

GETTING KIDS INTO NATIONAL PARKS



National Parks Association of Queensland

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A BUSH ADVENTURE WITH CHILDREN

Sometimes wonderful...

CAN WE
COME AGAIN?

LOOK WHAT
I FOUND!

THIS IS
AWESOME!

Sometimes more of a challenge...

I'M TIRED/
HUNGRY/BORED

I NEED
THE TOILET

ARE WE
NEARLY THERE?

Whether the idea of taking your children out into nature fills you with a sense of excited anticipation or nervous dread, one thing is certain – today, more than ever, we are well aware of the benefits of childhood contact with nature:

1. Positive mental health outcomes;
2. Physical health benefits;
3. Enhanced intellectual development; and
4. A stronger sense of concern and care for the environment in later life.

Planet Ark – *Planting Trees: Just What the Doctor Ordered*

Above all, it can be fun! But let's remember...

"If getting our kids out into nature is a search for perfection, or is one more chore, then the belief in perfection and the chore defeats the joy."

Richard Louv – *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

Please don't let your expectations of what should happen as you embark on a bush adventure prevent you from truly experiencing and enjoying what does happen. Simply setting the intention to connect your children to a natural place and discover it alongside them is enough. We invite you to enjoy each moment of your experience however it unfolds, and hope the following tips, ideas and activities help you along the way.

PLANNING TIPS

1. Be prepared!

Involve your children in planning – this is a shared adventure.

We recommend that you...

Choose your walk wisely

Visit nationalparks.queensland.com and match descriptions, distances and walking times with your children's needs and interests. It's important they have a clear idea of where and why you are going and how long your walk might take.

Pack a backpack

Include a basic first aid kit, spare insect repellent and sunscreen, water bottles, snacks and any materials essential for genuine 'Bush Explorers' e.g. a map, magnifying glass, compass, pen and paper or other art materials.

Dress appropriately

Choose protective clothing that can get dirty including long pants, closed-in walking shoes and hats.

2. Lead by example!

If you are genuinely engaged and enthusiastic, your children will:

- Discover with fresh eyes;
- Respond in the moment;
- Invite curiosity through your words and actions;
- Share your knowledge if it's requested; and
- Remember, on this adventure you are not a tour guide or a teacher, but a fellow explorer!

Children are born passionately eager to make as much sense as they can of things around them. If we attempt to control, manipulate, or divert this process... the independent scientist in the child disappears.

John Holt



3. Get smart with your smart phone!

Be clear with your 'Bush Explorers' that on this adventure your phone may be used as an Explorer's tool to:

Navigate – you could use your GPS or download a compass app; and

Capture memories – through photographs, video or audio recordings. Be prepared to allow your 'Bush Explorers' to use your phone (or camera) responsibly if they wish.

How wonderful that these devices help us to take only memories from our beautiful natural environments!

Queensland's parks protect the best of Queensland. 'Tread lightly' during your visit and respect our parks' natural and cultural heritage so that others may enjoy them after you.

nationalparks.queensland.com

Of course, your phone is also an important safety device. In an emergency situation, if there is no service available from your mobile phone provider, **you can dial 112** instead of 000.

We recommend you use the following ideas and activities only when needed.

Some days you may need many of them, other days you may need none.



AS YOU WALK ...

1. Vary your pace

There will be times when you all want to walk quickly, particularly when you begin your bush adventure. However, help your Bush Explorers slow down sometimes, engage all their senses and really pay attention to what is happening around them.

2. Select a walking stick

We have noticed children love carrying sticks in the bush, so let's go with it... carefully! Sticks can be wonderful walking aids for tired legs. Assist your child to carefully choose the stick that is right for them and listen as they explain their choice. It is important that even sticks with super powers are used wisely – ensure your Bush Explorer knows their stick cannot be used for whacking the bush or harming anyone.

3. Gather 'handy' imaginary snapshots

One way of tuning in to the bush and encouraging children to keep walking is to take imaginary photos. Use your hands to frame the perfect shot of each beautiful or interesting discovery. Use your fingers, or a notepad, to count and then recall each of your finds. Have fun creatively naming your snapshots (e.g. Grandpa Ironbark, Slippery Slope, Termite Town). At the end of your walk or back at home create an original map of your journey to include these landmarks. You might even add real photos!

4. Take extraordinary real photographs

Ban boring photographs! Get creative with composition!! Try photographing up the trunk of a tree or through a hole in a leaf, and experiment with close-ups. You may even be able to photograph through your magnifying glass. Be prepared to crouch, bend, lie down and peer into. It's all part of seeing the bush with new eyes.



5. Move silently

Bush exploring can be very noisy, but switch off your voices and you will find your senses become 'hyper-alert' like those of a bush creature. Agree on a length of time or set distance and then try a 'silent walk' during which you may only communicate without using words. Imagine the new things you might discover!

6. Find a bush seat

It's fun to find good sitting spots as you walk and it can provide a much needed moment of rest. Stop to try out each bush seat and don't forget to take a photograph!

7. Find your favourite stories

Engage the imaginations of your Bush Explorers and spur them on by linking their experiences to their favourite stories or movies. Find a leaf that reminds you of Nemo and swim him through the forest, locate the perfect 'Faraway Tree' or spot a home for a Hobbit!

8. Be a genuine 'Bush Explorer'

You can provide an example to your children of exploring using your senses, your mind and your imagination:



And if you just can't resist sharing your knowledge, stop to ask first 'Do you want to know about this?'

AS YOU STOP AND PLAY...

1. Take a moment

Remember, this is about the journey and not the destination. Follow your child's lead and take the time to stop and explore each new spot as your walk unfolds.

2. See yourself in a tree

Just like people, each tree is unique. Can you find a tree that reminds you of yourself? Play 'See that tree? It's a bit like me!' with your Bush Explorers and ask them to explain their choices.

That tree is old and wrinkly, but it's still standing strong and wears a smile.

That tree looks like it's reaching up to its parents for a hug.

3. Switch on your 'Super Eyes'

See the bush through the eyes of its smallest inhabitants. Challenge everyone to find a safe insect they can zoom in on and watch quietly for a whole minute (this could mean getting down on hands and knees). After a minute, share your 'insect adventures' e.g. I think this ant is searching for food and showing his mates where to go. This spider is repairing its broken web after that branch fell down and crashed through it. What might these insects say about the humans exploring their forest?

4. Splash, sink, soak

If your adventure leads you to water, stop to throw a small object in, listen to it 'plop' and watch the circular ripples. You can experiment to see who can make the smallest splash or if the water is flowing, hold a 'leaf boat' race. If it's safe to do so, try taking your shoes and socks off and exploring slowly with bare feet. It's cooling, relaxing and fun!



5. Scrunch and sniff

Can you find the one smell that would immediately bring this bush track to mind? Experiment with crushing and rolling fallen leaves in your hands, and then smelling your 'forest perfume'. Decide which perfume you each like best.

6. Listen with your fingers

Encourage your Bush Explorers to really tune their ears into the sounds of the forest by holding a listening challenge. Stand together and count on your fingers how many sounds, both near and far away, you hear in one minute.

7. Discover treasure

There are many ways to hunt for natural treasures in the bush. Begin by deciding what qualifies as a treasure and agreeing to leave all treasures where they are found, then... find natural objects to match each colour of the rainbow or each letter of the alphabet, spot a brightly coloured object such as a leaf and search for other natural objects of a similar colour, play 'I Spy' with colours, shapes or textures, or challenge your Bush Explorers to find five new discoveries in five minutes.

I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.

John Burroughs

8. Leave your treasures

As your Bush Explorers play they will find natural treasures they can't bear to part with. Photograph the treasures so they can be remembered, but then return them to the bush. It can help to find a special place to display each treasure so others can discover them as they walk, or leave treasures in a secret, hidden spot where you can search for them on your next visit.



AS YOU REST, EAT AND CONTEMPLATE...

1. Eat mindfully

Once you've found a place to stop and snack, take a moment to slow down and savour the texture and flavor of your food. Just as you have been engaging all of your senses as you explore the bush, engage them now as you sit and eat.

2. Construct 'fruity' bush creatures

If your snack includes apples, you have the beginnings of fun bush creatures. Use the apple cores as the bodies and find natural objects on the forest floor to build arms, legs, wings or any other body parts the imagination desires. Photograph your creatures in their best camouflaged 'habitat' before returning the found materials to the forest. Don't forget to take your apple cores home to compost!

3. Share stories

This is a perfect opportunity to share stories and memories. If and when the moment arises, tell your children about other bush adventures you have had, what you know about the history of the place you have been exploring, factual information about the flora and fauna, or fictional tales set in your bush location.

4. Watch the birds

If you sit quietly, you will notice that birds begin to fly and perch closer and closer to your group. Watch as they hunt for food, feed their babies, bathe and sing. Observe differences in size, shape, colour and behavior. Identify birds if you are able or enlist the children to help remember the significant features of each bird so you can identify them once you have returned home.





5. Sit silent and still

Many ancient cultures, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, practise a type of sitting that requires complete silence and the engagement of all the senses. Agree on a length of time for which everyone will sit silent and still. I wonder what we'll see and hear. I wonder how we'll feel. Once your time is up, encourage your children to share their experiences. Remember the bush can have a very real effect on our emotions.

6. Let your hands explore

Given time, your Bush Explorer's hands will naturally begin to explore the area around them. They might crush or grind leaves, sift through and sprinkle dirt, sort the objects they find, thread leaves onto a stick, or run their hands over the bark of a tree. Engaging the sense of touch in this way can be peaceful and calming, and is an essential part of exploring and connecting to the bush.

7. Create land art

Celebrate your bush adventure by using only natural materials to build a sculpture or make a 'picture'. Your artwork might be realistic e.g. a forest face or bush landscape, or abstract e.g. a rock tower or arrangement of leaves or rocks selected and placed according to colour. Photograph the finished result and then leave your ephemeral art to be reclaimed by nature.

8. Make music

Music, in the form of rhythms or songs, can tell the story of your day and/ or keep everyone going as you reach the end of your walk. Keep the beat with bush instruments, sing a song you all know and change the words to be about your bush adventure, or compose a brand new song together, incorporating all your experiences.





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