

# Frugal Activities for the Whole Family

Cool Frugal Summer Activities the Whole Family Will Love



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## INTRODUCTION

With few exceptions, we all look forward to summer. Kids love it because they get a break from school. Adults love it because it's a great time for a vacation. And almost everyone has a favorite summer activity that they can't wait to get involved in.

Summer can also be a very expensive time of year. There's so much to do, and we want to cram it all in before cold weather strikes again. But by the time we visit the beach, go to an amusement park, make weekend trips to the pool and do all of the other stuff we want to do, it can put a major strain on the budget.

But summer fun doesn't have to break the bank. There are lots of things families can do for cheap, and some are even free. In this report, you'll find lots of summer activity ideas that will fit into virtually any budget.

### Swimming for Less

On a hot summer day, one of the most popular destinations is the local pool. Admission isn't terribly expensive, but if you go as a family several times over the course of the season, it can really add up. By the time fall arrives, you might wonder why you just didn't save up a little more money and go to the beach!

If you love to swim, there are alternatives to the community pool. Here are some to think about:

\* The lake – If there's a state park with a lake nearby, you may be able to swim for cheap or free there. Some have beach-type areas with sand, so the kids can have a blast building castles and burying one another. It's kind of like taking a trip to the coast, only without so many expenses.

\* A friend's pool – If you have a friend with a pool, perhaps you could take the kids over to swim from time to time. In return, you could take refreshments for both families or invite the friend's family over to your house for other activities.

\* The gym – If you have a gym membership, you may be able to bring guests to the pool for free or at a reduced rate. Check with your gym for details.

\* Quick-set pools – Those inexpensive quick-set pools have become quite popular among families with kids. All you do is blow up the inflatable ring, fill the inside with water, and you have an instant pool! They come in many sizes, and some are priced under \$50. Larger ones are only a few hundred dollars, and by the time you figure in gas and pool admission, they can pay for themselves in just a couple of years.

If you're fortunate enough to live near a river, there are all sorts of summer activities you can participate in. Canoeing is lots of fun for adults, teens and older children. Innertubing is especially popular among the younger set. Or you can just jump in and play in low water areas.

Of course, you don't have to get in the water to have fun with water. Here are some other wet and wild activity ideas that are fun for all ages:

\* Water guns – Having a water gun fight is a classic summer activity for kids. But there's no reason that the grown-ups can't get involved too! You can find inexpensive water guns at the dollar store for next to nothing, and if properly cared for, they will last for many summers to come.

\* Water slides – You don't have to visit a water park to go down a water slide! You can buy slides that hook up to your water hose for \$20 or less and use them right in your own back yard.

\* Sprinklers – It's not necessary to buy any toys at all when the kids want to cool off on a hot day. You can simply hook up the sprinkler and let them run through it. If you don't have one, just get out the water hose and start spraying. It's guaranteed fun, and you won't have to pay a dime for it.

## **Enjoying Nature**

Summer is a wonderful time of year for getting out and enjoying all that nature has to offer. It doesn't have to cost anything, either. Many nature areas have hiking trails that you can access for free, and some don't even charge for parking.

Some state parks offer nature programs that the whole family can enjoy. These programs have various themes, including plant identification, bird watching and more. Check your local paper for dates, times and locations. You may have to register to participate, but there is rarely any cost.

No matter where you live, there is some sort of natural wonder that's not too far off. There are large rock formations, caverns, waterfalls and more throughout the country. Visiting these places is often free, and if there is any cost it's usually quite affordable. If you're not familiar with the attractions in your area, pick up a travel guide from a nearby visitors' center or search for information online.

Camping is the ultimate nature activity for families. RVs and pop-up campers offer all the amenities of home, but they aren't necessary. All you need is a tent, some sleeping bags, food and drinks and a grill or camp stove. Most campgrounds offer tent space for a small fee, or you can simply set up camp in your back yard.

Fishing is another favorite activity for adults and children alike. You can find poles in all sizes at your favorite sporting goods or discount store. Fishing licenses are generally required for adults and teenagers, but not for kids under certain ages (which vary from state to state). If you only fish on occasion, you can save money by buying a short-term license in most states.

## **Gardening**

Many adults enjoy gardening in the late spring and early summer. But did you know that it's a great activity for kids, too? Even toddlers can get in on the act!

Planting a flower garden is a great starter project. You can buy trays of flowers at a discount store for next to nothing. Let the kids help pick out flowers in a variety of colors, and plant them together. They'll be able to see the results right away, and they can be responsible for caring for them throughout the season.

Vegetable gardening is another great family activity. It provides an opportunity to teach children about good nutrition while having fun as a family. The results generally take longer to see than

flower gardening, but the end result is well worth the wait. Even the pickiest eaters are usually eager to try foods that they have grown!

## **Festivals and Carnivals**

Even the smallest of towns usually has some sort of festival during the summer months. These celebrations feature a wide variety of activities that adults and children of all ages can enjoy. It's easy to spend a small fortune at such events, but if you watch your spending you can have a good time without breaking the bank.

Many festivals offer free concerts as a means of drawing larger crowds. Street performers such as magicians, clowns and mimes are great free entertainment for the kids. Kiddie rides, face painting and other activities may be free or paid. If they're not free, set a budget and have your kids choose things to do that fit within that budget.

One of the most expensive aspects of festivals and carnivals is the food. To avoid overspending, pack a lunch or eat before you go to the event. Bring some snacks and drinks along if they are allowed on the premises, and if you must buy something during the festival, consider going to a nearby store instead of buying from overpriced food vendors.

## **The Zoo**

One destination that kids of all ages tend to enjoy is the zoo. Wild animals aren't something that most of us see every day, so watching them up close and personal can be a real treat. There are zoos to fit every budget. If traveling to a large zoo is out of your price range, there's sure to be an alternative that's within your budget.

A popular and inexpensive option among younger children is a petting zoo. These zoos may not feature large animals such as elephants and giraffes, but they make up for that by allowing physical contact with the animals. Kids enjoy petting and feeding the goats, pigs, ponies and ducks. Bring a camera along and capture some memories that are sure to be cherished for years to come!

## **Museums and Galleries**

If you're looking for a fun and educational activity for the entire family, you can't beat a trip to a museum or art gallery. You don't have to live in a large city to visit one. Most smaller cities, and many small towns, have at least one museum or gallery of some sort.

Museums come in a wide variety of flavors. Art and historical museums are among the most common. But you can also find museums based on all sorts of interesting themes. Museums featuring oddities (such as Ripley's Believe It or Not) are popular among children and adults alike. There are also museums geared toward children that make learning fun. If you're not sure what types of museums can be found in your area, check with your local Chamber of Commerce.

Many museums offer free admission, so all you have to do is resist the urge to splurge in the gift shop. Some charge admission, but prices are usually reasonable. If you want the best possible deal, consider organizing a group trip. Call ahead to find out how large of a group you will need to qualify for a discount. You could invite members of your church or an organization to which you belong to meet the requirement.

## **Visiting Friends and Family**

If you're looking for a change of scenery on a budget, visiting friends and family who live out of town could be the answer. If you can stay with them instead of renting a hotel room, you could even make a vacation out of it with very little expense.

If you have family living in the Bahamas, that would make for a great summer vacation. But no matter where your friends or relatives live, there's bound to be something fun to do together. A simple dinner out at a popular local restaurant and trip to the movies can be an adventure when you're away from home. Or you could visit inexpensive local attractions such as nature areas, museums or petting zoos.

## **The Library**

When it comes to summer activities, going to the library may not be on your kids' list of favorites. But did you know that most libraries offer a variety of programs that appeal to children, teens and adults?

Most libraries sponsor a summer reading program for kids and teenagers. These programs usually feature prize drawings for children who read certain numbers of books while they're out of school. This is a great way to keep your child's reading skills up to par!

For young children, storytelling is a popular library activity. Some libraries also feature activities such as movie showings, craft classes and even concerts. Most of these activities are free, but they may require registration. Call your local library to find out the details.

## **Movies**

Going to the movies is a wonderful family activity year-round. In the summer, it's the perfect cure for boredom. And if you play your cards right, you can take the entire family without paying an arm and a leg.

Instead of going to the big chain theater, see if there is a dollar theater in your area. These theaters may not show the newest releases, but seats are cheap for every showing. Sometimes you can even go for as little as 50 cents per person!

If there's no dollar theater in your hometown, check matinee prices at the regular theater. These daytime showings on the weekends are usually significantly cheaper than nightly shows. Some theaters also have cartoon showings for cheap on weekend mornings. And some offer special discount programs that could save you money if you go to the movies frequently.

Watching movies at home is even less expensive than going to the theater. There's no temptation to buy giant tubs of expensive popcorn, and everyone can watch a rented movie for one low price. If there's a Redbox location near you, you can rent new releases there for \$1 per night. Or you could join Netflix and borrow as many movies as you like each month with no late fees for one low price.

Better yet, you can borrow movies for free. If you have a friend with a large DVD collection, inquire about borrowing a movie to watch every now and then. Or go to your local library and borrow some movies. Pop some microwave popcorn and dim the lights for an authentic theater experience.

## **Picnics in the Park**

The park is a wonderful destination for family fun in the summer. There's something for everyone in the family to do. Youngsters can play on slides, swings and such. Older children, teens and adults can shoot hoops, play softball or go walking on trails. Or you could bring along a Frisbee, find an open space and toss it around.

With all of these fun things to do, why not pack a lunch and make a day out of it? For the price of some sandwiches, drinks and dessert, the whole family can have a blast and get some exercise. If you prefer a hot lunch, many parks have shelters with grills that you can use for free when they are not reserved.

## **Block Parties**

If you want to have a good time and have the room, try having a block party! Kids love them because they get a chance to play with the other kids in the neighborhood, and adults love them because it gives them an opportunity to socialize.

If you bear all of the expense yourself, having a block party is very expensive. But if you make it a potluck, you won't have to pay much at all. Just provide the main course, and ask each guest to bring a dish. You could even ask some to bring supplies such as paper plates, cups and napkins.

For cheap live entertainment, ask any neighbors that play an instrument to bring it along and have an impromptu jam session. Or have the kids that will attend prepare an act and have a talent show. You don't have to shell out big bucks to hire a band.

## **Amusement Parks**

Amusement parks aren't known for being inexpensive. One ticket for one day can cost as much as a couple of weeks' worth of other activities. But there are ways you can save on admission to your favorite park.

If you live fairly close to an amusement park, a season pass could be well worth the money spent. They usually cost about as much as 3 or 4 days' admission. So if you think you'll visit several times during the summer, a pass will pay for itself in no time.

Some employers offer discounts on admission to nearby amusement parks. They usually make announcements early in the summer. If you haven't heard anything from your employer, ask if they offer any special deals. If they don't, suggest that they check with the park in which you're interested to see if they could.

You can often get discounts on amusement park admission from a variety of sources. Check packages of canned soda and other items from the grocery store. Some fast food restaurants also distribute coupons for a certain percentage or dollar amount off of admission to amusement parks, so be sure to look in the bag when you get takeout. The best discounts are usually found late in the season.

## Other Frugal Summer Fun Ideas

The possibilities for frugal summer activities are endless. Here are some more ideas:

- Inquire about touring a local factory. Some offer interesting and educational programs, and you may even get some free samples afterward.
- Organize a family reunion. Rent a shelter at the park, and have a potluck dinner. You'll get to see family members that you haven't seen in ages, and the kids will have lots of fun playing together.
- Go on a family bike ride. Whether you load up and hit a bike trail or just ride around the neighborhood, everyone will get some exercise and an opportunity to bond.
- Volunteer. There are volunteer opportunities suitable for children as well as adults. Some organizations need lots of help, so the whole family may be able to get involved with the same project.
- Visit state, local or national government offices. Many offer tours that are very educational.
- Gaze at the stars. You can do this for free on a clear summer night, or you can visit the planetarium.
- Pick wild berries. They taste great right off the vine or bush, and you can also take them home to use in cobblers and other dishes that you can make with your kids.
- Get a jar and let the kids catch fireflies. You might even find yourself getting involved!
- Set up a scavenger hunt for the kids. Make a list of items found in nature, and let them loose in your back yard or at a nature park. Provide a special prize for the winner and consolation prizes for the runners up.
- Go to a minor league baseball game. Tickets are much cheaper than those for major league games, and the atmosphere is much more relaxed and family-friendly.
- Make a bird feeder by spreading peanut butter on a large pine cone and rolling it in birdseed. Hang it up in the front yard and watch as the birds flock to it.
- Create a family scrapbook. Have each child contribute a page or two, or assign each one a task such as creating page layouts, choosing photos and cropping.
- Check your local newspaper for event listings. You could find free concerts in the park, play groups and more.

Having fun in the summer isn't only for the well-to-do. There are plenty of activities you can do in your own back yard that are free or very inexpensive. And with some research, you can find affordable activities in your hometown and neighboring areas. There's no need to let summer boredom get the best of you and your family. Fun can be had on budgets of any size!

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