memories now as we're spread out not only across the US but also over the globe!

Here are some holiday ideas that may just start your own traditions for the holiday season and into the new year:

EUROPE: The cultural scene hits high gear; there are fewer crowds; saunter through the traditional Christmas markets and find such fun items as prune people while inhaling the smell of gingerbread and sipping on gluhwein.

SOUTH AMERICA: Remember, it's summer down there. From Buenos Aires (the Paris of South

America) to the Lakes region to Patagonia, there's something for everyone. And, there is an ever-growing wine industry for you oenophiles.

CRUISES: Somewhere a ship is sailing nearly every month of the year; the Caribbean is a big draw for December from here in the Lowcountry, but don't limit yourself to choosing from just one geographical area! Southeast Asia, South America, Australia/New Zealand and Dubai are just a few countries beckoning you to visit by cruise ship; combine your cruise with a land tour and see even more once you leave the shore!

AFRICA: An African safari is a wonderful trip for multi-generational getaways and a real educational experience for children & grandchildren. This is where the "Big Five," legends of Africa's wilderness, conjure up the romance and excitement of Africa's experiences. In case you are now trying to recall them, the "Big Five" refers to the five of Africa's greatest wild animals: lions, elephants, leopards, the "bad boys" rhinos, and the massive buffalo.

THE WEST: Ski the slopes of Aspen, Jackson Hole or Whistler, or relish the warmth of the deserts of the Southwest. Visit the 4-Corners region (AZ, CO, NM & UT) where a unique landmark, managed by the Navajo Nation, marks the only place in the US where 4 states come together. Watch for 2 new trips for 2012 in collaboration with award-winning filmmaker Ken Burns that include both the deserts of the Southwest & Yellowstone in winter.

FLORIDA: Step outside the comfort zone of Orlando and visit such hidden places as Cedar Key

or the 10,000 islands west of the Everglades on the southern tip of Florida or the Cuban section of Tampa known as Ybor City.

LAS VEGAS: The city clears out during family holidays so catering to your family is easy; then it goes into overdrive for New Year's Eve as you depart (or maybe not).

TAHITI: Always warm! Only a 7-hour flight from Los Angeles – but a world apart. Swim with sharks and feel the smooth skin of the stingrays as they glide past in the clearest, bluest water you've ever seen. Listen to the water lap against the base of your over-the-water bungalow.

ICELAND: Reykjavik is a city with gourmet dining, great adventures and many activities. Less than 5 hours' flight from NY or Boston, slow down in their geothermal pools & relax and rejuvenate! Visit Santa's World and meet the Yule Lads, who deliver gifts to good children 13 nights prior to Christmas; downhill or cross-country ski not far from the capital; and don't forget the Northern Lights.

A "TANK AWAY": Twinkling lights at the Biltmore Mansion in Asheville; the Sea Islands & the Cloister, rich in history & beauty; the Ringling Mansion and Museum in Sarasota; the Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia; and the beaches & golf courses of Alabama, just to name a few.

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