



How to make the most of your family camping getaway

By Kimberly Blaker

Camping is the ultimate in outdoor family fun and is loaded with benefits for parents and kids alike. It provides unlimited opportunities to experience the great outdoors and for kids to learn about nature, from plants and animals to the weather and skies. It offers lessons in history through visits to historical landmarks and different regions. It gives parents a break from daily responsibilities and time to relax and provides adventure for kids. Moreover, it's an affordable way for families to vacation.

What's the best way to camp?

Your family can choose from a wide variety of camping options. If you love the experience of roughin' it, pitch a tent and haul the bare necessities. Just don't forget the padding or blow up mattresses to insulate against the cold ground.

If your family likes the sound of roughing it, but needs some of the comforts of home, a pop-up camper is the best of both worlds. The sides and pullout sections of pop-up campers are made of canvas and are completely surrounded with screens to give the feeling of sleeping in the fresh outdoors.

Some families prefer to do it in style. Travel trailers and motor homes offer a luxurious nighttime retreat after a day of outdoor fun including toilets, showers, a kitchen and bedrooms for complete privacy.

Does your family like the sound of a cozy cabin in the woods? If so, look for a campground that has cabin rentals. Cabins come in a variety of sizes with a variety of amenities ranging from basic single room shelters containing only beds to two or three room units furnished with kitchenettes and furniture.

Experienced campers with older children might try a hike-in shelter for a true wilderness experience. Check with state and national parks for shelters that are sometimes set up along extended trails. After a day of hiking, roll out your sleeping bags under one of these small shelters for a dry night's sleep.

Camping costs

The costs of travel make family vacations a rare treat. However, the affordability of camping, allows for frequent family getaways. Overnight fees vary widely from a free night's stay

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at some state park's rustic sites (no showers, toilets, electricity or water) to \$50 or more a night at some of the top KOA and Jellystone Camp Park-Resorts. These top of the line campgrounds are loaded with amenities from built-in swimming pools to live entertainment.

State park campgrounds vary from state to state. However, these are often the best deal for families interested in experiencing all that nature has to offer. Many state parks have modern facilities including flush toilets, showers, grassy or gravel sites, playgrounds, park stores for firewood and ice and more. Fees for overnight accommodations in state parks typically range from \$15 to \$35. Furthermore, state parks frequently offer miles of wooded hiking or biking trails, natural wonders, historical sites and much more that may not be found at private camp resorts.

Camping keeps other vacation expenses to a minimum as well including meal and entertainment costs. When camping,

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