

# Down-to-Earth Vacations

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**S**ummer. Vacation. Two of my favorite words, especially when used together.

*Green* is another word I like to add to that combination. On vacation I'm still the same person who can't make herself throw away a pop can. Why not take my green habits with me?

Green vacationing means choosing activities that have less impact on the planet: staying closer to home, driving instead of flying, or choosing lodgings that use sustainable practices. You might already be taking green vacations.

By enjoying time off in your own stomping grounds, you can save money and resources by not consuming extra fossil fuels through extended travel. Staying close to home can help your family relax and connect with each other without the distractions of a big trip.

Plan ahead for down time. It's easy to fill up time at home with chores. My husband still smiles at the memory of his dad waxing the RV during an extended vacation out West. If you decide to take a "staycation," but find relaxing to be a challenge, especially when you stay at home, set aside time to play games with the kids, take walks, visit friends, and sleep in.

Explore fun destinations in and around your own neighborhood. Try a new restaurant. Visit the city zoo or a museum. My family plans bicycle excursions into town for lunch, then we head off to the library or the park. On warm nights we pitch a tent in the

backyard, stay up late, and stargaze.

Take nature hikes in your own backyard and make a list of what you find there. Can you name the trees in your backyard? What birds visit your feeders? My family's been working to make our yard a habitat—a place that supports wild creatures, especially beneficial insects. The National Wildlife Federation's backyard habitat program suggests ways to make your property creature friendly.

As much as we love to stay home, though, my family suffers from occasional wanderlust. You can lessen your travel impact by following some simple guidelines.

Flying uses twice as much fuel as driving, so keep long airline flights to a minimum. Try to enjoy destinations close enough to drive to, and drive your car with fuel economy in mind, keeping it tuned up for maximum efficiency. Avoid jack-rabbit starts, excessive idling, and driving over the speed limit. More fuel efficiency equals less carbon emissions—true whether you're on vacation or not.

Save more fuel by walking and using public transportation. If you vacation in a city, see your surroundings through the eyes of the people who live there. My family has strolled through Boston's North End, looking for the best cannoli, and we have negotiated subways in Washington D.C. and Chicago. Great fun for my kids, who have grown up in the country!

Try low-impact activities such as camping. I grew up camping in

Indiana state parks and have wonderful memories of stories and s'mores around the campfire, hiking, swimming, and finding my way to the campground restroom in the middle of the night. Local state park inns are also great places to stay if camping's not your thing.

More and more hotels are going green. Even if your hotel isn't considered "green lodging," you can still conserve resources. My family reuses towels and skips daily housekeeping services. I bring an extra sack in which we stash recyclables until we can dispose of them. Instead of eating out for every meal, we bring along our own snacks and carry our own water bottles. If we get a chance, we try to patronize local eateries, not just chains—it's more interesting and it boosts the local economy.

My family takes vacations to connect with each other and to enjoy the diversity of our God-made world. Knowing that we are lessening our environmental impact is just icing on the cake! ■

## RESOURCES

*Sustainable lodging:*  
[www.sustainabletravel.com](http://www.sustainabletravel.com)  
[www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com)

*National Wildlife Federation backyard habitats:*  
[www.nwf.org/backyard](http://www.nwf.org/backyard)

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