

Camping with kids

'Camping with kids doesn't have to be a trial.'

There are plenty of good reasons to take your kids on a camping holiday. Kids can keep themselves amused for hours in the Country side. A camping trip is a big adventure and they will come back with a better understanding of nature and Country side life.

The down side is that the country side is full of hazards and you can't let the kids out of your sight. It can be a full time job keeping them clean, fed and entertained - but what's new?

Kids love water. Given the chance, youngsters will spend all day splashing around. Find a nice, safe spot and all you will have to do is watch them and occasionally re-apply sun cream.

Kids also love wildlife. Even the smallest bug can be a source of endless interest, so pick a site with some animal interest. A torch will help you show them possums and other nightlife.

The basic checklist

The minimum equipment for a successful, comfortable camping trip of two nights or more is:

- Tent
- Airbeds or other form of mattress
- Sleeping bags and a few blankets
- Pillows
- Chairs and a table
- Cooking and eating utensils
- Gas cooking equipment (fires are great fun but are not always permitted)
- Gas lights
- Cooler for food and drink
- Plenty of food
- Water containers

Tent

Space and comfort are especially important when camping with kids. For two adults and two kids, aim for a tent that is at least 15 ft x 12 ft. Most tents this size have an external frame and are tall enough to stand in.

Better still is a two-room tent, with the back-room set aside for sleeping only. Keep it off-limits at other times to keep it clean.

Clothes

Whatever the weather, kids will get dirty on camping trips. The best approach is to let them loose in clothes that have reached the end of their useful life. The same goes for shoes. Pack each kid's clothes in a separate garbage bag and include something warm to sleep in. Bring additional garbage bags for the mountain of dirty clothing that will accumulate.

Toys

Leave anything mechanical/electric/breakable at home. Kids can have a ball with sticks, rocks, leaves, flowers, earth, sand and water. Supplement these with plastic containers, spades, boogie boards, balls and bats. For wet days, have at hand lots of paper, pens, kid-safe scissors, sticky tape, board games and books.

Food

The key to camp cooking is to keep it simple. Your standard might read something like this:

- Breakfast: cereal, milk and bread with jam/Vegemite.
- Lunch: sandwiches or noodles, followed by fresh fruit.
- Dinner: easy dishes like sausages, rissoles or chops with a salad or cooked vegetables. Stews are good. It's also a good plan to bring prepared pasta sauces that just need heating.
- Snacks: kids seem to eat more on camping trips, so bring plenty of fruit, muesli/fruit bars, biscuits and sultanas.
- Drinks: cordial and plenty of water.

Health

The biggest threat is sunburn. Use plenty of sunscreen and ensure they wear hats and neck-to-knee swimming costumes.

Bring a basic first aid kit with something for insect bites and cuts. Mosquitoes are often a problem, so pack a repellent.