

# SUMMER FUN

and the living is easy!

Summer should be a time for having fun and relaxing but the prospect of six weeks of school holidays is enough to fill even the most imaginative parent with dread. With some help from the website [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com), **Iain Duff** has come up with 21 ways to have more fun camping with your kids.

## 1 GO WILD SWIMMING

Is there a better way to cool off on a hot summer's day than plunging into the cold waters of a river or lake? Wild swimming – or outdoor swimming – is for those who don't want to be confined to an indoor pool and it's becoming more and more popular. Rivers, lakes, seas – even lidos – are all part of the experience and the UK is blessed with places adventurous swimmers can go to get back to nature. Luckily many of them are close to campsites. In the Lake District for example, Stonethwaite campsite in Borrowdale

gives access to a series of sublime waterfalls pools, while Wasdale Head campsite is close to Britain's deepest lake.

If you're going to try wild swimming for the first time, choose a hot day and make sure you are warm. If you really don't like the cold you might want to take a wetsuit. It's also great for your health and immune system. Before you go, buy a guidebook like Daniel Start's *Wild Swimming* (a new 2013 edition is out now) or visit a website dedicated to the pastime, research a place with good swimming and then see if there is camping nearby. Importantly, make sure you follow the safety advice and never go on your own. You'll be guaranteed an amazing experience.



TRAVEL

SITES

SKILLS

GEAR

COVER  
FEATURE

## 2 GET ON YOUR BIKE

With the feats of Bradley Wiggins, Mark Cavendish, Sir Chris Hoy and the rest of the Team GB squad still fresh in the mind, cycling has never been more popular. Cycle touring (ie using your bike as a method of transport between campsites) is perhaps a little ambitious for a family holiday, but take the bikes with you on a summer camping trip and you'll open up a world of possibilities. Many of Britain's best cycle routes are in areas blessed with campsites, so it's easy to find a pitch to use as a base and explore the surrounding area on two wheels. A good example is Callow Top campsite in the Peak District. It offers on-site cycle hire for all ages (including child seats and tag alongs), which means you don't have to worry about transporting your bikes. From the site you have direct access to the traffic free Tissington Trail cycle route. Another site that offers bike hire is Kelling Heath in Norfolk, and this has plenty of opportunities for cycling without leaving the site.

## STAY AT CALLOW TOP HOLIDAY PARK

Buxton Road, Sandybrook, Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE6 2AQ  
☎ 01335 344020  
🌐 [www.callowtop.co.uk](http://www.callowtop.co.uk)

## KELLING HEATH

Sandy Hill Lane, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7HW  
☎ 01263 588181  
🌐 [www.kellingheath.com.uk](http://www.kellingheath.com.uk)

## 3 PITCH UP FOR SUMMER

It might seem like a bonkers idea, but why not decamp your family to a local campsite for the whole summer? It obviously wouldn't be possible for everyone, but if your family circumstances allow it this could be the makings of a perfect summer. The kids will love the freedom of life on the site and should never be short of things to do or friends to do them with. And with an electric hook-up you can have as many of the luxuries of home as you like in your tent. Even a TV and satellite dish! If you have to go to work every day, you can pick a site handy

enough to make the daily commute. I did just that a couple of summers ago and the only problem was dragging myself away from the site when I knew it was going to be a glorious day. But if you're lucky you might be able to work from 'home', which basically means setting up the laptop on the camping table, signing up to the onsite Wi-Fi and enjoying the sunshine. Make sure your site is close enough to home that you can nip back any time to deal with domestic matters, wash clothes etc. One obvious issue is the expense of booking a pitch for six weeks during the peak holiday season, but it's worth asking your local campsite if they would do you a discount for a long-term booking. I was lucky enough to negotiate a pitch for around £10 a night, which would work out at around £400 for the whole summer.



## 4 STAR GAZING

One of the best things about hot, sunny summer days, is that they are usually accompanied by warm, clear nights, which are perfect for sitting outside and observing the skies. The fact that campsites are more often than not in fairly remote areas, where there is very little light pollution means you have optimum conditions for watching the stars. Certain parts of the country are better than others for stargazing. Galloway, Kielder Forest Park and Exmoor considered the best because the skies above are so dark. All three have lots of good quality campsites. While a pair of binoculars will come in handy, you don't need to be an expert or have expensive, high-tech equipment to enjoy it – one of the highlights of my camping year was watching a spectacular meteor shower as I sat outside my tent on Middlewood Farm campsite near Robin Hoods Bay in Yorkshire last August. It obviously helps to know what you're looking at though, and there are many apps you can download for your smartphone to help you navigate your way across the sky. Even better is the *I-Spy guide to the Night Sky* which will cost you just £2.50 but is packed with all the information you'll need to find the constellations and planets. Of course if you're very lucky you might even get to see the spectacular natural lightshow that is Aurora Borealis, more commonly known as the Northern Lights. To misquote America's Top 10 host Casey "voice of Shaggy on Scooby Doo" Kasem, "keep your feet on the ground and keep looking at those stars."

**STAY AT**  
**KENBRIDGE HOTEL CAMPSITE**  
 New Galloway, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3PR  
 ☎ 01644 420211  
 🌐 [www.kenbridgehotel.co.uk](http://www.kenbridgehotel.co.uk)

## 5 FISHING

If you or your partner enjoys a spot of fishing now and again, why not take your little one along too? They will be interested to learn how the rod works and will be excited to see the fish. You could take lots of games and books along or simply enjoy the serenity with imaginative stories and quiet games of eye spy. There are several sorts of campsites that allow fishing, starting with specialist sites that have developed their camping facilities alongside purpose built fishing pools. There are other less specialist sites that also have fishing pools as part of their facilities. Fishing is often charged as an extra so check in advance. Many sites also adjoin canals and rivers or even have waterways running through them. You'll have to buy a permit so check there are day tickets available before you go, as if you have to join the local club or buy an annual pass, it can get expensive.

**STAY AT**  
**BATACOMBE VALE CAMPSITE**  
 Batacombe Vale, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6BW  
 ☎ 01749 831207  
 🌐 [www.batacombevale.co.uk](http://www.batacombevale.co.uk)

## 6 INSECT WATCHING

Give your child a bug box and see how many creepy crawlies they can find on the campsite. Once they have a box full ask them to count them and describe which ones they like best and why. Once they've finished studying them they can find a good place to set them free. If there's one thing that's true about warm-weather camping, it's that you're going to encounter a lot more bugs than you do at home. Take along a butterfly net and/or bug catcher to observe some of them up close. A field guide will help you identify them – the British Ecological Society produced a glossy guide to Campsite Wildlife that features all sorts of bugs.

## 7 WATER SPORTS

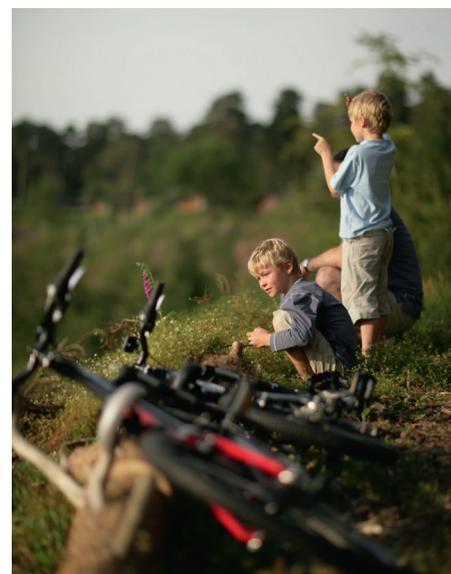
There are a huge number of sports that involve water, either in it, on it or under it and the summer holidays are exactly the time to sample them, especially if you can combine it with a camping trip to the coast or the edge of a lake. Activities like snorkeling, waterskiing, white water rafting, windsurfing, surfing, bodyboarding, diving, canoeing and kayaking can all be enjoyed no matter your level of expertise – there are always real experts on hand to give lessons (for a fee of course).

## 8 GARDEN CAMPING

If spending the whole summer on a campsite isn't a realistic option, the next best thing is to pitch a tent in the garden and let the youngsters enjoy nights under canvas without leaving home. It's a mini-adventure for the kids and a great way to get them used to camping if they've not been away that often. The beauty is that if the weather takes a turn for the worst it's easy to pop back inside and spend the rest of your night indoors.

## 9 FORAGE FOR FOOD

It takes a bit of nerve, and some of your party might need a bit of persuasion, but foraging by the coast for your own grub is the ultimate in back to nature eating. Lots of coastal plants are edible so get a good field guide and go wild. It should go without saying that you should NEVER eat anything you aren't 100% sure of. So what is good? Well, sea beet is just like spinach while samphire and seaweed will give you a salty taste of the open sea. Sea lettuce can be eaten raw while dry sugar kelp makes great seaside crisps. Whelks and limpets are perfectly edible and shrimps are delicious straight from the beach. Mussels straight off the rocks are an even better bet.





## 10 PACK A PICNIC

If foraging is a step too far then pack a good picnic for your summer camping excursions. Don't settle for soggy cheese and pickle sandwiches and hard boiled eggs though. Get creative with your cooking and make something a bit more adventurous. One of the secrets to great camping food is to make part of your meal at home and take it with you. A dish like pasta with sun-dried tomato pesto is a great example, you can make the pesto at home, pop it in a Tupperware box and toss it with the pasta on the campsite. You could also bake some muffins or banana bread and bring that along too. In a sealed box they will last for most of your trip. Also make use of your barbecue – grill some chicken in your favourite flavour and use it as a sandwich filling between two slices of fresh crusty bread. If there's a farm shop nearby, you should be able to pick up some interesting pickles or mayonnaise as an accompaniment. And if you don't fancy cooking you might be able to get some delicious pies instead.

## 11 MEET UP WITH OLD FRIENDS

The summer holidays are a perfect time to reconnect with friends you've not seen for a long time. Get onto Facebook and arrange a get-together, and combine your visit with a camping trip. In fact, even better would be to meet up on a site for a few days. If your friends have got kids your own children will love having new pals to kick around with on the site, leaving you to catch up on the glory days over a bottle of wine or two.

## 12 GEOCACHING

Geocaching is basically a sophisticated cross between treasure hunting

and orienteering for the modern world. It might use up-to-date technology, but it has its origins in the good old-fashioned treasure hunt and letterboxing – where small boxes were hidden in the wild, and their locations only shared by word of mouth. People who discovered them placed letters or postcards inside, and the next person to find the box would take the letters and post them.

When hand-held GPS devices became widespread about 10 years ago, geocaching took off, using the internet to share the location of caches. The first cache was hidden in America in May 2003 and by 2010, there were thought to be caches in over 200 countries, and there are over five million geocachers. A cache can take on a variety of different forms, but the most common is a small, plastic box, usually containing a logbook and some sort of "treasure". The geocaching rule states that if you take something, then you must leave something of equal value.

### TOP TIPS

- Have a practice run close to home so you can get a feel for it somewhere you know well
- Carry a pen to sign the log book - some caches are not big enough to store one, or they may not work
- Do not forget to log your find online

## 13 NATURE WALKS

Pack some food, a pad and pens and take your brood on a big expedition to a nearby park/nature reserve. Children will love the excitement of planning routes, drawing any birds and animals they see and finding a quiet spot for lunch. You could also set them tasks or create a list of likely sights you'll see so they can tick them off as you come across them. Little explorers love the country and there's usually plenty to see and do for all. You

could make up imaginative games as you go along or tell mystical stories of fairies, knights on horses. If the weather isn't great, don't let it put you off. Raincoats, wellies and good wet weather gear will keep you suitably dry and in a child's eyes, will probably add to the entertainment. You'll find details of some great walks on [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com).

## 14 LOCAL FETES, FAIRS AND MARKETS

Local events are often in abundance throughout the holidays so it's worth keeping tabs on the local listings for the area you're in to ensure you don't miss out on anything. Look on the notice board in your campsite's reception or information room as well.





## 15 TREE CLIMBING

The original and still the best - tree climbing is one of those timeless activities that children never seem to tire of. If you're lucky enough to have a tree in your back garden, they'll most likely have mastered their climbing technique, otherwise the park or a friend's garden can be equally as fun. Campsites are often surrounded by trees and there are a growing number of 'natural' sites where youngsters are positively encouraged to climb. Just make sure they remain safe and take one step at a time, it's also a good idea to set a branch limit to ensure they don't go too high.

## 16 GET CRAFTY

Kids love making and doing at the best of times, and on a campsite it's a great way to while away a few hours on the odd occasion (ahem) when the sun doesn't shine. It's a good idea to take along a craft box you've made up at home, packed with pens, pencils, glue sticks, sticky tape, scissors, card and coloured paper. The kids can set themselves up on the dining table or on the floor in the bedroom area and create until their heart's content while you get on with the important business of reading a book or resting your eyes. You could of course join in yourself if you're feeling particularly creative.

## 17 BORN FREE

Many towns and cities have free galleries open to the public. Depending on your child's age, they are a perfect opportunity to teach them about art, photography and the whole notion of creativity. There are often kids' classes and talks designed for children so it's



worth checking your local museums website or local events guide to ensure you know of any up-coming events.

Museums - especially the big, old ones - are full of excitement for children of all ages. More sedate art galleries are perhaps best saved for older children but like so many places these days the flagship city museums have a relaxed policy towards children and welcome visitors of all ages. Not only that but many museums are free of charge - including some great ones in the capital, such as the British Museum, National Gallery, Natural History Museum and Tate - so if you find the experience is lost on your children you won't have wasted any money.

But most children will be fascinated by the varied collections - think dinosaurs, Egyptian relics, Roman coins and stuffed animals! Furthermore, your local museum may also run specific activity days or culture trails for children, to help the exhibits really come to life, and some have special areas for children, with books, toys and colouring sheets. Have a look at the indoor play page on [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com) for more info.

Going to a festival is a major part of the Great British Summer for many families now but it can be an expensive business. However there are hundreds of local festivals up and down the country that are free - search local events websites for details.

## 18 STONE THROWING

A simple past-time that still packs a punch where fun is concerned, your kids will love spending an afternoon by the sea/ lake/river throwing and skimming stones as far as possible. Set them challenges and competitions to add to the fun and take a picnic to make an afternoon of it. Don't try it on the campsite though - those caravan windows can be expensive to repair...

## 19 COOL IT!

Another way to cool off - or just to surprise your kids with a well-placed squirt - is to take some water guns. In my day an old washing-up liquid bottled filled from the tap was enough to keep us entertained for hours, but nowadays, for a few pounds you can pick up a water blaster that looks like something the Ghosbusters used to zap the Stay Puft marshmallow man.

## 20 THROWAWAY FUN

A Frisbee is one of those toys you might already have at home that will give lots of fun at the campsite. But even better is the Aerobie, which is like a Frisbee with a hole in the middle, and can be thrown much further. Just make sure there's enough space and that you're not annoying fellow campers. Even better, head to the beach or to a big open playing field and you can run around as much as you like.

## 21 BIRD WATCHING

Grab some pens, a pad and some binoculars and head outside for a bird watching afternoon. Your child could draw any birds they see and make a note of their favourite breeds. ■

