

# Low-Cost Ways to Entertain Kids this Summer

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With the economic downturn, finding cost effective activities to keep children busy may be difficult. Below are lists of cost-saving ideas designed to keep children entertained this summer.

## Low-Cost Activities at Home

Information from a recent Gallup Poll suggests that only half of Americans plan to travel this summer, and half of those with plans say they are altering those plans in response to the current economic recession (Jones, 2009). Therefore, children will be spending more time at home this summer. Here is a list of different activities to complete this summer.

Check with local YMCA/YWCA, Parks and Recreation, and local Cooperative Extension offices for free or low-cost activities throughout the summer. Make sure to ask about scholarships to help cover the costs. Visit: [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net) for information about the YMCA or [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu) to locate the Cooperative Extension office in your area.

Sign up at your local library for their summer reading programs for all ages. Libraries offer other fun programs such as magicians and story-telling in addition to reading programs.

Go to a faith based or 4-H camp. Faith based and 4-H camps generally do not have as many fees and may have scholarships available to waive the cost of attendance.



Search garage sales on a \$5 budget.

Start a garden or participate in a community garden. You can use containers if you do not have a yard. Children can read about how plants grow, and monitor the growth, watch for buds, etc.

Give back to the community by volunteering. Check with national volunteer websites as well as your local government websites for volunteer opportunities for all ages. For more information, visit Youth Service America's website at: <http://www.ysa.org>.

Create a box of fun ideas such as putting on a play, baking or decorating cookies, creating a family history book, playing store, playing games, watching a video, etc. Let the children take turns picking an activity to do.

## Road Trip Tips

According to a CNN article, "Layoff Worries Keep Many from Taking Vacations, Experts Say", workers fear that vacationing during the recession could lead to them losing their jobs. Cindy Goodman, a Miami Herald business columnist, says a possible solution is to plan four-day weekends or time off around holidays.

Here are a few ideas close to home that won't break the bank:

Go to the Zoo. Many zoos have free or reduced days throughout the week. Check with your local zoo for more information.

Visit Virginia state parks. Most state parks have overnight facilities where families can camp and participate in free activities with the park rangers. Check out this website about Virginia state parks: [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state\\_parks/index.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/index.shtml). For more information on National Park visits you can visit the National Park Service website at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).



Visit a local farm.

Visit a local TV station. Also check the station's website. Many stations list local attractions.

Visit a local museum or attraction. Many places have a time or day with reduced entrance fees.

Visit the local movie theater. Many movie theaters have free children's movies in the morning one or two days during the week.

Have a picnic in the park. Take the kids to a local park and make a day out of it by having lunch or even a light snack.

Go fishing. Many states, including Virginia, allow children under 16 to fish without a license. Information about fishing in Virginia can be found on this website: <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/regulations>

Ride the ferry or tram to tour your city. With the cost of gas rising more every day, taking public transportation can be made into an adventure for children.

Visit a pizza store and ask for a lesson in making pizza. Many pizzerias offer lessons at a minimal cost or even free.

Plan vacations with relatives or close-friends. It is often cheaper to get one large cabin than several rooms or you may need fewer campsites. You may also be able to take turns watching the children so that the adults get some vacation time too. Websites like Vacation Rentals by Owner ([vrbo.com](http://vrbo.com)) and HomeExchange.com are popping up all over the internet offering alternatives to pricey hotels. Renting and exchanging homes offers families the ability to cut vacation costs by cooking meals themselves and splitting the costs of the home with other families.

#### Reference

Jones, J. M. (May 2009). Recession altering plans for half of summer travelers. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/118597/Recession-Altering-Plans-Half-Summer-Travelers.aspx>

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