

Start them young

Introducing your little ones to the wonders of Mother Nature through hiking and camping from an early age is a valuable thing, shares **TRACY MORRIS.**

I can see a little flame ignite inside my two children, Marli (6) and Ziggy (3), whenever we head outside for an adventure. There's something about the fresh air, the freedom of movement and wanderlust that fills them with energy.

Bush babies

Our little ones have always shared our love of the great outdoors, something I believe stems from my husband and I introducing them to camping, hiking and wild family adventures when they were not long out of my pouch.

Retreating into the wild, away from all mod cons, technology and home comforts is often put in the too-hard basket for new parents, especially when you think about how much gear you need to lug around when travelling with tots. But by planting the seed early, taking baby steps and stretching everyone's comfort zones bit by bit, there's no doubt that it will start your kids on the path to a lifelong love affair with Mother Nature.

As full-time travellers, camping and wilderness adventures are part of our everyday life and it's amazing to see the multitude of rewarding benefits and incredible life skills our little explorers are gaining along the way.

A lesson in responsibility

When setting up camp, teamwork is the name of the game. With our guidance, the kids always pitch in and help. We love finding camping spots that present simple problem-solving challenges for the kids. We take our time, assess the location, look for the flattest area to camp on and consider anything that may affect our set-up. We discuss the predicted weather forecast: will it rain, will it be windy, do we need shade, where will the waterline be at high tide? We love to see their little minds ticking away as this new challenge encourages them to think practically and use common sense.

Another important element is fire safety. With happy little hands offering to collect sticks and light fires, we take the time to teach them how to do it, showing them the best way to arrange the tinder, kindling and wood. Under our watchful eye, we allow them to strike a flint to make a spark that soon becomes a flame. It's a rewarding process

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to watch, especially as their main goal is not only to build the fire but also to roast marshmallows over it. That's what being a kid is all about right?

Nurturing nature

A love of the great outdoors also comes with respect. Whether we are crossing paths with a slithering snake, watching a huge crocodile rule his territory (from a distance), or simply sitting still observing a colony of ants build their nest, our kids have learnt to respect each animal as important, all having their place in nature and the food chain.

Speaking of food, when it comes to feeding our mini tribe, the kids are always involved. Our travels and adventures have allowed them to see first-hand where food comes from. Over the years, we have shared with them our knowledge of the land, the effect of the tides and how to hunt and fish sustainably. We regularly take them fishing, crabbing or let them play at the water's edge as their dad free dives for fish with his spear.

Picking up rubbish is also a regular occurrence for our family; no matter where we are, there is always time to collect and clean up any rogue pieces of rubbish.



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01 Cape Range Naonal Park, WA 02 Fire safety at Dampier Peninsula, WA 03 Happy campers at Kakadu, NT 04 Helping build the campfire 05 Cathedral Gorge, Purnululu National Park, WA 06 Quokka respect on Rottnest Island, WA. All images © The Blonde Nomads

Bursting with confidence

Spending more time together outdoors has brought us a lot of opportunities to connect as a family. With no distractions from devices and technology, the kids are more inclined to start a conversation and introduce themselves to new friends. The fresh air and changing locations inspire imagination, storytelling and role-playing games.

They're developing excellent gross motor skills as they balance over rocks and stepping stones and climb trees. And, as an added bonus, when their head hits the pillow at the end of the day, it's not too long before they are dreaming of their next adventure.



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Thirst for adventure

This nature-loving business is not just for our mini people but for us grown-ups, too. I believe there is a thirst for adventure in all of us; it's just natural, or should I say primal? The more you do it, the more you need it and that's a wonderful thing.

It's easy to get lost in the demands of the daily grind as we jump from one task to the next. To share time together in the outdoors and to make it a priority should be a regular goal for everyone.

If you find yourself with a free moment, instead of flicking on the TV or scrolling through your phone, how about stepping outside – device free – to take a moment to be in nature? Look up, take a deep breath and surround yourself in our natural environment ... your inner caveman will thank you for it. ▲



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