

Vacation Trends

Camping: Family Fun For Less

(NAPSA)—A great vacation doesn't have to require a lot of money. Something as fun and easy as camping at the nearest state or national park can save you some cash as you relax with the whole family. Try these tips:

Choosing The Perfect Spot

With a little research you can probably find a free or low-cost campground not too far from home. Many offer hiking trails that appeal to different ages and levels of experience, from beginner to advanced. State and national parks often provide nature maps for self-guided tours, and some even have nature centers with formal programs led by rangers who can teach you about local plants and animals.

Many parks include rivers and lakes for additional recreation. Fishing and canoeing are popular pastimes, so inquire ahead about fishing licenses and boat rentals. The more adventurous might want to try rafting or even kayaking, which may be provided by nearby touring companies that will arrange day trips, complete with instruction and gear.

For overnights, you can choose between parks that offer cabins for shelter or designated spaces for tents, and you'll likely find open pits for campfires close to your accommodations. Both types of site typically have "comfort stations" nearby with running water and restrooms. Sitting around a campfire at night, telling stories and roasting marshmallows, can be a truly memorable event.

What To Bring

Before you go, think like a scout and "be prepared." Check local weather reports and be



Camping can be a fun and affordable family getaway.

ready, whether that means possible rain or cooler-than-usual temperatures. A first-aid kit is well advised, if only for minor scrapes and unexpected blisters.

Some things to take along on the trip to make you feel at home include the basic necessities of a tent, sleeping bags, appropriate clothing, food and cooking utensils. Camping supply stores provide specialty items, such as kerosene lamps, propane stoves and other conveniences.

One item you shouldn't take along with you is firewood. Buy it when you get there and burn it at the campground. Don't bring it home: Moving firewood can spread the Emerald Ash Borer beetle, a nasty pest that is killing ash trees at a rapid rate. To keep the woods healthy and available for all to enjoy—people and critters alike—promise not to move firewood. For more information, visit www.stopthebeetle.info.

Most state parks can be found online through your favorite search engine, or to research national parks, visit the Web site www.nps.gov/findapark/.