

Catering To

KIDS

Is your campground truly family-friendly?

BY SILVANA CLARK

When my daughter was 12, we traveled around the country for a year in an RV, staying in a different campground every three or four days. I gave Sondra a very unusual homeschool assignment to tie in with our trip. We called it “Undercover Cop.” At each campground, she went with me to register our RV. Her job was to simply record how many staff members acknowledged her in some way, and then to create a graph showing those interactions. She was to document how friendly the staff members were to her, especially at campgrounds marketing themselves as family-friendly. The result of our highly scientific survey? One campground! Out of the 103 campgrounds we visited, only staff members at the Jellystone Yogi Bear Campground in Frankenmuth, Mich., commented on her cute headband and then asked what activities she enjoyed doing.

It’s a known fact—if children are made to feel special, parents have a positive impression about an RV park. The following are some ways to establish personal contact with young guests so they feel welcome:



1 Display a large bulletin board or white board by the park entrance. Label it VIK, “Very Important Kids.” As children check in with parents, invite them to autograph the board. With a parent’s permission, take a Polaroid or digital picture of the young guests. Make sure to write their name on the back of the photo because this is a golden marketing opportunity. Several weeks after the family’s visit, mail the photo to the child with a note saying, “Thanks for staying with us at the Hidden Valley RV Park. Here’s a picture to remind you of the fun time you had. Hope to see you again!” If you feel really ambitious, mount the photo on a small calendar imprinted with the name of your campground. Parents will proudly display the calendar, creating a daily reminder of their visit.

2 As children arrive, hand them an activity sheet with information about how to play “RV Park Scavenger Hunt.” Ask them to find answers to some of the following questions:

- How many sidewalk lights are there from the sidewalk to the front door?
- What does the inscription say on the wishing well by the pond?
- What is the name of our resident cat?

After children complete the survey and turn it in at the front desk, they receive a small gift or coupon for a free ice cream cone.

3 Prepare small swag bags for children. These can include a deck of cards, a piece of candy, or another treat. The contents don’t have to be expensive because the children will have fun finding the bags. As the family registers, tell them, “We have a small gift for Ashley. After you are settled, follow these clues to find your gift.” Then list a set of directions, such as: “From the front steps of the office, turn left at the sidewalk. Look for the heart-shaped boulder and turn right, etc.” Continue the clues until the child finds a gift labeled with their name, which can simply be behind the registration desk! It’s not uncommon for campground owners to hear, “I liked looking for my prize. Can you hide it again in a different place and give me different clues?”



4 Try to provide some nature-related activities. One campground planned a “Mudpie Making” event for kids to actually get their hands dirty and play in the mud. Offer nature hikes or a chance to observe frogs and ducks in a natural or man-made pond. Set up some easels outdoors with a variety of colored paints available. Let kids use small twigs, pine cones, or whatever natural item they find on the ground to use as a paintbrush. This produces creative paintings with a modern art feel! You’ll get a kid’s attention by offering a chance to take part in the “Leaf Cutting Salon.” Have kids find leaves on the ground. Provide scissors so kids can “cut” the hair of their leaf face. Cutting leaves is easy and something most kids haven’t done. Simply add a few wiggle eyes to complete this well-groomed creation. Parents will applaud you for getting kids away from video games!

5 Most campgrounds plan special events on traditional holidays, such as July Fourth or Halloween. Sure, children enjoy these activities, but how about celebrating some “untraditional” holidays? Why not celebrate National Clown Day on August 5? Pass out red noses when families register. Hire a clown or juggler to perform during your ice-cream social. Ask kids to put on a talent show featuring a circus theme. Fill a wagon with popcorn and go from site to site, passing out (or selling) bags of popcorn. These events are fun for adults and kids. Who knows? Maybe a few kids will write about celebrating this unusual holiday in the annual “What I Did This Summer” essay!



Here are a few other holidays to celebrate:

- **MARCH 22—National Goof-Off Day:** Stage an event where people goof off with Crazy Olympics, nailing Jell-O to trees and learning useless skills.
- **APRIL 6—National Twinkie Day:** Play floor hockey with frozen Twinkies!
- **APRIL 25—National Penguin Day:** Have all staff members dress in black and white. Conduct “waddle” races and award prizes to the person who best waddles like a penguin.
- **JUNE 9—Donald Duck’s Birthday:** Give each family a yellow plastic duck to compete in a “Dress Your Duck” contest.
- **JUNE 19—Butterfly Day:** Invite children to help plant a small garden with butterfly-attracting plants, such as Queen Anne’s Lace, yarrow, or snapdragons. Kids will enjoy coming back in following years to see the garden they created.
- **AUGUST 11—Play in the Sand Day:** One campground owner had a large truckload of sand dumped in an out-of-the-way location and invited kids to play in it. Parents were shocked at how engaged their children were in creating miniature villages and “roads” with this humongous pile of sand.
- **AUGUST 15—Wizard of Oz Day:** Ask staff members and family to dress as their favorite character while eating yellow-frosted cupcakes to represent the yellow-brick road.

As you can see, it only takes a small amount of extra effort to make children feel like welcome guests. Parents appreciate the thoughtfulness you exhibit towards their children, and are likely to tell their friends about your family-friendly RV campground. **PRB**

Silvana Clark has stayed in over 350 campgrounds across the U.S., Canada, and overseas. She frequently presents keynotes and workshops on how campground owners can improve customer service and increase the number of guests who turn into repeat customers. For more information, visit www.silvanaclark.com.

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