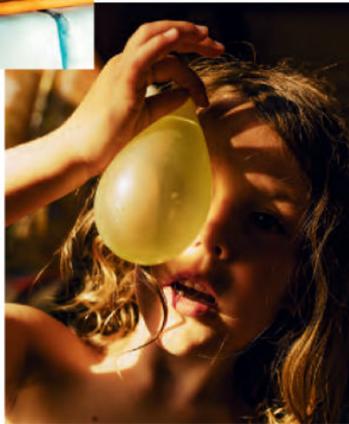


THE BEST FAMILY HOLIDAYS



RIGHT SIDE OF THE TRACKS

INTERCONTINENTAL KHAO YAI
RESORT, THAILAND

I find it hard to believe that this whimsical resort, three hours north of our home in Bangkok and on the cusp of the eponymous national park, wasn't conceived solely with kids in mind. Spun from the eccentric brain of designer Bill Bensley, the hotel unfurls like a lake-dotted, railroad-themed playground, where every building, from the gingerbread-trimmed main wing to the lake-side restaurants, draws inspiration from the nearby King Rama V-era Pak Chong railway station. Bensley blurs fact and fiction with an inspired tale about an imaginary train conductor, Somsak, whose locomotive-style sleeping quarters double as the hotel lobby. There are faux ticket booths, and moss-covered tracks criss-cross the grounds, but it's the rooms that my son still gushes about: each one is designed like a train carriage, with narrow clerestoried ceilings, sliding cabin doors and overhead luggage racks. Even more fun are the villas at the jungled back of the lot, built from upcycled rail wagons salvaged from junkyards and kitted out with canvas-shaded patios and private plunge pools. But for all its whimsy, the vibe is still more Orient Express than Disneyland, so while my son joined treasure hunts and Thai dancing classes in the railway cart turned kids' club, I could sip Negronis in the French-tinged Papillon bar. For youngsters or inner children, this one's a hoot. CHRIS SCHALKX *Doubles from £185; ihg.com*

ALL ABOUT BABY

PORTO SANI, HALKIDIKI, GREECE

I noticed it on day one: strangely mellow parents in pleasant trances. I arrived frazzled with my partner and two-year-old daughter, Romy, after a packed four-hour flight, but quickly began to understand. Every detail here has been designed to take the heat off baby and toddler parents. If the village-like tendrils of Sani Resort's five hotels on Greece's northwestern Aegean coast are the members of a family, then Porto Sani – renovated last year, sleek yet child-friendly – is the immaculate aunt who slips sweets from her Chanel bag. All the Sani resorts welcome children, but this one is well equipped with a splash pool, kids' club and friendly staff who'll play peekaboo with the baby. Each spacious room has its own sunbeds, so we lounged while my daughter napped. The dine-around programme meant that she feasted on nutritionist Annabel Karmel's guilt-free kids' menu (the beetroot brownies were a hit) before being tucked up with a babysitter while we enjoyed a Peruvian feast and a Pisco Sour at new restaurant Lima. The hotel provides buckets and spades on the beach and a white-noise machine in the cot. Then there's the crèche (for children aged from four months to four years); baby consultant Carol Mae on hand with tips; and the Babewatch service, which provides 30 minutes of free childcare per day (cue glorious solo dips). Swimming lessons and family bike rides through the nature reserve distracted our baby, and the indoor pool and crèche brought entertainment and affection, especially on rainy days. We left feeling like we could have stayed for a month, and Romy asked for brownies all the way home. FLORRIE THOMAS *Sovereign offers seven nights from £1,245; sovereign.com*



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