



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 our 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.

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 PANILY TRAILS

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 worked to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. 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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Find spring coming to life in this family-friendly scavenger hunt.

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 visiting familytrails.com/blog.

featuring



THE BROOKSHIRE FAMILY









Earlier this year, I was overcome by a strong desire to see our country's natural beauty. (America the beautiful, right?)

Learning about our country's national parks via textbooks is great, but it doesn't beat actually touching craggily rocks and sandy dirt, smelling fresh mountain air, and hearing the sounds of wildlife. So when we were recently met with the opportunity to road trip our way to Zion National Park, we said yes.

We traveled with friends and five little ones under the age of four! (Crazy, right?!) For us, the key was planning around naps and making sure we had plenty of snacks throughout the day. We chose short-distance hikes that also provided the older kids with enough space to climb and explore.

In case you're wondering, it's definitely possible to visit Zion and take in its spectacular views with young children. We visited the lower of the three Emerald Pools one day and Weeping Rock the next. We observed different shaped leaves, beautiful rock formations, and trees so colorful we couldn't stop marveling with each turn we took up the mountain. We were swept away by the grandeur, but also took some time to search the trails for small rocks and new leaves.

Each day we took a break during our hike to have lunch and read nature books during a little story time. After a short rest, the kids were back to playing and exercising their wild imaginations.









 $\hbox{``It's definitely possible to visit Zion and take in its spectacular views with young children."}$



Our last day in Zion was a "free day," during which the little ones fed llamas, sheep, and donkeys, and played Little House on the Prairie in a cute, covered wagon. We loved Zion and look forward to going back when the children are older to experience all the wonder the mountains and narrows have to offer.

After our time in Zion National Park, we made our way further east to Page, Arizona, home to two of its most popular sights, Antelope Canyon and Horseshoe Bend. Personally, I think both are bucket-list destinations. Add Lake Powell and Glen Canyon Dam to the mix and there's just so much beauty in one small geographic location.

Upper Antelope Canyon was definitely my favorite part of our trip. Accessible only by guided tour, Upper Antelope Canyon is a slot canyon of Navajo Sandstone created by flash flooding and rainwater erosion. The result is spectacular: a series of narrow passageways surrounded on both sides by high walls of beautiful red rock.

I couldn't help but run my hands along the rock walls throughout the tour, as if doing so confirmed that I was actually there and, in some small way, meant that I was now a part of the canyon's rich and deep history. What took nature years to form took us only about 30 minutes to walk through.

Located within Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Horseshoe Bend was equally stunning. A short hike from the parking lot brought us to a cliff where the Colorado River cuts through the valley below in a horseshoe shape. I have a healthy fear of heights, so after a quick peek over the edge I was happy to keep watch over the kiddos as they played and kicked up the red dirt.

At this point, our trip was nearly over and it was almost time to go home, but we thought we'd squeeze in one more national park because, well, why not? So, we kept moving and made our way back West to Yosemite National Park. The final part of our road trip was a 24-hour whirlwind of gorgeous yellow leaves, crystal blue lakes, and lots of driving. We took the scenic route back home, but visiting Mammoth Lakes and Yosemite National Park at the end of October was definitely a good idea. After an overnight in Mammoth, and a little jaunt to one of the nearby lakes, we drove into Yosemite from the eastern entrance at Tioga Pass. This was fun and different, since we would've normally entered from the west. The variety of trees along the drive into Yosemite Valley was spectacular. The redwoods stood tall and proud, while the gnarled, old oak trees and leafy sycamores impressed with their color and stature. We were ready to head home, but not before the girls (and maybe most of the adults) played in a pile of huge sycamore leaves. The girls had the best time burying each other and tossing leaves up into the air, which made for a perfect fall evening. Our visit to Mammoth and Yosemite was short, but oh-so-sweet, and left us wanting more. Traveling with little ones takes more time and effort, but the memories are forever and driving long distances with friends adds to the fun. We would do it all over again and hope to go back soon.





It's two in the morning and I'm sitting in a tent with toddler who woke up an hour ago. I'm desperately trying to convince him to go back to sleep, but each time I lay him down and pull up the covers, he starts complaining — loudly. We're separated from our neighbors in the adjacent campsite by a few feet of trees and our tent's thin, nylon walls that are now beading with condensation from a fog that rolled into camp after we went to sleep. Despite the soggy tent and the prospect of stumbling around the campsite in the dark, I'm seriously considering tearing everything down, throwing it in the car, and heading back to our warm beds in Seattle.

The first time my parents took me camping, I was six weeks old. That's how I got it into my head that a camping trip during my son's first summer was a perfectly normal thing to do. After all, he was due in June, which meant we had the whole summer to get one in. It seemed perfectly reasonable; it turned out to be totally delusional. Two summers came and went without camping trips. We wanted to camp, but we were too sleep deprived and too overwhelmed with taking care of a baby at home to make it happen. But late this fall, a stretch of good weather aligned with a stretch of good sleep and we decided to take a chance. I was excited. It was going to be the trip I had dreamed of for a year and a half. It was going to be a moment we'd always remember. It was the start of a family camping tradition.

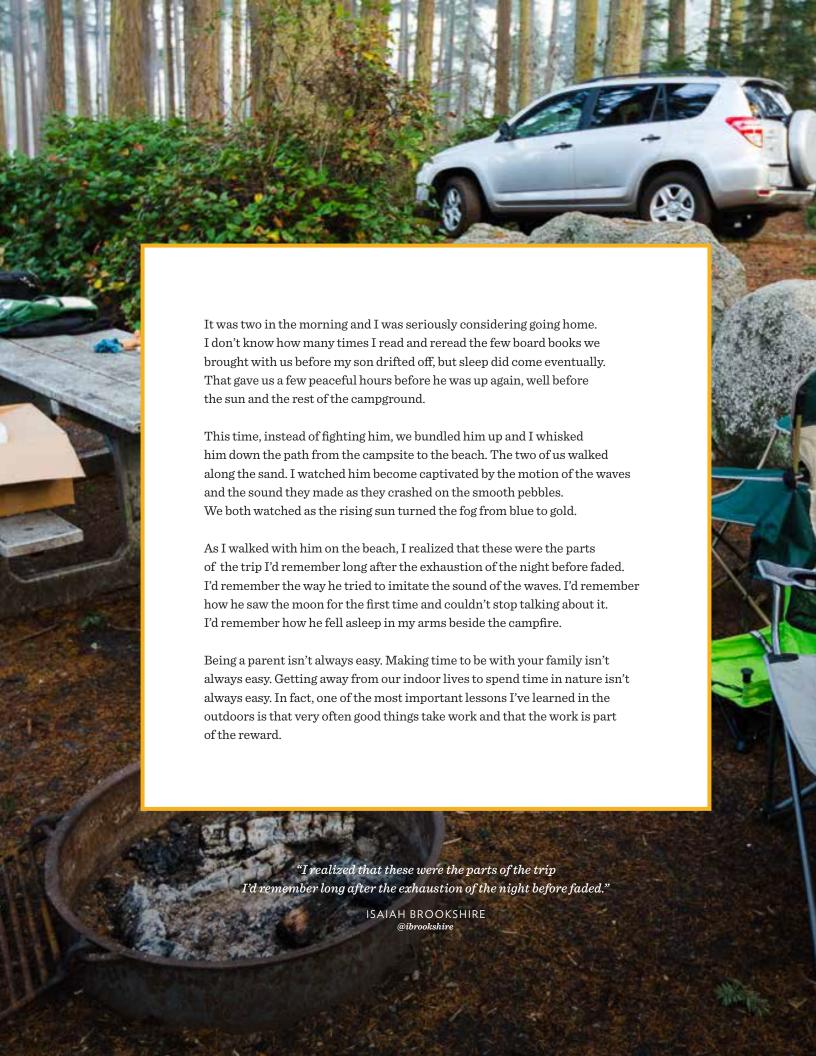
















STORIES FROM THE TRAIL

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EXPLORE FURTHER

EXTENDED LEARNING with THE YUNG FAMILY

No matter where you live, nature offers much to enjoy and explore. Try these activities with your family next time you venture out.

- **1. Do you have a favorite outdoor spot in your backyard or community?** Begin observing and noting in a journal or with drawings. How does the area look, sound, and smell different during different times of days or different times of years? Use scientific observation and your five senses to get to know your special area and your family.
- 2. What kind of trees grow in your area? Use your computer or head to the local library to do some research. Gather leaves and identify each type and note their similarities and differences. See what you can learn about which trees are the tallest, oldest, and fastest/slowest growing in your state.
- 3. Explore Wonder of the Day® #1982 "Are there Any Wildernesses Left in America?" with your family at Wonderopolis.org

EXTENDED LEARNING with THE BROOKSHIRE FAMILY

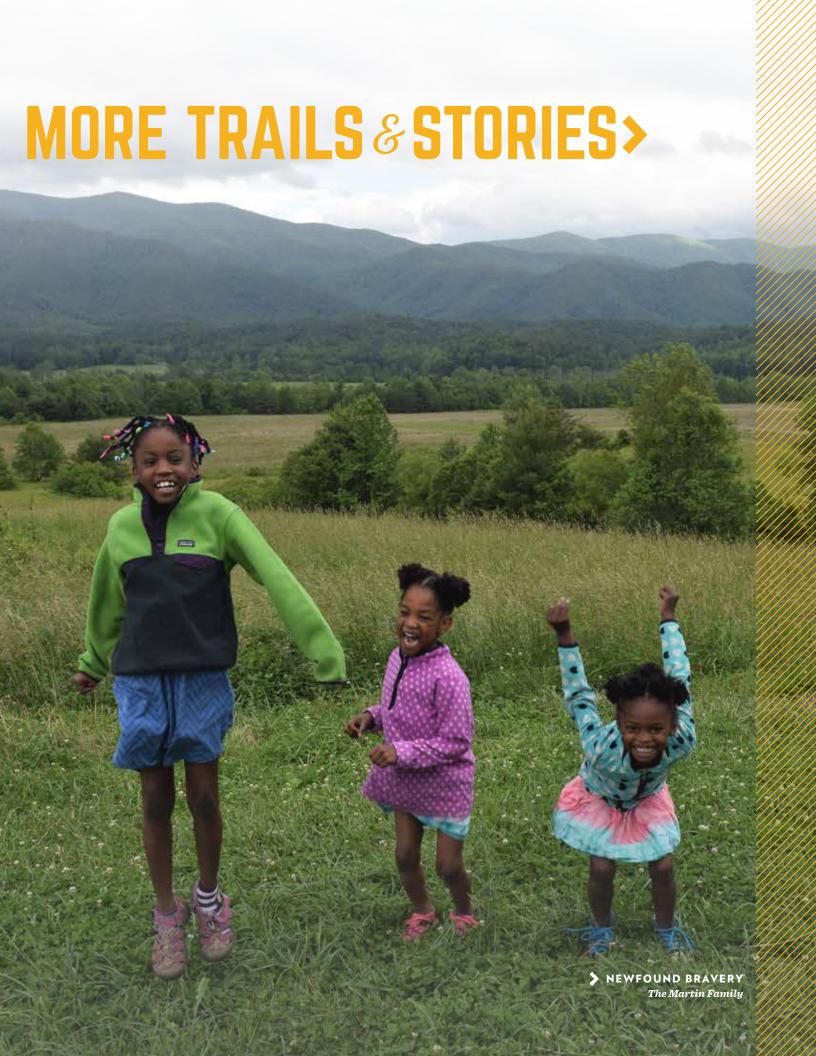
Campfires are a camping tradition, providing a gathering place to cook, stay warm, and to share and enjoy nature's wonders. Try these activities during your family's next camping adventure or in your own backyard.

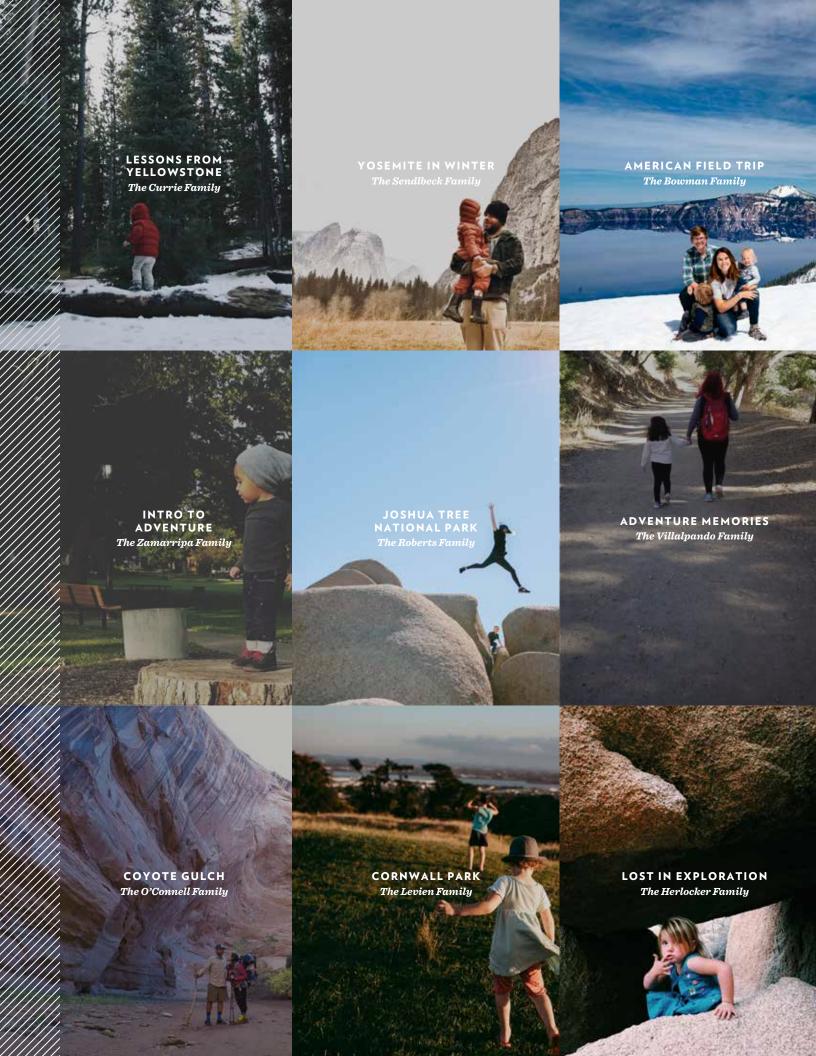
- **1.** With supervision, let children join in as you build your campfire. Try burning different types of wood from various trees as well as both wet and dry wood. Talk with children about their observations. How does the wood burn differently? Are there different smells, sounds, and sights?
- 2. Ghost stories have long been a way to add excitement to an evening around a campfire.

 Have members of your group share their favorites or create a new shared story where members of the group each build upon the tale in turn. Use a flashlight and spooky voices to add an eerie element to the experience!
- **3.** Explore Wonder of the Day® #2**7**7 "Why Are They Called S'Mores? "with your family at Wonderopolis.org











"We welcome spring in a couple ways. Finding the south-facing hiking trails and exploring in search of tiny wildflowers and snail shells is a favorite. Skiing spring slush in t-shirts is always a rite of passage to welcome spring. Having a warm spring escape is a tradition, too - Hawaii, Zion, Moab - places that help you thaw out more quickly from winter."



THE WILD BLUE FAMILY

@wildbluefamily



"We welcome spring, rain or shine! We live in the PNW so chances are it's raining. We get outdoors and usually find puddles to splash in. The kids love that, especially my daughter who is five. Our dog, who we lost in October, would be the first one to find a puddle to lay in. We just love to do anything outdoors, be it going to the mountains, taking a ride on our bikes, or finding a puddle to play in."

ADRIA
@mrsadrialeigh

"Spring is such a fun time to watch things change and begin again.

Little ones are full of curiosity and like examining things on their level.

A fun activity is picking a place in nature to visit each week. As you visit, take the time to really explore, looking for signs of spring and change. Watch for new plants budding, signs of new animals, or insects.

This would be a great time to bring the magnifying glasses, binoculars, cameras, and sketch books along. Sometimes little adventures with no real expectations end up becoming the best memories of all."

LINDSEY

@littlemountaineer

"Definitely top of our list is flower fields! We love getting out there and getting a firsthand view of those famous super blooms. One of our semi-local prime spots is Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve. Here you get to enjoy some family-friendly trails while gazing out at endless fields of beautiful poppies.

It's like a scene straight out of The Wizard of Oz."

DAISY
@daisu_s2:

GUEST TRAIL GUIDES AHEAD

Attention Hikers:

You are about to embark on a journey that will impact your family activities for generations to come.

Proceed with extreme excitement

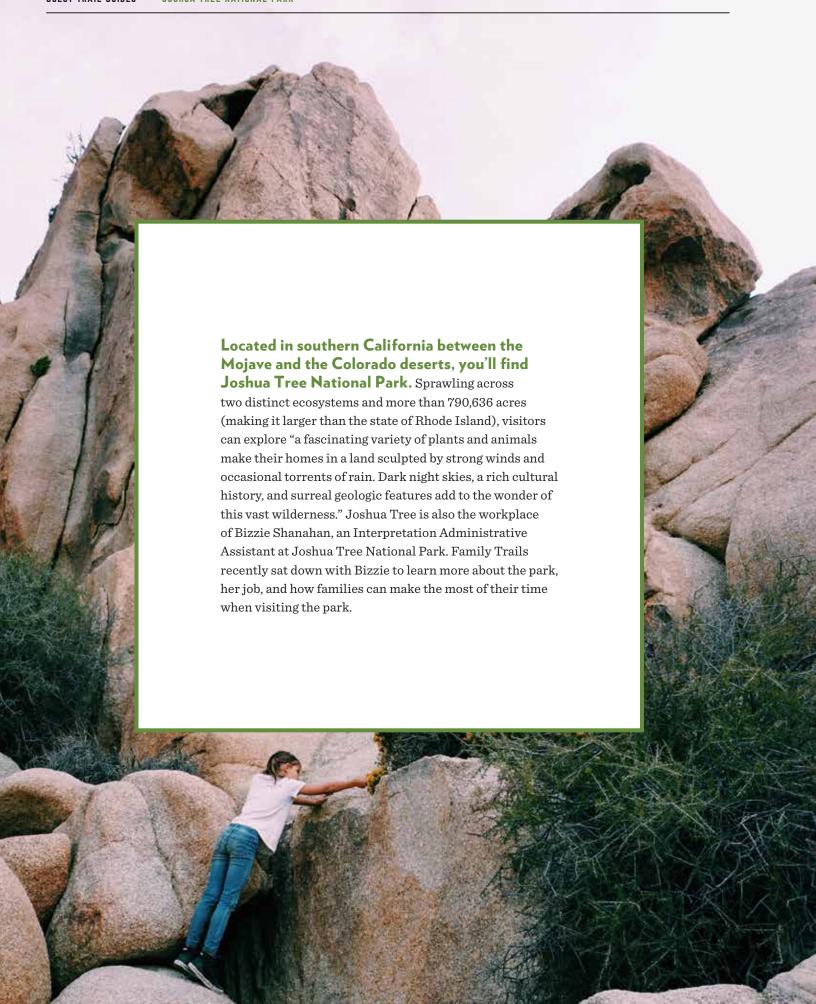


At Family Trails, we believe all families can learn and grow together through exploration and adventure. In this spirit, in each edition of Trails Mix you'll find feature pieces spotlighting a diverse range of adventurers from around the country, blazing their own trail.

featuring

BIZZIE SHANAHAN MARK FITTERER





WHAT IS A NATIONAL PARK?

Bizzie: They are places that have significant value to the American people, be it scenery or plant life. The National Parks came into existence in 1916 as the population began exploding in America. People realized that if we didn't preserve these beautiful places, they would be overrun with humans. The government put National Parks in place so that historically significant areas would be protected. This includes Civil War battlefields, which are also managed by the National Park Service.

WHAT IS A JOSHUA TREE?

Bizzie: A Joshua tree actually isn't a tree, it's a yucca plant related to the agave. They only grow in the Mojave Desert and can only be pollinated by one insect, which is the yucca moth. If you come to the "I Speak for the Trees" walk, we have a cool moth headpiece you can put on to experience what it is like being a moth. Most of our Joshua trees are between 150 and 300 years old. It's hard to tell their exact age because they don't have tree rings, so we have to base our estimates on height. We are learning more each day.

WHY ARE THEY CALLED JOSHUA TREES?

Bizzie: When the Mormons walked through the desert, they thought that the Joshua tree looked like Joshua welcoming them to paradise. The Joshua tree, of course, has many other names because many Native Americans lived in the area.

WHAT IS THE MOST SPECIAL THING ABOUT JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK?

Bizzie: The Joshua trees are popular, but many people come to see the rock formations. Our park is incredibly popular

among rock climbers and scramblers due to the enormous, granite rock formations – including one shaped like a skull. Our park also spans two deserts, the Mojave and Colorado, which offers a great opportunity to learn about desert plants.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT JOSHUA TREE?

Bizzie: If you want to see blooms, come in January through March. Spring break is a really busy time, so plan at least six months in advance in order to reserve camping. There are no hotels within the park, and it's dry camping. That means no water, no electrical hook-ups, and the toilets are pit toilets. It's a desert; there's no water, so you have to bring in all of your water with you. There is water at entry gates and the Visitor Center, but you need to plan ahead. The idea is that you are enjoying the desert as it is.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE PARK?

Bizzie: My favorite part of the park is the Cholla Cactus Garden. In the transition zone between the two deserts there is a naturally-occurring cactus garden with over 170,000 cacti.

The majority of the cacti are Cholla, but there are few other types scattered throughout. It's a beautiful place to watch the sunset or the sunrise, because the Cholla cacti needles reflect sunlight making it look like they're glowing.

FOR FAMILIES WITH KIDS, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE MUST-SEE FOR THEM?

Bizzie: You would definitely want to go on the Discovery Trail, which is a trail designed for kids by kids. We have a Junior Ranger Discovery Walk where a ranger goes through and helps the kids complete the book. Barker Dam and Hidden Valley have some of the oldest rock formations in the park. Barker Dam also has petroglyphs on it, which are Native American rock paintings.

WHAT DOES A PARK RANGER DO?

Bizzie: A park ranger helps educate visitors about the park and makes sure they know the rules and regulations. The biggest part of my job is making sure that visitors bring water with them. A lot of rangers do ranger programs and take people on hikes. Rangers also help protect the parks.

WHAT'S THE BEST PART ABOUT WORKING IN THE NATIONAL PARK?

Bizzie: I think it's the people. On an average day, our Visitor Center can welcome over 1,000 people from all over the world. Our park was on track to reach three million visitors in 2017, almost double the number of visitors we had in 2014.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT OUR NATIONAL PARKS?

Bizzie: Visit and donate! If you can't visit, try to learn about the National Park System and why it's important. If you visit a park, tell other people about your visit. Spread the love.

WHAT IS THE JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM?

Bizzie: Each park has its own Junior Ranger book designed around the different plants and animals you find living in it. When your return your completed book, you earn a ranger badge. If you finish your Junior Ranger book at Joshua Tree, but don't have time to go to the Visitor Center to get your badge, you can mail them to the address on the back of the book. I look through the books, add comments, and then send them back to the kids with their badge.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM ENHANCING LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR KIDS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

Bizzie: What we hear from a lot of parents is that helps kids stay engaged. Joshua Tree is technically bigger than Rhode Island, which means it takes a while to drive from Barker Dam to Jumbo Rocks. There's a lot of down time in the car as you drive from trail to trail. The Junior Ranger book is helpful here; one of the pages asks kids to identify plants and animals. Another page has kids shout out the rocks they see. (Look for a rock that sparkles. Look for a rock that is bigger than you.) It's a great way to help kids stay engaged during the downtime that inevitably happens.

A lot of our book is also dedicated to landscape drawing, which encourages you to take a minute and enjoy the view. Joshua Tree looks like another planet. It's a good opportunity to take a moment with your kids to stop and say, "Wow, this is really cool." Take a minute to draw. Take a minute to be peaceful. That's one of the best things about the desert; it's incredibly peaceful, and everyone in the family can enjoy that together.

What's your family's favorite National Park? Which National Parks are on your bucket list in 2018? Use hashtag **#FamilyTrails** to share your response (and photos) with us on Instagram!









CAMPING with kids

 $as \ told \ by \ \mathsf{MARK} \ \mathsf{FITTERER}$

So, you're thinking about camping with the kids. Where do you begin? These are my top five tips for planning the perfect family camping adventure.

1. START SIMPLE

Getting started camping outdoors can be intimidating for parents and kids. I recommend introducing camping gradually in order to build comfort and confidence. Start with an overnight trip close to home to get your kids familiar with sleeping outdoors. Look for a local campground or set up a tent in the backyard. I spent the first several years with my kids completing quick overnight trips before graduating to multi-day camping adventures. They absolutely loved these trips and became more self-assured and enthusiastic with each outing.

If your family is experienced in outdoor adventure, try mixing things up by exposing your kids to different sleep systems or build your own shelter. Let them prepare meals and experiment with different types of backcountry stoves. They might also enjoy honing their survival skills by practicing knots or trying to light a fire with kindling.

2. BE PREPARED

As an Eagle Scout, the words "Be Prepared" became an ingrained part of my outdoor life. It does not mean you have to pack the kitchen sink or prepare for every possible scenario, but a little preparation can go a long way to ensure the safety and comfort for your family. In my experience, the biggest challenges are usually weather and bugs. If it is too hot, too cold, too wet, or too buggy, camping can be absolutely miserable. The weather can change quickly in the mountains, but there are a host of tools and resources available to research weather conditions. I rely on apps like Weather Underground to get accurate real-time and historical forecasts. Unfortunately, there are no apps for detecting mosquito density, but there are a few tricks. Avoid early-season camping when mosquitoes are at their thickest and choose campsites away from standing water. You can layer your kids in nylon clothing to create a bug-proof layer and bring a head net if needed, which minimizes the need for potentially dangerous chemical deterrents. Ultimately, if you can anticipate adverse conditions, you can prepare to mitigate the impact to your kids, which means more fun and enjoyment for everyone.

3. HAVE A PLAN

I have never met a kid who likes to be bored. That's why I always try to keep them busy during our family camping trips. When the kids were younger, we would get hours of entertainment out of a bucket, shovel, and moving water. Now that they are older, we are busy taking hikes into alpine lakes, fly fishing for trout in freestone rivers, or mountain biking old forest service roads. We leave after breakfast and arrive back into camp by late afternoon, usually just in time for dinner. In the evening, we sit around the campfire (if permitted) and roast s'mores while telling stories.

Whatever activities your family enjoys, try to minimize idle time by developing an adventure plan. You can even get the kids involved! The internet provides virtually endless opportunities to identify family activities near your campsite. Another great resource are the ranger stations in the national forest or state park system. Staff at these locations are always eager to discuss camping conditions and local sightseeing destinations.

4. BE FLEXIBLE

You know what they say, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." That is perhaps most true in the great outdoors. Take, for example, the family camping trip we took to Glacier National Park a few years ago in which my son had a serious allergic reaction to mosquito bites that forced us to return home. Then there was the time when partygoers blasted music through the campground until the wee hours of the morning...for two nights in a row. We were zombies by the time we headed home. Needless to say, not everything goes according to plan. There are so many things you cannot control outdoors, so flexibility is key to ensuring everyone stays safe and has fun.

A few years ago, I planned a four-day backpacking trip into the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area with my oldest son, then nine years old. By the second day he started complaining about being homesick. Instead of adhering to a strict itinerary, I offered him the choice of going home early. I wanted to empower him to make the decision. When he decided to head home early, I took an alternative route and we arrived at the trailhead the next morning. Sure, I could have pushed him along to complete the itinerary, but I equate flexibility in these situations to mean you prioritize your kids' needs above your own to maximize their enjoyment and foster a lifelong love of the outdoors.





5. PACK SOME CREATURE COMFORTS

I have slept in a bivy sack in a torrential downpour and brushed my teeth with my finger, but I wouldn't recommend "roughing" it with your kids outdoors. There is nothing wrong with surrounding yourself with a few creature comforts. One year I packed an inflatable mattress and full-size pillows for the inside of the tent. It was amazing! I have also been known to bring board games, books, baseball bats, footballs, bicycles, slacklines, and just about everything else you can image. There are no rules about how you should camp, so bring what you want and enjoy every minute of your experience as a family.

ABOUT ME

I'm Mark Fitterer, creator of www.familybasecamp.com. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and spent most of my childhood in the mountains backpacking, hiking, white water rafting, rock climbing, hunting, and fly fishing. I'm also an avid runner and photographer. Nowadays, my beautiful wife and I are passing similar experiences on to our three kids, ages eleven, nine, and six. We're hiking the most epic trails in North America, casting dry flies in blue-ribbon streams from our drift boat, and chasing light to capture amazing landscapes in pristine outdoor locations with our cameras. We have three avid little backpackers, skiers, runners, rock climbers, and hikers.

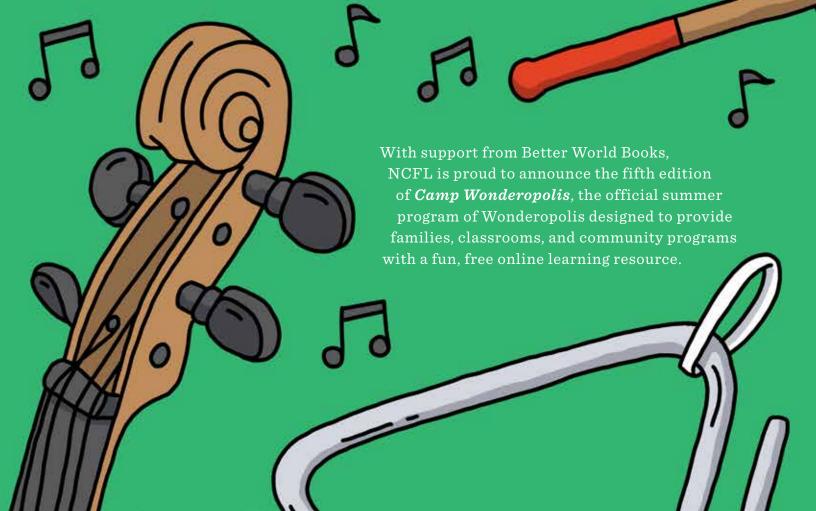
"You know what they say, 'the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry."

MARK FITTERER

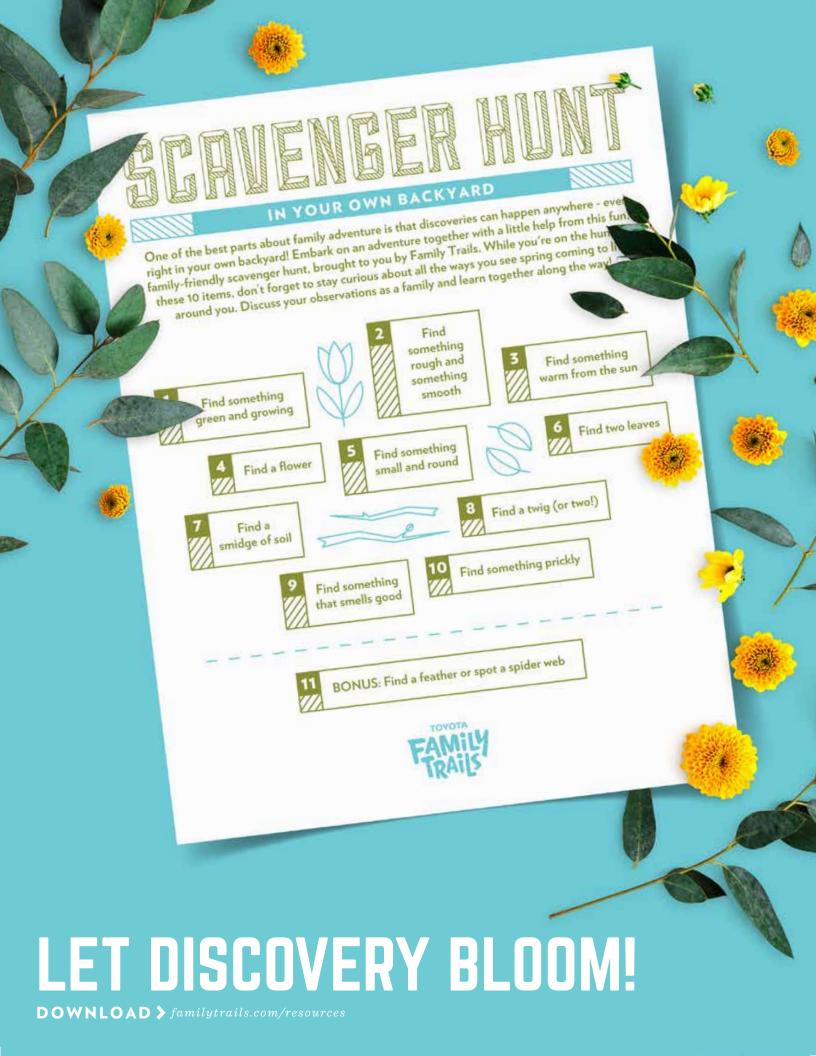


Symphony of Wonders

What if you could enjoy the perks of family camping without having to leave home? What if all the wonders of summer camp were just a click away? If this sounds like your idea of family fun, it's time to pack your (imaginary) bags and prepare for Camp Wonderoplis!







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