

TRAILS MIX

VOLUME 1 | ISSUE NO. 2



Hello!



Welcome to **Trails Mix**, an extra helping of Family Trails goodness. Each quarter, our *#FamilyTrails* community will receive a digital edition of the **Trails Mix** bundle packed with ideas and inspiration designed to spark more family adventuring and learning together. We'll also feature highlights from the best of Family Trails – the stories shared by families around the world.

From recipes to activities to expert interviews, we hope you'll find that **Trails Mix** encourages your family to get out and get going – wherever the trail may lead you.

Have an idea for an upcoming edition of **Trails Mix**?

Email us at **community@familytrails.com**.

To connect with thousands of other families learning through adventure, join the **#FamilyTrails** conversation on Instagram by following us **@FamilyTrails**.

We'd love to hear from you!





Toyota Family Trails is an adventure brought to life thanks to a partnership between the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) and Toyota. Since 1989, NCFL has helped more than two million families make educational progress. We believe that all parents can help their children succeed in school and in life. The family unit is the one constant across the educational spectrum, but family engagement in education doesn't happen on its own. NCFL pioneered Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®, bridging the gap that often exists between school, home, and community.

At *Family Trails*, we believe your family is the best teacher your child will ever have. Together, we hope to inspire parents and kids to let their imaginations lead them on a daily exploration and adventure through the world around them and the classroom of life.



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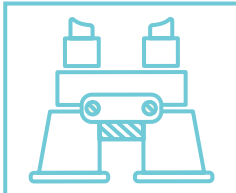
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DOWNLOAD SOME FAMILY FUN



Community Poll



Take the
Poll

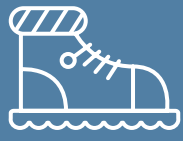
FAMILY TRAILS FEEDBACK

Getting feedback from Family Trails community is always important to us. In each edition of Trails Mix, we'll ask for your input on a particular topic, question or issue. This quarter, we want to know:

“What would you like to see in future editions of Trails Mix?”

Share your response and information. As a token of our appreciation, we'll send a Family Trails gift your way.





Stories from the Trail

DIOP FAMILY

FEATURED FAMILIES

BAIRD FAMILY

Family stories are the heart and soul of Family Trails. Check out these two amazing stories contributed by the Family Trails community—and get to know the rest of our contributors by clicking their family photo. Interested in submitting your own family adventure story? [Click here.](#)



MARION DIOP

“The kids just thrive running free and I always feel better after some time in the sun.”

KAILUA, HAWAII



BETHANY BAIRD

“We knew the value of teaching our kids to slow down and soak in nature.”

ALTADENA, CA



Beach ADVENTURE

told by
MARION DIOP



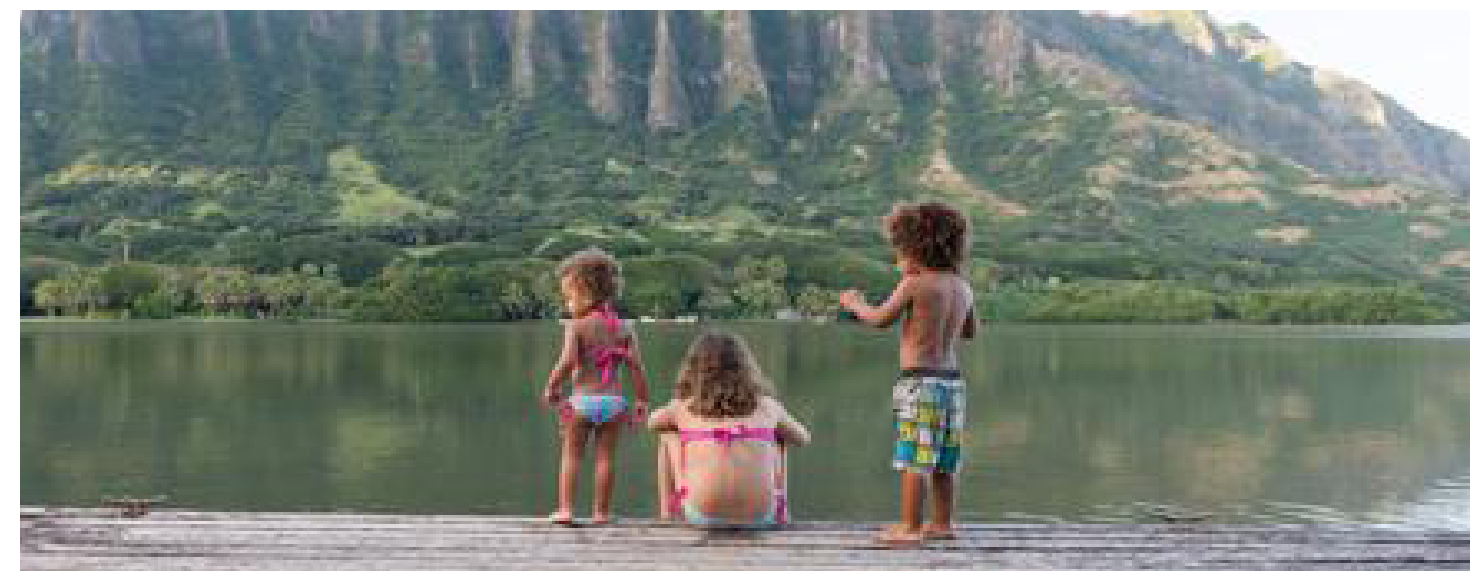
Beach Adventure



This adventure was SO much fun. It started with a picture I had seen, but I wasn't too sure of where it was located. I had a general idea, so we loaded the kids up in the 4Runner and headed off. On the way, we talked about our plan and watched the mountains, looking for the one we were trying to find. We parked and started hiking down the beach. We had a long walk down the shore until we got to a little secluded cove. Along the way, we collected shells and sticks and talked about how sand is made. We talked about how sand is made up of tiny particles from lots and lots of rocks that were broken down by the waves.

All three kids had questions. The baby wanted to know why she couldn't walk. (Because she was going very, very slow.) The three-year-old wondered how many sharks were in the water and would eat him. (We saw zero sharks.) The seven-year-old had just learned about clouds, and wondered how all the different shapes were made. When my three-year-old found a slimy sea cucumber, he almost died from shock and excitement.

The most exciting moment of our adventure was discovering an injured sea turtle. We almost walked right over it because it looked like a rock in the sand. As we got closer, we could see that it was covered in tumors and seemed to be in pain. We called the turtle rescue organization (NOAA), gave the description and location of the turtle, and the rescuers said they would send someone out. We were able to greet the conservationists and learn that the turtle was probably about 50 years old and the tumors were



caused by environmental pollutants. It felt great to be able to help a hurt animal.

As a parent, my takeaway from our adventure is that you never know what you are going to experience, so get out there and do something! We like to go on random explorations as often as possible. I try to make our lives a little less busy so we have more time to do so. The kids just thrive running free and I always feel better after some time in the sun. Life is best lived outdoors



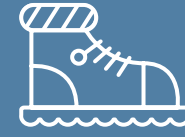
LEARNING EXTENSION

- Whether you're at the beach, the park, or even in your backyard, any place can be a great place for a family nature walk. Make sure you choose an area that has a variety of trails and vegetation. You might also want to bring a camera and a notebook to record what you see. If you discover something interesting, take a picture or write a few notes about your experience. In addition to looking around, take some time to concentrate on your other senses. What do you hear? What can you smell?
- What did you find on your family nature walk? Share descriptions and photos letting us know what you discovered along the way. Be sure to use the hashtag #FamilyTrails when you share on social media.
- Continue learning together by exploring the Kids Environment Kids Health topics, activities, and games at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences [website](#).



Our Family MISSION

told by
BETHANY BAIRD



Our Family Mission

I read this quote from Ryan Leak, “Become today who you intend to be tomorrow. The bridge between who you are and who you want to become is simply courage. At some point you’ve just got to wake up and make a decision to get over the pile of excuses you’ve built up in your head for not being the person you really want to be.”

I have a confession. We have not always lived our values and priorities. In fact, there was a period of time where life felt like just surviving. We got so caught up with what we were “supposed” to be doing – and what everyone else was doing – that we forgot what story we wanted to tell. Sometimes you have to get to a place of brokenness to wake up and really start living.

During that time Aaron and I sat down and wrote out what was important to our family. We formed the notes into a mission statement. Part of that included getting outdoors more with our kids and exploring as much of the natural world with them as we could. We knew the value of teaching our kids to slow down and soak in nature. We both grew up enjoying the outdoors and knew what kinds of things it can teach children: learning to be okay with discomfort, facing fears, and perseverance...not to mention the loads of science and relational lessons. We discovered that this time together – the great memories and moments when we struggle and have to work together – are the elements of strong relational building blocks. While enjoying nature is lovely, building a strong family and community is what it’s really about. Getting outside is just the conduit for that.

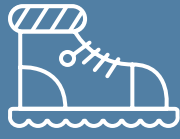
We began with several hikes a month, babies strapped to our backs and a soundtrack of whining along the way. We moved to weekly hikes and now camp once a month. We have become the family we envisioned. We have watched our kiddos conquer miles and elevation gains that we would never have imagined possible. We have seen them overcome fears. We have witnessed them come alongside friends and encourage them. We often have onlookers scoff as we head out on trails only to have their jaws drop when the kiddos come around the corner at the top of a summit. With consistency, we all are able to do much more than we ever imagined. So who are you going to be today?

LEARNING EXTENSION

- Take some time to talk as a family and write your own family mission statement. Whether you want to find time for more family dinners, spend more time outdoors, or support a cause that’s important to you, it’s great to set goals together!
- We’d love to hear about your family mission statement. Share it with us on social media using the hashtag #FamilyTrails. You could even include a family portrait!
- Gather around the computer and create a digital family mission statement using Franklin Covey’s Build a Mission Statement **website**.







Stories from the Trail



PAHL FAMILY: CROSS COUNTRY MOVE



BEAN FAMILY: YOSEMITE



HASKINS FAMILY: CALLOWAY PEAK 2



KELLY FAMILY: MOVE TO COLORADO

CLICK A PHOTO TO READ MORE EXCITING STORIES OF FAMILY ADVENTURES!



TRAN FAMILY: DEATH VALLEY SUPER BLOOM



CONTRERAS FAMILY: HOW WE GOT THERE



EMSLIE FAMILY: HIKING LESSONS



CURREN FAMILY: VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

STORIES FROM THE TRAIL CONT'D.



PAHL FAMILY: LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST



EMSLIE FAMILY: TWO KIDS IN TOW



YLIKOSKI FAMILY: SLEDDING WEEKEND



PAHL FAMILY: A CANYON HIKE

CLICK A PHOTO TO READ MORE EXCITING STORIES OF FAMILY ADVENTURES!

Experiences
bring our
world alive



MURDOCK FAMILY: EAGLE RIVER



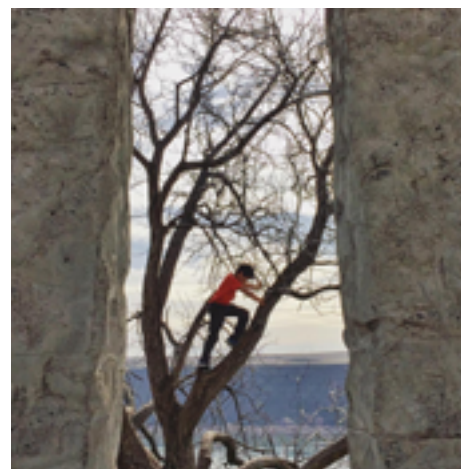
WANT TO
SHARE YOUR
STORY?

[CLICK HERE](#)





Social Challenges



Each month we're issuing a new inspiration challenge to the Family Trails community. The monthly challenge may come in the form of a visual prompt, question, or activity, and will always be designed to spark family exploration, adventure, and learning.

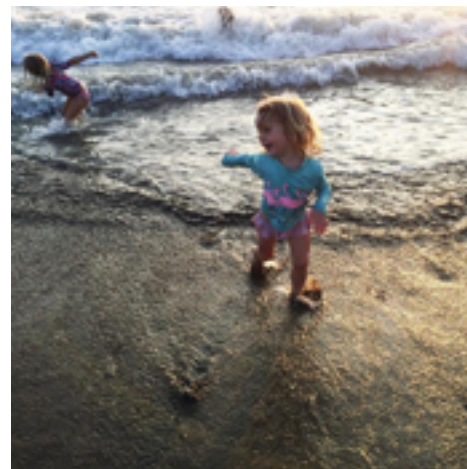
We'll collect the best of the best to share via social, on **FamilyTrails.com**, and in Trails Mix. To participate, look for the monthly challenge prompt **#FamilyTrailsTales** on Instagram. Maybe you'll see your family adventures in an upcoming issue of Trails Mix!

Check out some of the highlights from our last few months!





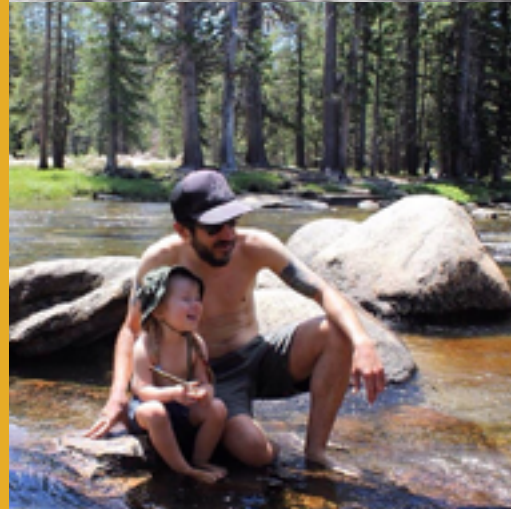
Social Challenges



MARCH: **FREE FOR ALL**

Now that the weather is warming, we wanted you to get up and go! You shared fun things you do together as a family that are free (or nearly free) in your local area. Without further ado, here are some of the stories you told as you explored adventures that were free for all:







APRIL



Social Challenges



APRIL: **CREATIVITY**

April is a month of renewal, of budding trees and buzzing bees! It's an inspiring time to be alive, so this month we're asking you to share your creative side. Whether trying a new craft together inside, or making something new as a family, we want to see your creative side. This month's storytelling theme is creativity!







MAY



Social Challenges



MAY: EARTH

With spring in full swing, our May visual storytelling theme challenged adventure families around the country to get out and get their hands dirty by snapping photos that celebrate a love of nature, being outside, and the earth.





LET THE DAY
@live
AS IT COMES





Trails Recipe

HOMEMADE STRAWBERRY FRUIT LEATHER:

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees F. Line a 12 x 16 baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Remove the stems from the strawberries and give them a rinse.
3. Place the strawberries and honey in a blender and puree until smooth.
4. Pour the mixture on to the lined baking sheet. Lift the sheet and lightly tilt it around to evenly distribute the mixture.
5. Bake for 2 hours or until the mixture is dry and not sticky to the touch. If your oven tends to overheat, it may take less than 2 hours. Once my batch started to solidify, I turned my oven off completely and let it complete as the oven cooled down.
6. Remove fruit leather from oven and allow it to cool at room temperature. Let it sit overnight so that the fruit can soften.

7. Cut fruit leather (with paper on) into strips using a pizza cutter or scissors and roll the fruit leather into snack rolls.

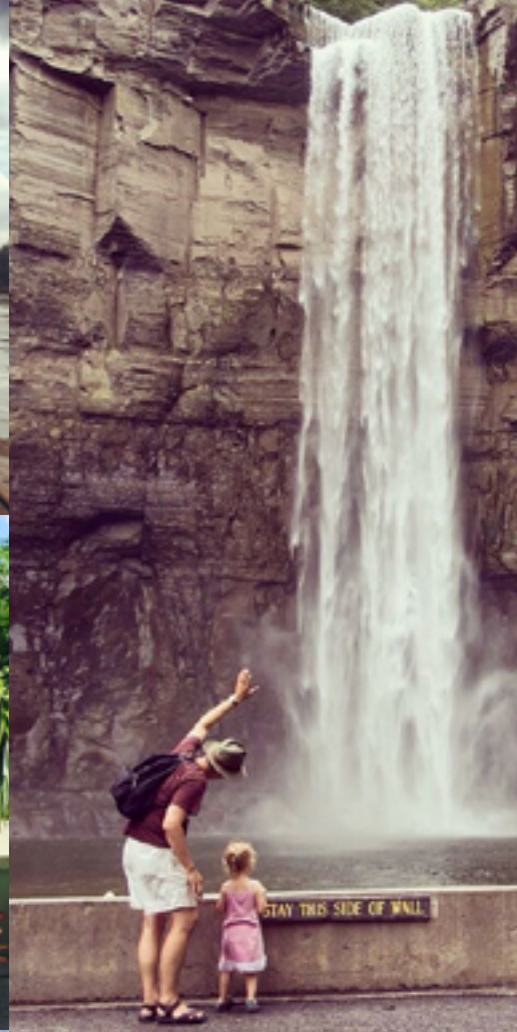
[serves 4 – 6 people]

recipe by @sheenatatum

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cups fresh strawberries
- 1 tablespoon honey







Guest Trail Guides

THIS MONTH'S GUIDES:

Brandon Ballard • DeAnna McCasland

At Family Trails we believe all families can learn and grow together through exploration and adventure. In this spirit, in each edition of Trails Mix you'll find feature pieces spotlighting a diverse range of adventurers from around the country, blazing their own trail.



Road Trip Dad WHERE TO BEGIN

told by
Brandon Ballard



Road Trip Dad



Where Do I Start?

It's a big undertaking to plan a vacation. It's even bigger to go somewhere you've never been and do something you've never done. There are so many factors that for some people it's too intimidating to even make the attempt. It's a lot easier to just go to that tried and true beach condo or mountain cabin that your family has been going to since you were a kid. And believe me, I am not knocking the comfort of familiar territory. You know which restaurants you like; you know the quickest route to get places; and you can't wait to sit in your favorite chair on the back porch and read a book. It's relaxing. It's safe. And most of the time, it's just what you need.

But sometimes you need a little more. Sometimes you need some adventure to make the familiar that much sweeter. If you don't



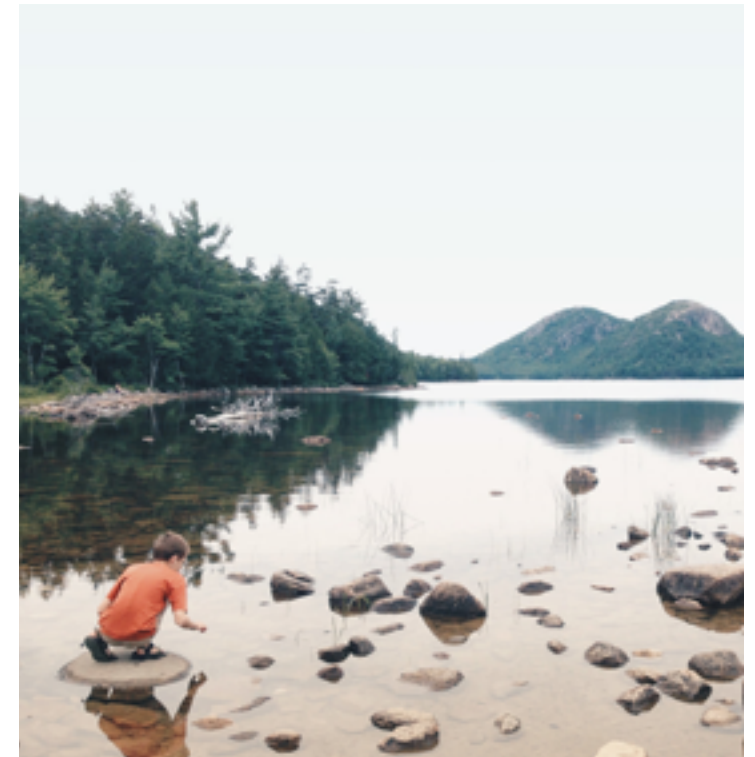
mix it up once in a while, tradition can become routine and boring. So, it's good to branch out and take some risks in unknown territory. You never know, you may find a new place to be your favorite getaway.

So, where to begin? First, start slow. If this is going to be your first big road trip, then I would suggest finding a destination kind of close to home, no more than a few states away. You don't want to jump from driving a few hours to the beach to being in the car for three days straight. Also, if your family has never been that big on camping, get some practice in before you go. Go to a nearby state park or pitch a tent in your back yard. It may be better (though pricier) to rent a cabin or motel room near your destination. That way you aren't dealing with too many new experiences at once. The main thing is to ease yourself and your family into this new adventure, so you can be sure there will be more.

Once you've picked a place, decide on a when. Do some research about how the weather and conditions change throughout the months. When is the rainy season? When is it too hot? When are the bugs the worst? When do the leaves change? What's the best time to avoid crowds? When is the wildlife most active? Focus on individual months, rather than seasons. Just because it's summer doesn't mean there won't be road closures due to snow. In some places, winter is the busy season. Decide what time of year sounds the most enjoyable for your family and plan accordingly.

One of the most important tips I can give you is if there is anything you can make a reservation for, do it as soon as possible. It's a no-brainer. The sooner you book a campsite, tour, rafting trip, etc. the better your chances of getting a spot. If you wait a few weeks before your trip, you could be out of luck, especially with the more popular destinations. Plus, in some cases, you have more choices if you book earlier. Also, If you can pay in advance, that's less money that you have to spend during the actual trip. Spread the expenses out over time.

Finally, make learning about this place your new hobby. Instead of browsing social media during your breaks, read about your destination. Most places have some sort of official website, and that is a good place to start. It will give you a broad overview of a place. It will point out popular hikes, list the different campgrounds, show you where the central hubs are, which are sometimes based around visitor centers or museums or lodges. It will mention all the "must-see" places. But dig deeper. Look at TripAdvisor and other similar sites. Ask specific questions in a search engine like "What are the kid friendly hikes in _____?" "Where is the best



spot to see the sunset?" "Which campground is the least crowded?" The information is out there. Get prepared. Have a plan. You don't have to set up a strict itinerary or anything, but it is pretty foolish to drive all that way, use all those vacation days and then just hope you figure it out when you get there. I am not saying you should never be impulsive. Some of the best adventures are when you just take off into the unknown with no real plan, but you need to get your sea legs before you try that. If you haven't done too much traveling or camping with your family, it's not the best idea to be flying blind.

So, it can be done. People look at photos of The Grand Canyon or hear stories about Alaska and say, "I wish I could do something like that." You can! What's stopping you? Money? Start saving. Knowledge? It's right there at your fingertips. Experience? Start building it now. Plan a small trip and then make the next one bigger, and so on. I promise you, this is not that hard. I'm not good at anything and I got really good at this in a fairly short amount of time. And I'm still learning! Fear? "What if we have a terrible time?" "What if it's just a big waste of money?" "What if I get eaten by a bear and wolf at the same time?" I'll be honest, sometimes things go wrong and sometimes trips are duds, but just try again later. There is no law anywhere that says you only get one shot at having a great vacation.

Well, except the bear/wolf eating you law. That one is pretty final.

DeAnna McCasland

5 TIPS FOR SNAPPING THE PERFECT FAMILY ADVENTURE PHOTO

told by
DeAnna McCasland



The Perfect Photo

We are a family who loves adventure. Not only does loading up the kids to visit a new place or exploring our backyard bring me so much joy, but it also challenges my photographic eye! Here are five of my favorite tips and tricks for capturing family adventures:

1. Keep it simple.

While I absolutely adore my DSLR cameras and lenses, it isn't always ideal to lug around all of that equipment on our family trips. Sometimes less is more! If I have to worry about lenses, settings and focus, I am more than likely not going to use it as much as I could a quick point-and-shoot or my phone camera. I try to make it a rule of thumb to use a camera that will fit in my pocket so I am more likely to use it. Keeping up with kids in a new environment is hard enough, so go easy on yourself.

2. Keep it candid.

While I love shots where everyone is looking at the camera and smiling, I don't put too much pressure on myself to capture the "perfect" perfect portrait on our trips. I prefer to let the kids be kids. I capture them exploring, learning, and enjoying themselves in a natural way. Not to mention, this is a wonderful way to capture their real smiles and personalities. At the end of the day, these always end up being my favorite shots anyway. When I hang back to capture a shot, I get to experience the adventure in my own way. Plus, half of the joy of the adventure is watching my family. Not only does this make photographing the trip less stressful for everyone, but you will be left with some really special and natural images of the time your family spent together.

3. Change up your perspective.

Don't be afraid to get dirty! One of my favorite ways to

shoot is by getting down on the ground or standing on something for a bird's eye view. I feel like this really challenges me as a photographer while giving others a glimpse at a view they would have otherwise missed out on. When we are off adventuring you will often see me squatting, laying on the ground or finding something to climb on to get my shots. I also like to make sure my phone is protected with some kind of waterproof cover because changing my perspective often means getting messy if you aren't careful.

4. It's all in the details.

No matter where you are, whether it be a trip to the beach or a simple morning run to the farmers market, detail shots are just as important as the big-picture shots. Maybe it's the pruney toes of a little kid who spent the afternoon creek swimming. Perhaps it's a big, red apple hanging on a tree from a day of apple picking or little





The Perfect Photo

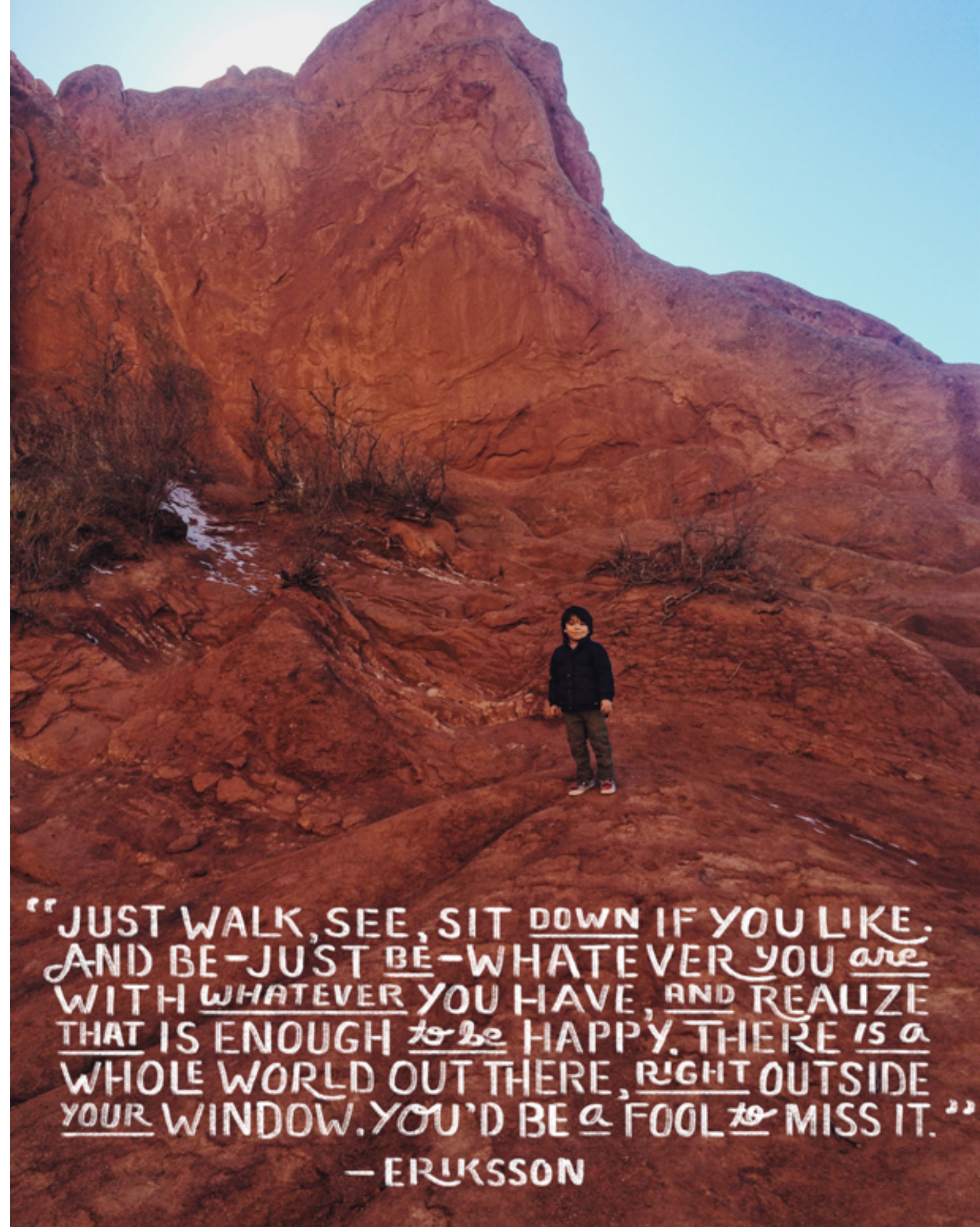
footprints left behind on the sand during a beach trip. These little detail shots add up and play an important role in telling the story of the big picture.

5. Tell a story.

When I plan to document a family adventure I like to think of it as a story unfolding in front of my camera. I have a mental checklist I go through to make sure I have the shots I want and the camera to make it happen. I always try to photograph everyone on our trip; both individually and together as a group. I also try not to forget to jump in front of the camera myself. I take a few moments to photograph our location by getting wide-angle shots of the big picture, as well as a series of detail shots to help tell our story. Throughout the day, I challenge myself to do these things in unique ways by paying attention to the light, angles, and composition that I am able to work with.

There's no such thing as too many photos. Snap away, always making sure you have plenty of room on your camera roll BEFORE the adventure begins. When in doubt about whether to take the shot, always go for it. You will be glad you did. At the end of the day it won't matter if your photos are picture perfect. All that matters is that you spent time together. Any shots you have at the end of the adventure will be worth it.

DeAnna McCasland is a homeschooling mother of three. When she isn't exploring with her family, she keeps busy working on her West Virginia homestead raising dairy goats, chickens, ducks, turkeys, working in her garden, and making soap. DeAnna is a professional photographer inspired by documenting the mundane moments of life and the simplicity of childhood. You can view her work at www.mountainmamaapothecaries.com.



"JUST WALK, SEE, SIT DOWN IF YOU LIKE.
AND BE—JUST BE—WHATEVER YOU are
WITH WHATEVER YOU HAVE, AND REALIZE
THAT IS ENOUGH to be HAPPY. THERE IS A
WHOLE WORLD OUT THERE, RIGHT OUTSIDE
YOUR WINDOW. YOU'D BE A FOOL to MISS IT."
—ERIKSSON



CHECKLIST

There's nothing quite like sharing stories around a campfire and falling asleep beneath the stars. Before you head out on your next family camping adventure, make sure you're equipped with everything your family needs to ensure everyone has a safe, fun time wherever the trail may lead you.

CLOTHES + GEAR

CAMP SETUP

COOKING SUPPLIES



PERSONAL ITEMS

- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Lip balm
- ☐ Bug spray
- ☐ Toothbrush
- ☐ Toothpaste
- ☐ Towels
- ☐ Toilet paper
- ☐ Hand sanitizer
- ☐ Dry shampoo

FUN STUFF

- ☐ Fishing gear
- ☐ Kayak equipment
- ☐ Star chart
- ☐ Playing cards
- ☐ Radio

UTILITY TOOLS

Have any other camping suggestions? What's your must-bring item? We'd love to hear. Drop us a note at community@familytrails.com.

Download Now



#FAMILYTRAILS