



SCHOOL HOLIDAYS, SAFE TRAVEL & COOL PLACES

THINGS2DO

'If you are wondering how to make the best of the upcoming winter holidays, then read on. But, before you continue reading, I cannot stress this enough: every now and then, remember to do absolutely nothing & relax. It's okay to just "be",' says Petra Vandecasteele, editor of *Kids of Nature*. Here she looks at a few easy tips to keep boredom at bay in a meaningful way.



Quad biking in the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve with Nature Discovery Tours



Fun at Umngazi River Bungalows & Spa. Photo @ Kids of Nature



Junior photography in nature Photo @ Kids of Nature

During holidays, many children spend their days in front of the television or playing electronic games. But what about 'the great outdoors'? How do we spend quality time as a family? The answer is simple: in nature. Children are becoming increasingly disconnected from their natural surroundings and it is key to their emotional and physical well-being that they spend as much time in nature as possible. One doesn't necessarily have to go on a 'groot trek' or spend a fortune to give them (and yourself) a wholesome break away from a demanding school routine.

AT HOME

GROW YOUR OWN NAMAQUALAND: Sorrel, daisies and gazania are fantastic green family projects to liven up your garden or backyard at this time of the year. They are so easy to grow that, even if you don't have 'green' fingers, they will still thrive and bring you lots of joy. Get the seeds or seedlings from your nearest nursery.

START A VEGETABLE GARDEN: It can be as modest as a crate if you live in town. Carrots, spinach and lettuce are great for young and upcoming gardeners, because they are easy and fast-growing. Gardening provides children with good exercise, fresh air and a sense of accomplishment.

GROW A FOREST: Trees are easy to grow at home.

Collect some acorns, seeds or nuts in autumn and push it in a container (make holes at the bottom) filled with potting soil. Keep the soil moist and put it on a window sill in a plastic bag, sealed with a rubber band. Once it has sprouted, remove the container from the bag (be patient, this could take several weeks, or even months) and repot as your sapling grows until it's strong enough to live in your garden.

MAKE A BIRD FEEDER: This is a great way to attract different types of birds to your garden. Your children can read up about their behaviour, food type and flower pollination. Bird feeders are fairly easy to make from berries, seeds, raisins and small apple pieces which can be threaded into strings. The birds will love visiting your garden all year round and the children can keep a 'bird diary'.

BUILD YOUR OWN TERRARIUM: Terrariums are completely self-supporting and help to absorb pollutants, while replenishing the air with oxygen. These are great to keep indoors and add a unique creation to a minimalist indoor style. Find a large clear glass container, potting soil and small stones to go with the succulent plants and moss.

COOK UP A STORM: This is the perfect time to teach the young ones how to cook easy meals (while you put your feet up). Not only does it give them a sense of responsibility, it's also a great

way to get children involved in shopping for fresh local produce and sharing recipes. Moreover, it encourages sit-down meals with the family and it's a skill your child can use for the rest of its life. Fancy chocolate? For an easy Rawlicious recipe for your family to try click [here](#).

AT HOME OR AWAY

STARGAZING: This is a great pastime for children, and a fantastic opportunity for parents to teach children about mathematical concepts of counting, shapes, patterns, astronomy and mythology. Wide open spaces away from the city lights are ideal for teaching your child (and yourself) about the night sky.

PHOTOGRAPHY FUN: Photography is an excellent way to stimulate your child's creativity by telling a story and making them more visually aware of the natural world around them. This creates a meaningful pastime which they could be encouraged to develop, while at the same time spending more time in nature. Photographs can be shared with friends and family online, and you can create your own calendar by using some of your child's favourite images.

NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT: A nature scavenger hunt encourages your children to explore and learn more about the world around them. Make a list of natural objects which can be collected, like a bird's

Cool places for your family to enjoy this winter

NEAR CAPE TOWN

- Tokai Arboretum, Cape Town: hiking & picnic - 021 712 2844
- Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, Overberg: hiking, picnic, tubing
- Nature Discovery Tours, Grabouw: quad biking, e-biking, 4x4, motorbiking
- World of Birds, Hout Bay
- African Horse Company, Stanford
- Klein Paradys Equestrian Centre, Botriver
- Two Oceans Aquarium, Cape Town
- Montagu Springs Resort, Montagu
- The Caledon Mineral Springs & Spa, Caledon
- Country living in gorgeous Greyton: Saturday market, mountain biking, hiking in the Greyton Nature Reserve, quaint shops and lovely restaurants. Indulge in a full body massage with Lisa Kevitt (083 499 2825) of Nature's Touch (children love Lisa's gentle touch) or book a family outdoor painting workshop with Adele Fouche (082-522 4010).
- Farm life at Oakhurst Farm Cottages, Hoekwil/ Sedgefield: self-catering cottages with fireplace, fresh milk & eggs, learn about organic dairy farming, go hiking & mountainbiking.
- Or, spend some leisurely time on a house boat in the Knysna Lagoon.

NEAR GEORGE

- Tsitsikamma Canopy Tours, Plettenberg Bay
- Monkeyland, Plettenberg Bay
- Birds of Eden, Plettenberg Bay
- Jukani Wildlife Sanctuary, Plettenberg Bay: big cat sanctuary
- Cango Caves, Oudtshoorn
- Wild Meerkat Adventure Tours, De Zeekoe Guest Farm, Oudtshoorn

NEAR JOHANNESBURG

- Cradle of Humankind, Sterkfontein up to Makapans
- Vredefort Dome, Parys: meteor impact site
- Stargazing in the bush with astronomer Phillip Calcott, Waterberg: 083 552 2119
- Horizon Horseback Safaris, Waterberg

NEAR DURBAN

- Tugela Falls, Drakensberg KZN Wildlife: 033 845 1999
- Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve, Howick: hiking, picnic, game
- Umkhumbi Lodge: Hluhluwe: wetlands, game drives & water sports, educational family programs
- Umngazi River Bungalows & Spa, Port St-Johns: whale-watching, hiking, mountainbiking, horse riding, spa (don't miss the Saturday night buffet.)





Picnic with LotusGrill. Photo @ LotusGrill

TRAVEL TIPS

- ✓ Scheduling your itinerary to match your child's pace.
- ✓ If possible, keep to your child's routine.
- ✓ Include travel games and activities that will keep them occupied but won't annoy your fellow passengers.
- ✓ If there is more than one adult, agree who will be responsible for who, what and when.
- ✓ Pack compact healthy snacks that are low in sugar.
- ✓ Make sure the children drink plenty of water.
- ✓ Involve your children in the planning of the trip.

ROAD TRAVEL

- ✓ Expect your trip to take longer than usual, plan more toilet stops, foresee more unplanned sight-seeing and let the children run around.
- ✓ Be sure everyone has used the restroom before getting into the car.
- ✓ Fun things to do in the car are counting the windmills, running a competition between car colours or identifying as many different brands of cars as possible.
- ✓ Remind your children the importance of buckling up when driving by car.

AIR TRAVEL

- ✓ Keep your hand luggage light and simple (ship bulky items)
- ✓ Any liquids including perfume, medicine and toothpaste that you intend to carry on an aircraft must be packed separately in a transparent plastic bag. Check luggage policies before packing.
- ✓ Get creative with the material onboard. Make puppets out of airsickness bags and put on a show.
- ✓ Be flexible and relaxed



Gazania. Photo: www.PaulGodard.com



Tokai Arboretum. Photo: www.PaulGodard.com



Educational family fun. Photo @ Umkhumbi Lodge

➡ feather, a wild flower in a certain colour, a smooth rock or leaf in a certain shape, and set a time limit. Help them to document their observations and collection by taking a photograph or drawing a picture.

HAVE A PICNIC: This is one of my all-time favourites: the art of doing nothing. And you don't need to go far to have an enjoyable picnic, you can even do it in your back garden. Great places to spend leisurely time are the beach, the forest, a riverbed, a nearby park and our beautiful national botanical gardens. Fires are not always allowed, but we've discovered a nifty portable solution to enjoy a yummy braai anywhere, anytime, in the compact LotusGrill (available from Mobelli Outdoor Furniture). Technically speaking there's no fire involved, just hot coals, and it's ultra safe with children around. Pack your picnic basket with yummy healthy snacks such as wholewheat sandwiches, fruit and nuts and enjoy an impromptu picnic.

The Bontebok National Park near Swellendam is a lovely place to picnic (and stay overnight) and you can even meet the resident bontebok. For a list of the national botanical gardens, visit www.sanbi.org.

LEARN A NEW SKILL TOGETHER: Find something that is new for the entire family such as kayaking, snorkeling, fishing or spotting wildlife in nature and

learning more about the identified animals. This is a great way to keep your holiday adventurous and to create exciting memories. And most importantly, to bond as a family.

CREATE MEMORIES: Taking photographs is a great way to remember a wonderful fun holiday, but children can also buy postcards of their favourite place, start a scrapbook of their holiday or even make sketches or paintings of their fun experiences. Also, don't forget the video camera if you have one. And, who says you should be the photographer? Delegate to your children and let them master or improve their photographic skills.

HAVE A FAMILY PORTRAIT SHOT IN NATURE: How about capturing a family portrait in beautiful natural settings instead of the typical more formal indoor scene, and show off with a set of gorgeous nature portraits to share with friends and family. We had a really great time with photographer Laresa Perlman at Ravenna Mountain Retreat, Montagu, where we stayed the weekend hiking, mountain biking and fetching farm fresh eggs in the coop.

After all that has been suggested here, don't forget to find time to do absolutely nothing & relax. Enjoy. **SG**

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