

adventure awaits!

Whether you're climbing high or catching a wave, these six outdoor vacation spots are fun for the whole family.

BY COLLEEN OAKLEY



Sure, you could take the kids to another amusement park this summer, or to grandma's house—again. Or you could give them a vacation they'll never forget. Pack the car for a day trip or a weekend and hit up one of these exciting off-the-beaten-path adventures. Better still? They won't break the bank. Trust us, your kids will be totally stoked—and you'll be glad for a summer free of talking mice and roller coasters. Everybody wins.

• Virginia Beach Virginia

• Learn how to hang ten with your totally rad family at the Whale Bone Surf Shop. The three-hour lessons include a 20-minute classroom talk about safety, the types of waves, and practice on a balance board. Then you'll cross the street to the beach for about two-and-a-half hours of surfing. There is one instructor for every three students, so you'll get plenty of board time and individual attention. Best of all, there's no age limit. They've had kids as young as four and adults as old as 70 ripping up the surf, so nobody has to watch from the shore. Classes run from 8-11am (when the water is less crowded) and the shop provides all the equipment. If you're still having fun when the lesson ends, you can rent your board for the rest of the day and keep practicing. Cowabunga!

How much: \$80 per person. Rates drop to \$70 per person when you have a group of six or more.

Don't miss: Go for the Fourth of July and you'll see the Stars and Stripes Explosion, a free star-spangled celebration on the beach complete with tribute bands, a symphony orchestra, and—of course—fireworks.

Helpful hint: Lessons are only offered on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, so you could sign up for a Thursday and then enjoy a long weekend honing your new talent.

For more info: whalebonesurfshop.com, 877.855.1975

• Washington DC

• Planning a trip to our nation's capital? Ditch the tour bus and go with two-wheeled transportation. Bike and Roll offers safe, historic, 3-hour tours that stop at all the famous monuments, from the National Mall to the Lincoln Memorial. Bikes and helmets are provided, as well as bottled water and a light snack. Kids not ready to pedal on their own can ride along on a trailer tandem or trailer carriage, so the whole family can participate. Educational and good exercise—what more could you ask for?

How much: Tour prices start at \$40 for adults and \$35 for children.

Don't miss: The Sites@Nites tours—the air is cooler and the lights are spectacular.

Helpful hint: Tours fill up quickly, so make reservations ahead of time.

For more info: bikethesites.com



Oak Hill West Virginia

The community pool's got nothing on paddling down a rushing, white-capped river. Whitewater rafting in West Virginia is the ultimate thrill ride and ACE Adventure Resort has trips perfect for first-timers and more experienced paddlers. The Upper New River has mild rapids great for young families (minimum age is 6). The Lower Gauley River is good for the more adventurous first-timers (minimum age is 12), with 14 miles of vertical drops and three Class V rapids (the highest level). Whichever river you choose, every full-day trip comes with a riverside lunch. Best of all? You're miles away from television, PlayStation, and your boss. Gotta love nature.

How much: For the Upper New River, day rates start at \$99 for adults, half-price for kids. The Gauley River starts at \$119 for adults, \$99 for kids.

Don't miss: The West Virginia State Fair, August 14-22. Located in Lewisburg, just over an hour from Oak Hill, the state fair has plenty of kid-friendly rides, crafts and entertainment.

Helpful hint: If you just want a day of rafting, pick a weekday. On Saturdays, the price is hiked.

For more info: aceraft.com, 1.800.787.3982



THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL GUIDE

If your family is always looking for a new adventure, look no further than National Geographic's *The 10 Best of Everything: Families* by Susan Magsamen. It's packed with "10 best" lists, from ice cream spots to skate parks to fall festivals all over the United States and even abroad. It even includes information on how to preserve those precious family memories,

a place to write wish lists for future trips, and what-to-pack reminders to make each vacation a breeze. \$21.95 • shop.nationalgeographic.com.



● **Linville North Carolina**

● You haven't been to the Blue Ridge Mountains until you've
 ● been to Grandfather Mountain, with its breathtaking views and
 ● some of the best alpine hiking in the South. Camp out under
 the stars at the Grandfather Campground where tents and
 RVs are welcome. Or if you aren't a fan of roughing it, you can
 even rent a cabin. The grounds have three bathhouses, all with
 showers, hot water, and even laundry facilities, so while you're
 communing with nature, you don't have to turn your back
 on civilization altogether. Maps in the on-site office direct
 you to nearby hiking trails, and a free vacation planner helps
 newbies decide where to start their sightseeing. Don't forget
 the marshmallows—no camping trip is complete without the
 s'mores.

How much: Rates start at \$20/day for a tent spot with water
 spigots and \$50/day for a cabin.

Don't miss: The views from the Linville Peak vantage point.
 To get there, you have to cross an 80-foot chasm on the Mile
 High Swinging Bridge—not for the faint of heart.

Helpful hint: The physical address of the campsite is
 different from their mailing address. So for your GPS, type
 in: 125 Profile View Road, Banner Elk, NC 28604, and you
 should be good to go. Also, their busiest months are July
 and October. If you're planning a trip for either month, you
 definitely want to call ahead and reserve a spot.

For more info: grandfatherrv.com, grandfather.com

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Smoky Mountains Tennessee

Take a hike—a scavenger hike, that is. The Scavenger Hike Adventures and Mountain Journal by John and Kat LaFevre turns hiking into an interactive game. It's a guidebook to designated trails, and you follow the clues to find really cool stuff, like an old steam engine that rolled off a mountain, a tree that was clawed apart by a bear and even a giant natural

rock house that pioneers used as a shelter. Make it even more fun by naming a prize to be won by the family member that racks up the most points (each treasure found is worth 10 points). The book contains 14 easy, moderate, and extreme hikes with over 200 treasures to find. Adventures range from an easy stroller-accessible half-mile trek, to a 10-mile extreme challenge. Perfect for little and big explorers alike.



How much: \$14.95 for the book. The hikes are free!

Don't miss: The 120-year-old cabin that you can explore inside and out on adventure number two.

Helpful hint: You can order the book online or just pick it up at the Welcome Center of the Smoky Mountains.

For more info: scavengerhikeadventures.com

Atlanta Georgia

If you love Swiss Family Robinson, then you don't want to miss the new Sky Hike at Stone Mountain. The nation's largest family adventure course in the treetops is built out of ropes and wooden bridges. Choose from a 12-foot or 24-foot high course (or for daredevils try the super challenge at 40 feet in the air). Explore the quarter-mile trek with your kids by balancing on single ropes high above the ground, leaping from one wooden slat to another and climbing to the top of vertical net bridges. Besides a can-do attitude, you need closed-toe shoes to participate.

How much: Get a one-day adventure pass for \$21 for kids and \$26 for adults.

Don't miss: Stay until nightfall and experience the infamous Stone Mountain Laser Show. The 40-minute spectacle is complete with special effects, surround sound and a grand fireworks finale. Best of all, it's free with the \$8 parking pass.

Helpful hint: Kids must be at least 44 inches tall for Sky Hike. If you have children that are too small to participate, there are plenty of other activities at the park for them to do while the older kids climb in the treetops.

For more info: stonemountainpark.com

Colleen Oakley is a freelance writer and avid traveler based in Atlanta, Georgia. Her work has appeared in Marie Claire, Women's Health, Fitness, Shape and Redbook. She is currently penning her first novel.