

Budget-friendly Summer Fun for Married Couples with Kids

Do you need fun, affordable ideas for your next family outing?

Sharing quality time with your family can build stronger relationships and foster a sense of wellbeing for all family members. The family vacation is a traditional part of the American summer and is intended to forge these family bonds in a relaxed environment. We all know that family vacations can often be expensive due to costs such as fuel, rental cars, food, lodging and even plane tickets. Don't despair! There are a variety of ideas for family fun both inside and outside of the house that will not break the bank. This tip sheet will offer some direction on how you can make that happen!

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If you ask some married couples on a fixed income the best way to keep their kids occupied during the summer, you may be met with confusion or blank stares. In today's economy, fuel, childcare and other financial obligations stretch budgets to the point where there is little money left to finance family fun. Though financial challenges can make

vacations and other summer activities seem impossible, effective planning can help create enjoyable and cost effective summer fun even if leaving town is not possible.

Summer Camps

Most youth organizations realize that some families will need financial support to participate in summer programs. In an effort to encourage economic diversity in their programs, most camps structure their budgets to include funds for scholarships. Some camps are also reaching out to military families and their children by offering camps free of charge. It is best to inquire about these scholarships during the school year before summer camp season begins.

From summer camps to sports camps, there are often donors willing to ease a family's burden by sponsoring the child. If your child is not interested in attending a traditional camp, there are a variety of other options available. For example, a major computer software corporation offers free clinics to children where they can learn skills such as how to create their own music or PowerPoint Presentations.

Be sure to use all of the resources available to you when searching for financial aid to send your child to camp. A few



good first steps include asking teachers, librarians, and school administrators as well as community agencies, churches and other faith based organization for suggestions. Remember that many organizations do not advertise the fact that they offer scholarships, so contact camp directors and outside organizations directly for more information. You can also try an internet search by typing the following keywords/search terms into a search engine:

- Free things to do in your city
- Free summer camps
- Camp scholarships

Camps are not the only activity that can provide summer fun. The following activities can also be enjoyed for little or no cost.

1. National Parks/ Wildlife refuges

Share the love of the outdoors with your family, while instilling the importance of caring for the earth. Contact the park before you go for maps, events, prices, and tips for what to bring when you visit. Also, be prepared for changes in the weather. Asking the right questions before you go will eliminate surprises later about the park conditions, accessibility of trails, busy times to visit and other concerns. Take into account your family members' limitations regarding physical exertion. Nature outings can be physically challenging due to the rough terrain and the often high temperatures.

The following websites will get you started with finding information on opportunities in or near your area:

<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/refugeLocatorMaps/index.html>

<http://www.nps.gov>

2. Local Museums and Libraries

Whether your family enjoys history, arts, sports, technology, or any number of other interests, museums are a fun and educational way to spend time together as a family.

Contact your local museum for any dates and times that they may offer free family days or reduced admission. If you don't have access to a computer, or there is not a museum nearby, you can also visit your local library. Libraries typically have a lot of great activities planned for the summer. You can access the internet there to research other fun and cost-effective summer activities in your area.

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3. Fairs and Festivals

Many states have fairs in the summer, but sometimes these fairs can be costly when you calculate the price of parking, admission, food and activity tickets. Plan in advance how much money you are willing to spend at the fair so you do not exceed your budget. Setting limits up front is a good starting point. For

instance, you can tell your children that they may go on three rides throughout the day. You can also pack a picnic lunch instead of buying food at the fair and research whether the fair has discount tickets if you come with a group.

If attending a state fair would be a stretch for your budget, in all likelihood there are also other free events in or near your town with similar activities as those found at the local fair or festival. Check your local newspaper, online calendar, or chamber of commerce for schedules of upcoming activities.

4. Local Parks and Recreation Programs

Most areas have at least some form of a Parks and Recreation Department. These organizations and the parks in their care are funded by your tax dollars, and as such, some of their basic features are offered for free. For fun, you can pack a lunch and a blanket and enjoy a different park every weekend.

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departments are also typically responsible for organizing and operating camp programs. Be sure to check with your local Parks Department to confirm pricing on services and activities.

5. Volunteerism

Opportunities to teach the benefits of volunteerism to your kids are plentiful. Consider age appropriate volunteer options for your family to do together. Contact local organizations with community-oriented goals and ask what sort of support they might need. Habitat for Humanity is one example of an organization that offers volunteer programs for older children. You can also start on the path to “going green” by beginning to recycle household items like paper, plastic and glass. The kids may enjoy helping you sort through your discarded items.

For other ideas try visit these websites:

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

<http://www.redcross.org/>

6. Home Improvement

Your “Honey-do List” may include activities such as cleaning out the shed/garage, working on the garden, or painting your home. These can

be fun activities to do with your children while teaching them the importance of work. If you have a lot of things you wish to get rid of you can also have a yard sale and maybe even make a few bucks in the

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process. Use the kids to help get you set-up and organized, or to work as sales people! This is a good way to start them on the path to “going green” via recycle/reuse strategies. These activities can also teach them money management. A lemonade stand is also a great way to involve children in your project, as it can occur at the same time as the yard sale. You can use the money earned for a great night out with the family.

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alike. By organizing a potluck style event for your block, everyone can pitch in and it will distribute the cost evenly. In some communities you can talk to the city about blocking off a street if you live in a subdivision or away from a major thoroughfare. Organizing this type of event can create a sense of community around you. Consider planning the event to coincide with a summer holiday such as the 4th of July or Memorial Day.

8. Camping At Home

If you can't afford to go away on a camping trip, arrange to camp out at home. You can set up a tent in the backyard, bring snacks and board games, sing campfire songs, and tell stories. Even if you don't have a backyard or a tent, you can always build a fort using couch cushions, bed sheets, or other materials that are on hand already.

Spending time as a family is a wonderful investment you can make towards strengthening your marriage and family. It doesn't take a great deal of cash to make a memorable summer for you and your loved ones. The only necessary ingredient is taking a little time to be creative and plan your activities. Be mindful that not all family outings will go as planned, so be flexible. A lot of times accidental mishaps lead to new adventures and new reasons to laugh.

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These are just a few ideas to get you started thinking about fun, inexpensive ways to share time together. Remember to utilize the resources that are available to you. Your greatest resource is your imagination and creativity!