A Family Camp Getaway

Relaxed setting, reasonable prices, and tons of fun stuff to do—all planned out for you. Now that's a vacation!

Sasha and I share a quiet moment.

From top: **"The Lodge"—we had BYOB happy hour on the porch every night before dinner; a group of kids hang out with a counselor while the adults have their own fun; it's a lobster and steak feast on the last night of camp.**

I loved summer camp when I was a kid—going on scavenger hunts, learning archery, forming round-the-clock friendships with the other campers. But when my husband, Paul, brought up the idea of spending a week with our 3-year-old twins at a family camp last summer, I wasn't so hot on the idea. I'm a grown-up now, and unlike my fun-loving husband, I haven't got the energy of an 8-year-old. Reading in a lounge chair with my hand wrapped around a cold Diet Coke is more my speed than canoeing or trekking up a mountain singing my bunk's theme song. Besides, traveling anywhere with Sasha and Vivian is usually the opposite of relaxing. Our previous vacations to Florida and Maine were nothing more than child care in another state without all the stuff we needed.

But it was Paul's turn to pick the place, and he had his heart set on an outdoorsy vacation—so off to camp we went.

Camp Kingsley Pines, in Raymond, Maine, is a smidge more upscale than the rustic getaways I went to as a child (there are no tents, only cabins), but it's by no stretch a luxury hideaway. If you require amenities such as double beds (we bunked in twins), heat, separate sleeping space from your children, or a bathroom you don't have to share with a family of daddy longlegs, this vacation is not for you.

But if you want a safe place with activities for your kids that you don't have to dream up (or even participate in), plus the company of other adults who don't mind getting up on stage and performing in an all-camp lip-synched version of *American Idol*, then family camp can be lots of fun. Best of all, the setting is relaxed and the price reasonable.

Heigh Ho! Heigh Ho! It's off to Camp We Go!

Someone rings a bell, and the day begins. Breakfast is at 8 A.M., served at a self-serve indoor/outdoor mess hall. The food at Kingsley Pines was far tastier and healthier than any camp chow I've ever had. There's a salad bar and grown-up cuisine as well as standard kid fare and the PB&J fallback at every meal. There's something for the most finicky of kids too—Vivian, who only eats white foods, actually tried the more colorful stir-fries and omelets because the other kids were eating them.

After breakfast, children 4 and older are divided into age groups for supervised activities such as arts and crafts or water sports. You

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can join them or opt for adult recreation like mountain biking or yoga—or sneaking off to the woods with a book and a Diet Coke. If your kids are younger than 4, they can still go with a group, but parents have to hover, helping little ones with activities like painting, mask-making, and kickball. Or, you can hang out at the lakefront beach with other families while the kids wade, dig, and play.

The bell again, and it's time for lunch. Rest time is followed by another activity at 3. Note to grown-ups: There's a BYOB happy hour before dinner while the kids are off playing massive all-age tag.

I was worried that camp would feel overly scheduled but was relieved that there was no pressure to participate in programs if you didn't feel like it. Still, the atmosphere encourages an enthusiastic spirit. One couple's 5-year-old son, who they said usually prefers playing quietly with his dinosaurs, was inspired to try some outdoor games.

Vivian shows off her art projects.

After dinner one evening, because the weather was chilly, the counselors organized a "snowball fight" (it was talcum powder poured into nylon knee-highs and tied up in balls) so the kids could gang up on the grown-ups. There was always something fun to do at that time of night when children are tired and parents are snappish. We spent our evenings making s'mores, doing improv theater, and enjoying a last-night-of-camp carnival.

Boy, Did We Have Fun!

By the end of the week there, I had become friendly enough with several other families that we kept an eye on one another's children. It's the little things (like getting to pee without bringing a kid into your stall) that can make the difference between a relaxing vacation and a continuation of the usual grind. But my favorite part of family camp was watching Sasha and Vivian independently click with a girl from Massachusetts named Hayley—no scheduled playdates—and run off with her to roll down the big hill without so much as a "Bye, Mom!"

Although my girls are only 3, I discovered that they didn't always need my help having fun. It's a rare vacation spot where you feel safe enough letting your kids dart off without you for a few minutes, and they feel confident enough to do so.

We're already talking about going back next year. Some families return to Kingsley Pines year after year, and I can see why. Our girls still talk about their camp friends. And Paul and I, for once, didn't feel like we needed a vacation from our vacation when we returned home.

Camp Kingsley Pines; Raymond, Maine, 800-480-1533, *kingsleypines.com.* One- or two-week sessions from August 19 to 25 and/or August 26 to September 1. Price per week: $760 per adult, $375 per child over 3 (kids 3 and under free), plus $300 per cabin. Price includes three meals a day and all activities.