



Natural Connections

Exploring San Mateo County with Your Children



We hope that you use this guide to engage your child's curiosity and help them make positive connections with the natural world. Sometimes the best experiences are unplanned free time in a natural area, whether it's a backyard, a neighborhood park or a wilderness area. We've put together some fun activities you can do together as you explore new locations or look at the outdoors differently. The activities suggested in this guide are simple, do not require special supplies, and can often be done in your neighborhood. Why not start by simply taking your family outside? Exploration and excitement will naturally follow.



Enjoy!



Activities

Meet a Tree

Location: An area with lots of trees

This is a partner game. Have one of the partners put on a blindfold, and the other lead him or her to a tree. Have the blindfolded person feel the tree and get a good idea of the width of the trunk, the size of the leaves, the feeling of the bark, and the surface of the ground around the tree. Then lead the blindfolded person back to the starting point. Have them remove the blindfold and guess which tree they were led to.

Goodnight Moon

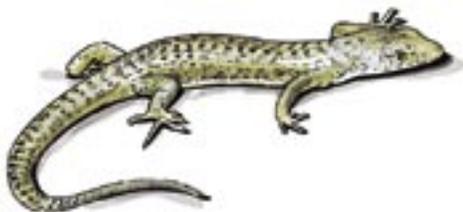
Location: Your neighborhood

Make a family agreement to take a walk when the moon is full. Venture into your neighborhood and see what your block looks like in the moonlight. Are there animals out? Do you hear anything? What can you see? Where are the stars? Between full moons go to the window before bedtime and see where the moon is and how it changes over the month.

Natural Art

Location: Backyard or park

Use leaves, rocks, flower petals, sticks – anything nature provides – to create an artistic masterpiece. After your child creates their work of art, take a walk together to your local library and look for a book of nature artwork by other artists like Andy Goldsworthy for further inspiration.



Adopt a Tree

Location: Your local neighborhood

Why not add a new member to your family by adopting a tree? After observing the different trees around you, ask your child to choose a tree in your neighborhood. At the library, find out what kind of tree it is, what conditions it likes, and how big it gets. Visit the tree once a month and make observations about how the tree is changing over time. You can even name your tree and take a family picture with it!

Just Listen

Location: Anywhere outside

Go outside with your child to observe your surroundings. Choose a comfortable place where you can both sit and close your eyes. Listen to your surroundings and see what you can hear. It might start off with a car or airplane, but if you listen you will hear other things, too. The wind in the trees, a bird singing, footsteps or a dog in the distance will all start to catch your attention. Practice your listening skills by going out once a week for five minutes to see what you can hear.

“Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives.”

—Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth*

Activities

Scavenger Hunt

Location: Park or backyard

This is a great game for a birthday party or other gathering of children. Send the group of children out to search for the following items for a specified timed period. You can use jars with holes punched in the lid to capture some creatures, but remember to let them go at the end of the game. Adapt the list as appropriate to your setting.

Leaf with two colors

Leaf with three points

Feather

Pine needle

Stick longer than one foot

Stick fatter than three inches

Moss

Smooth rock

Rock with sharp edges

Flower from the ground

Beetle (must be alive)

A variation of this game is to give kids colors and ask them to bring back items that match the colors. You can use things from home like old crayons or scraps of cloth. Paint tabs are another great source of a variety of colors and are easy for kids to handle. The tabs can be found at local paint stores in many browns and greens. Give each child two or three strips and see what they can find.



Junipero Serra Park

Nighttime Bug Hunt

Location: Backyard or your neighborhood

Everything is more fun at night! Bring flashlights and magnifying glasses and go out looking for insects. Watch them as they crawl around. Do they travel alone or in groups? Are they carrying anything? If so, how do they carry things? Do they go underground? What do they do when the light shines on them?

Stargazing

Location: Backyard or park

Pick an evening when the moon is not full and head outside to look at the stars. Bring a blanket and find an open area to lie down with your child. Relax and enjoy the beauty and wonder of all the stars. Notice how what you can see changes based on where you are (in a city, in a rural area, etc.)

Micro World

Location: Backyard or park

Mark a circle on the ground about three feet in diameter using a hoop or string. Look very carefully, with a magnifying glass if desired, to see all the different life forms contained within the circle.

Activities

Back to Roots

Locations: Your local farmers' market and grocery store

The source of food is something that a lot of people don't really think about. Where does it come from? How does it get to you? As a way to explore this, take a family trip to a farmers' market to buy fresh produce. Before your outing, select a fruit or a vegetable to investigate. At the farmers' market see if you can find your item. Talk to the sellers about where and how the produce was farmed. What does it take to grow our food?

After your trip to the farmers' market, try repeating the same activity at a grocery store. Talk to a produce clerk and see where the produce at the grocery store comes from. For packaged foods, check the labels and see what ingredients are in the food and where it was produced.

About 3% of the land in San Mateo County is used for agriculture. See if you can identify what is grown in our county at the farmers' market and at the grocery store. (Hint: the answer can be found on our website: www.RecycleWorks.org/agriculture/index.html).

Water Flows

Location: A nearby body of water

Visit a body of water like the ocean, a creek, lake, marsh or river. Before embarking on your journey, get out a map of your area and find where you live with your child. Show them where you are going and point out any significant features such as mountains, ocean, rivers, bridges, freeways, etc. in the area that will help them orient themselves as you drive there. Some children might like to follow the map as you travel. When you get to the body of water, look on the map to see where the water comes from and where it goes. It's fun to think about how water flows to the oceans and that you might have crossed a river that had water coming from or going to the body of water you just visited. If you want to explore this more, look for books on watersheds at the library or check out www.epa.gov/water/kids.html and www.RecycleWorks.org/kids/water.html on the Internet.



Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

Tidepooling

Location: Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and other nearby rocky intertidal zones

Tidepooling is fun and easy in San Mateo County. Remember to plan your trip around low tide (to check, use the tide calendar in the your local newspaper or online at www.tidesonline.com/state.php?state=California). Tides are measured in feet; therefore, a 2.0 tide means the water is 2 feet high. It is best to visit the tide pools when the tide is 1.5 or below. A minus tide will allow more time for sightseeing than a positive tide. Some great tidepools can be explored at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach. Have fun exploring them and looking for signs of life with your child, but don't move the creatures as it makes it hard for them to survive. Remember to be safe, do not venture too far out and always face the horizon in order to pay attention to incoming tides.

Note: If you are traveling to the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in a group of 10 or more, you will need to make a reservation in advance by calling 650-363-4021.

Directions to Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

By car: Take Highway 1 to California Street in Moss Beach, turn west. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is at the end of the street.

By public transportation: SamTrans buses provide service to key destinations throughout San Mateo County and San Francisco, including the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. Please visit: www.samtrans.com/keydestinations.html or call 1-800-660-4287 to find out how you can take one of their buses to this park.

Activities

Banana Slug Safari

Location: Memorial Park near La Honda

A hike on the 0.75-mile Creek Trail almost guarantees a banana slug sighting. You can bask under gigantic redwoods, play in the tunnel tree, dip into the swimming hole, and hike past Pescadero Creek. Remember to stay on the trail! How many banana slugs did you find?

Directions to Memorial Park

From the bay side of the Peninsula: Use Highway 84 west from either Highway 280, 101 or 35 (Skyline Boulevard). Travel westbound on Highway 84 from Skyline Boulevard through the town of La Honda. Just after La Honda, turn left (south) on Pescadero Road. Follow Pescadero Road to the park entrance.

From the coast: Use Highway 1 to Pescadero Road. Follow Pescadero Road to the park entrance.



Memorial Park

Wildflower Walk

Location: San Bruno Mountain State and County Park



San Bruno Mountain Park is a wonderful open-space area for San Mateo County residents. It is home to various rare or endangered plants and butterflies, and a hike in the spring can reward your family with a stunning wildflower show. To enhance your wildflower experience, make it a color scavenger hunt and try to find flowers that match color samples from home. Don't forget to remind kids that wildflowers are for everyone's enjoyment, and that they should not be picked. Look, but don't touch!

Directions to San Bruno Mountain State and County Park

From Highway 101: take the Bayshore Boulevard/ Brisbane exit. Proceed on Bayshore Boulevard to Guadalupe Canyon Parkway. Turn west on Guadalupe Canyon Parkway toward the Mountain and proceed to the park entrance on your right.

From Highway 280 North: Take the Mission Street exit. Head left (north) on Junipero Serra Blvd. Turn right onto San Pedro Blvd. San Pedro Blvd will turn into E. Market Street, and E. Market Street will turn into Guadalupe Canyon Parkway, which will take you eastward up the canyon. The Park entrance will be on your left toward the top of the hill.

By public transportation: SamTrans buses provide service to key destinations throughout San Mateo County and San Francisco, including the San Bruno Mountain Park. Please visit: www.samtrans.com/keydestinations.html or call 1-800-660-4287 to find out how you can take one of their buses to this park.

Activities

What Animal Would You Be?

Location: Coyote Point Museum and Recreational Area

Get in touch with your wild side. Take a family trip to Coyote Point Recreational Area to explore the park. While you are there, visit the Coyote Point Museum and meet some wild reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds. After your visit, each person can choose an animal to be for the day. What sounds will you make, what do you like to eat, where do you live, and what do you think about?

On the north side of Coyote Point is a gravel beach area. It is ideal for sunbathing and the cool bay water is very refreshing on hot summer days. Food and drink are permitted on the beach, but alcohol is prohibited.

Directions to Coyote Point Recreational Area

From the north (San Francisco): Use Highway 101 South. Take the Poplar Avenue exit. Turn right onto Humboldt Street. Turn right onto Peninsula Avenue. Go over the freeway, and then circle around and into the Park.

From the south (San Jose): Use Highway 101 North. Take the Dore Avenue exit. Immediately turn left onto North Bayshore Boulevard. Turn right onto Coyote Point Drive to the park.

By public transportation: SamTrans buses provide service to key destinations throughout San Mateo County and San Francisco, including the Coyote Point Recreation Area. Please visit: www.samtrans.com/keydestinations.html or call 1-800-660-4287 to find out how you can take one of their buses to this park.

“If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it. Perhaps this is what Thoreau had in mind when he said, “the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think the same is true of human beings.”

– David Sobel, Beyond Ecophobia



Local Places to Connect with Nature



Parks

San Mateo County Parks

Use the website to find out about trails, directions, camping, and services available at parks.
(650) 363-4021
www.eparks.net

California State Parks

Visit state parks throughout the Bay Area.
(800) 777-0369
www.parks.ca.gov

Environmental Education Programs and Resources

Coyote Point Museum, San Mateo

This museum provides hands-on environmental education activities for children and has exhibits about the wildlife and habitats of San Mateo County.
(650) 342-7755
www.coyoteptmuseum.org

Elkus Ranch, Half Moon Bay

Elkus Ranch is an environmental education center offering hikes, an introduction to working with livestock, and gardening. Programs are available to school groups during the year. Individual children can participate in summer camp programs.
(650) 712-3158
http://cesanmateo.ucdavis.edu/Custom_Program/

Filoli Center, Woodside

Filoli offers family hikes in their nature preserve, tours throughout their gardens, and educational programs for adults and children.
(650) 364-8300
www.filoli.org/education.html#talks

Harley Farms Goat Dairy, Pescadero

Harley Farms Goat Dairy offers cheese-making tours. On the tour children and adults can meet the goats and have an opportunity to milk one, explore their edible flower garden, and learn how their goat cheese is made.
(650) 879-0480
www.harleyfarms.com/Our-Farm.htm

Hidden Villa, Los Altos Hills

Hidden Villa offers many community and school environmental education programs. Through these programs children and adults have the opportunity to tour their farm and work with the livestock, learn about organic gardening, stargaze, and hike or backpack in the surrounding wilderness.
(650) 949-8650
www.hiddenvilla.org/about.php

Marine Science Institute (MSI), Redwood City

MSI offers hands-on Marine Summer Camps for kids grades K-12, and field trips throughout the school year.
(650) 364-2760
www.sfbaymsi.org

Save Our Shores, SF Bay Area

This non-profit organization provides great ways for people to get involved in their local shore! From beach and bay clean-ups to fun and informative meetings, it's an easy way for the whole family to get out and protect our coast and bay.
(831) 462-5660
www.saveourshores.org

Save the Bay, SF Bay Area

Save the Bay offers educational boating trips for the whole family as well as volunteer opportunities.
(510) 452-9261
www.savesfbay.org



Summary

This brochure was made for families to compliment the materials we made for schools on the natural regions, or habitats, in San Mateo County. If you have children in elementary school, they may be familiar with the *San Mateo County – It's a Great Place to Live!* poster and game. These educational resources teach children about the characteristics of the different habitats in San Mateo County. They also encourage them to explore, respect, and protect their natural environment through activities such as taking a hike to learn about a new area or recycling to conserve natural resources. We hope this brochure encourages your family to connect with the natural world and embrace these same ideas of exploring, respecting and protecting the natural environments of San Mateo County.



RecycleWorks is a program of San Mateo County that offers information and assistance on recycling, waste reduction, green building, and composting to the residents, businesses and schools in the county. We'd love to hear from you with your questions or comments on this brochure. If you have a special activity that helps your family connect with our natural environment, please share it with us for future printings.

www.RecycleWorks.org
info@RecycleWorks.org
1-888-442-2666

The RecycleWorks website and hotline has comprehensive information on recycling, building with environmentally healthy materials, waste reduction, composting and other environmental issues. There is an easy-to-use database for finding places to recycle just about anything, to buy green products, or to donate things for reuse.

