

Tag Along with the Kids to a Family Camp this Summer

By Jason Sheftell

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You ever get envious when you drop your kid off at summer camp thinking how wonderful it would be if you could stay? At camp, with your kids? And just play the day away. Well, certain travel-oriented summer camps let you do just that. Promising fun for the entire family, camp programs combining sports, science and nature programs put parents and their kids together for educational and physical adventure.

The **Whale Camp** (tel. 800/549-4253; www.whalecamp.com) has family programs for parents and children five years of age and up. Located on Grand Manan Island by the Bay of Fundy between Maine and Canada's Nova Scotia, the camp is set amidst dunes, inlets and small islands. The Bay of Fundy is known for having the highest tides in the world. The combination of the high tides and the clear water make for a feeding frenzy for marine life. The whales come to nourish and breed, as the Bay of Fundy is known as the "nursing ground" for the North Atlantic Right Whale, one of the rarest whales still swimming. The staff is made up of qualified marine biologists and professional naturalists. With a mission of providing a place to "experience the grandeur, serenity, and beauty of nature," Whale Camp ensures children and adults leave with a deep respect for their natural habitat. Activities include sailing, marine biology classes on whales, porpoises, and sharks, nature walks, kayaking, and even pointers on photography. The one-week family program that departs from Bangor, Maine, costs \$1,195 for each parent and \$895 for individual child. Sessions take place from July 15 to July 22, 2006. The camp provides transportation from Bangor, Maine on the first day of camp. Accommodations for families are in beachfront cottages. All meals except one supper are included in the price of the week. Bird watching, hunting for seashells and other coastal activities add to the detailed education on area marine life.

The **Family Vacation Center in Santa Barbara** (tel. 805/893-3123; www.familyvacationcenter.com) combines a family vacation with camp-type activities. Located on the campus of University of California Santa Barbara, the Family Vacation Center has been entertaining families since 1969. Activities include golf, tennis, swimming, casino and musical entertainment at night, volleyball, surf lessons, kayaking, body surfing, arts and crafts, a pinewood derby build your own car race, and seminars taught by university professors. A typical week includes bonding time for parents and gives kids a chance to interact with those similar in age. These weeklong programs take place all summer long starting on July 1 and lasting through August 26, 2006. The first day of regular registration for summer of 2006 was December 1 with payments due before April 3, 2006. Rates differ based on age, with all participants thirteen years or above costing \$780, children from 8 to 12 costing \$720, four to seven costing \$695, kids one to three costing \$595 and children under one costing \$360. Cribs are \$25 each. Those prices include all meals, lodging and activities for the weeklong family vacation. The staff consists mainly of outstanding University of California Santa Barbara students. Of course, if you get antsy, a few extra days around Santa Barbara can be filled with ocean side dining and more beach and shopping fun. **Hearst Castle** (tel. 800/444-4445; www.hearstcastle.com) is 150 miles from Santa Barbara proper up the California coast.

For gay and lesbian-parented families, **Rainbow Families Great Lakes** (tel. **800/908-8491**; www.rfgl.org) is a great option for meeting similar families from around the world. From July 8 to July 13, 2006, the camp has programs geared to "celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersexed and transgendered (LGBT) parents and their families." Growing out of a collected interest to provide non-traditional families with an active, educational, and fun environment where togetherness comes first, the Rainbow Families Great Lakes family week takes place around the town of Saugatuck which is on the banks of Lake Michigan and the Kalamazoo River. Cost of the summer program starts at \$150 per family with children attending for just \$50 for the first child over 9 and \$30 for each additional child. While the 2006 program is currently being planned, the 2005 program included sunsets on the beach, essay writing classes, stories from other children growing up with gay and lesbian parents, toddler play, barbecues, berry pickings and family gatherings. Planned and organized in conjunction with **COLAGE** (tel. **415/861-5437**; www.colage.org), the Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere, the weeklong camp celebrates the experience of growing up with gay and lesbian parents in a bucolic setting.

In addition to the Family Camp options from national organizations, some private summer camps gear themselves to the ultimate family experience. The **Wonder Valley Family Camp** (tel. **800/821-2801**; www.wondervalleyfamilycamp.com) located in the foothills of California's Sierra Mountains has two one-week sessions running August 6-12 and 13-19, 2006, that promises all the excitement of sleep-away camp life. The costs for the week run \$989 for adults 18 or older and go down based on age to \$259 for children from zero to two years old. Most rooms accommodate up to six people with additional fees tacked on for bigger rooms for up to eight. The camp is equipped with an equestrian ring, an aquatic center where you can learn to sail, basketball courts, tennis courts, volleyball courts, tetherball, baseball and football fields, and a brand new skateboard park. One thing's for sure, the sprawling buffets served in the big lodge at Wonder Valley sure beat sleep away camp chow. Hope they still make that multi-colored bug juice.

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***Note:** This information was accurate when it was published, but can change without notice. Please be sure to confirm all rates and details directly with the companies in question before planning your trip.*

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- **Provider:** Multiple Providers