**Getting Away from Home for the Holidays**

Instead of heading home – or staying home – for the holidays, some Americans are trying a different tack: they’re heading out on vacation.

A Christmas getaway, sometimes bringing the family along, can provide a break from the stresses of the season. It’s also a terrific way to keep gift giving to a minimum and create a new holiday tradition that’s all your own.

The possibilities are limitless – from lounging on a beach or aboard a cruise ship to exploring a historic European capital or visiting sites in the Holy Land that take on special significance at this time of year.

Travel doesn’t mean giving up everything that makes the holidays special, either.

Many cruise lines offer voyages to ports in Mexico and the Caribbean in December that give passengers the opportunity to celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah the way they would at home, including enjoying traditional foods, taking part in holiday activities and even attending religious services.

With daytime temperatures in the low 80s, a trip to Hawaii can be the perfect gift for travelers who dream of spending December someplace warm. There’s plenty of holiday spirit in this tropical paradise, too, from Christmas parades to performances of “The Nutcracker.” And of course, there are Hawaii’s world-famous beaches, great for outdoor activities such as swimming, surfing and snorkeling or for simply relaxing and soaking up some sun.

Of course Europe is a great place to visit at any time of year, but it’s especially beautiful in December, when Christmas markets pop up, historic city centers are all decked out and cultural events are in full swing.

In London, carolers sing each evening in December beneath the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square and the stores along Oxford Street sparkle with a brilliant display of lights. Both adults and children will enjoy taking in a pantomime, or “panto,” comic musicals that are a British Christmas tradition. One of the city’s biggest holiday attractions is the Winter Wonderland in Hyde Park, which includes Christmas markets, a “kingdom” made of ice, a skating rink and a circus.

To spend Christmas immersed in Old World charm, consider a trip to Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. The ancient buildings and magnificent churches of Old Town are especially welcoming in December. Bustling Christmas markets selling traditional foods and handicrafts make for a festive atmosphere. Jazz and classical concerts, as well as opera and ballet, take place all month long in some of the city’s most historic venues, including Prague Castle.

A trip to the Holy Land can be an incredibly spiritual experience no matter what your faith or religion. For Christians, December is an especially meaningful time to visit. On Christmas Eve, pilgrims from all over the world gather at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem’s Manger Square to celebrate the birth of Jesus. From Nazareth, in northern Israel, to Jerusalem and beyond, the region is filled with places that make the Bible come alive.

For help planning a holiday getaway anywhere in the world, contact your local Colorado Springs Travel Leader’s agent.