



## Fun Ways to Get Outside This Summer

### Be a Kid Again With Your Own Family

by Sandra Murphy

**S**ummer is calling and so is the great outdoors. Here are some super vacation sites, inviting activities and ideas to spark summer fun with your family.

#### Hike It

"Hiking teaches kids respect for the outdoors and animals," says Branch Whitney, a Mount Charleston, Nevada, author of three books on hiking. "Near Las Vegas, in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, sandstone rock affords a rare sight—year-round running water and lush ferns."

Ralph Stover State Park, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, offers easy walking trails and climbing rocks. When water levels are high, Tohickon Creek challenges paddlers and whitewater rafters.

#### Zip Lines and More

Holding the Guinness World Record for the longest and largest continuous eco zip line canopy tour in the world, historic Banning Mills, in Whitesburg, Georgia, will thrill tweens and teens. Enjoy a slower pace on the 12-mile Hike and Bike Trail, with nine suspension bridges, including the longest of its kind in North America. Stay in eco-friendly lodges, cabins and tree houses.

#### Family Week

From July 30 to August 4, the Omega Institute, in Rhinebeck, New York, will host Family Week. Grownups attend workshops while kids participate in specialty camps; everyone convenes for meals, free time and evening entertainment. The campus relies on sustainable

energy and local agriculture. Free tours are available at the environmental education center.

#### Camp in Style

If traditional camping isn't on the table, try Tentr. Campsites on the privately owned properties sleep four to 16 people in a family, pet-friendly atmosphere. A tent, fire pit, picnic table, water container, camp toilet, queen-size cot, grill, food storage and sun shower are provided. "Compared to other accommodations, each night at a Tentr campsite saves 245 gallons of water and reduces CO<sub>2</sub> output by 54 pounds per campsite," estimates Michael D'Agostino, Tentr's founder and CEO.

The secluded Lumberland, New York, campsite, along the Delaware River, sets its roomy tent on a wooden deck. Attractions include Adirondack chairs for unwinding and a nearby farmers' market and restaurant. Enjoy hiking, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, swimming and fishing. Tentr provides required life jackets and a shuttle to meet paddlers at their destination for the return trip to camp.

From its original 35 sites, the organization recently expanded to 250 campsites, predominantly from Pennsylvania to Maine. This fall, they'll also open sites in the Pacific Northwest from Northern California to Washington state.

#### Head for the Beach

At Natural Bridges State Park, in California, visitors relish viewing shorebirds, migrating whales, seals and playful otters. Moore Creek forms freshwater wetlands and a salt marsh. There's also a Monarch Butterfly Natural Preserve.

At Kama'ole Beach Park III, in Maui, Hawaii, the small waves are so clear



photo by Minhee Cho

that fish can be seen from the surface. Snorkeling gear rentals are available. Shaved ice stands keep everyone cool.

Lakefront beaches like West Beach at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, on Lake Michigan's southern tip, attract kids. They can earn beachcomber badges in the Junior Ranger program by finding three different-colored rocks or telling what plants they saw most often.

In late August, Mayflower Beach, in Dennis, Massachusetts, hosts its annual local sand sculpture contest with divisions for kids and families creating the art together.

## Go Farming

FarmWise, near Alpine Valley, in

southeastern Wisconsin, gives children a personal peek into where their food comes from. They learn about life on a farm by tending livestock and farm pets, pruning fruit trees and weeding the garden. They also prepare snacks with the fruits of their day's labor. The emphasis is on doing the work themselves, be it planting seeds or feeding pigs.

## Experience Science

Science Saturdays at the EcoCenter at Heron's Head Park, in San Francisco, are held every weekend with a focus on environmental education, park restoration, climate change science experiments, nature walks and citizen science excursions. "There are no other centers like it in the U.S.," says staffer Jacqueline Murray. Learn more about this Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design Platinum living classroom at [EcoCenterhhp.org](http://EcoCenterhhp.org).

## Staycation Ideas

Organic sidewalk chalk,



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fairly garden and birdhouse kits, and ideas for imaginatively using found items keep kids busy and happy; see *BellaLuna*

*Toys.com*. Letterboxing combines a contemporary scavenger hunt, hike and mysterious clues; participants have fun locating hidden boxes and collecting stamp marks in personalized logbooks.

Whether on a one- or two-week vacation or a weekend away, a daytrip or backyard activity, there are plenty of nurturing outdoor options for kids of all ages to experience when the weather heats up.

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