



Generations of family fun.

# THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CAMPING ROAD TRIPS WITH THE KIDS





If you've ever sat down to watch a movie or TV show involving a family road trip, you probably had a pretty good idea what you were in for: disastrous shenanigans, well-planned itineraries gone haywire or destinations falling woefully short of their billing. But, the bad rap we get in our minds from fictional screen adaptations and elsewhere is just that: fiction.

Sure, hitting the road with the kids requires a different set of parenting skills, but there's a reason this isn't titled, "Surviving a Road Trip with the Kids" like many other articles or online posts you may find. Taking the kids on the road, especially for a camping trip, is one of the best opportunities to bond, form family traditions and make memories. And particularly in the age of the Internet, *disconnecting* can be one of the best ways to *connect* with the ones you love most.

Little mishaps will morph into great stories years later. You'll reflect on the heated discussion about where to stop for lunch and chuckle. And little Jimmy stepping waist deep in that mud pit may require some industrial-level cleanup, but will make for a picture with a long-reserved spot on the wall.

Here are five great ways to help ensure you and yours enjoy more chuckles, stories and spots on the wall thanks to your road trips— with some fun camping destinations and travel tips included along the way.

# GET IMAGINATIVE

Not only can camping be a chance to escape the day-to-day hustle and bustle, but it's also a chance to show the kids, no TV or Internet, no problem.

One fun way to do this is to explore the campground and its surroundings. Take your kids on a walk, bring a paper bag and collect five to ten nature objects: leaves, pinecones, flowers, stones and the like. Then, encourage your kids to write down a story with the items you collected as inspiration. It'll be fun to see how their little imaginations grow and you'll enjoy looking back at the stories and reminiscing about the places you visited together.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROAD



**Fuel creativity** – Clean and safe craft supplies like pipe cleaners twist ties, tape, colored pencils and paper can keep the little passengers entertained for long stretches of highway.



**Splash!** – The self-proclaimed Waterpark Capital of the World is bursting at the seams with fun summertime activities and parks. "The Dells," as it's affectionately known by locals, is a very camper-friendly area situated among the picturesque rolling hills and bountiful lakes of south-central Wisconsin. Visitors are also greeted with an array of unique museums and theme parks for those who prefer dry land.



# WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

Give the kids a light-hearted chore and make them responsible for it throughout the trip. An example is to have the kids 'manage' keeping grandparents or cousins up-to-date about the trip. Have them pick out a postcard from nearby campsites and attractions to describe what the family has been up to and the places you've all been and drop them in the mail as you go.

It'll give the kids a sense of purpose. They'll feel like the boss of an important job. Plus, you and your extended family will have something you can see and feel to commemorate your adventures down the road; something that's increasingly rare, and valuable, in the digital age.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROAD



**Blow off steam** – Bring a frisbee, a jump rope or a stop watch to time a race to the tree and back, anything to help the kids burn some of their seemingly endless supply of energy that they store up in the car or motorhome.



**Get the heck to Dodge!** – Dodge City, Kansas that is. Give the young ones a taste of the old west. Think cowboys, Indians and rodeos. In addition to the history, there's a great zoo and several parks that provide an array of activities and spots to set up camp.



# GO TEAM!

You may discover that great things happen when the family works together. It can be easier said than done, getting the kids to pitch in, but if part of it involves learning a “cool” skill like building and managing a fire (once they’re the right age, of course) or the importance of setting up a safe, well-organized camp, there’s much more of an incentive for the kids to get excited. Not only will it teach some handy skills, but they’ll learn the importance of working together and how helpful it is for each to do their part—on the campsite and back in the real world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROAD



**Don’t pack like a rat** – Make sure all the essentials are within reach, not buried in a bag somewhere. If you like to make the occasional spontaneous stop along the way, have the right clothes, sunscreen or a blanket handy for the break from the road.



**Biggest. Cave. Ever.** – Educate and blow the little ones’ minds all at once. Kentucky’s wondrous Mammoth Cave is the world’s longest known cave system—as far as the experts know—with more than 400 underground miles explored. Charming towns and natural beauty abound in this rolling region of Kentucky.



# KEEP THEM ON THE EDGE OF THEIR SEATS

Anticipation helps keep things exciting. Set milestones throughout the trip with little rewards or incentives to keep the kids curious and interested. One idea is to make goody bags with the names of towns you'll pass through with a tasty treat, some sort of activity or a fun fact about the location and hand them out as you move through your itinerary. Not only can it peak the kids' interest in geography and map reading, but instead of a refrain of, "Are we there yet," the kids will actually hope for more spots between you and your next campsite.

Another way to keep things interesting once you arrive is to carve out a chunk of time and tell the kids they're in charge of it. Give them a day or two of notice, some ideas for activities or places to visit and see what they come up with. They'll have fun thinking about what to do and will surely come up with some itineraries for the memory books.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROAD



**Light up the night** – If you're on the road late in the evening, maybe in an effort to avoid traffic, bring some glow sticks, small book lamps or mini flashlights if the kids aren't highway-sleepers.



**Chattanooga Choo Choo** – Southern charm, a top aquarium and children's museum give you options and a free electric shuttle makes getting to and from each activity fun and easy for less mobile campers. Visit Lookout Mountain for a spectacular view that spans seven states on a clear day.



# FIND A CHANGE OF PACE

One of the best ways to make a road trip memorable is to find destinations that are bigtime departures from the family's everyday life. If you live in a big city, a crowded theme park may not have the same "memorable factor." Likewise, if you live in a calmer locale, the hustle and bustle of big city or popular tourist destination may be more exciting.

The same goes for behaviors or routine. If the kids are often locked in on screens—smartphones, computers or video game—plan out some screen-free time to look back at the adventures of the day or plan ahead for the day to come.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROAD



**Snack smart** – Establish a special road-trip treat the kids will look forward to each time. Or, whip up something in the theme of your destination with the potential cleanup in mind, of course.



**Thanksgiving – no, not that one** – Thanksgiving Point in Lehi, Utah, between Salt Lake City and Provo, offers a hands-on look at ancient life—and DINOSAURS! Owned and operated by a nonprofit, the facility offers loads of educational programming and is always hosting fun events like themed brunches, runs and festivals.



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