

NATURE DISCOVERY



Lose yourself in the fascinating natural world that surrounds you. Hone your observation and orienteering skills, and you'll lose yourself in the beauty without getting lost!

Nature-themed Scavenger Hunt: Play Hide-and-Seek with nature! Create a list of things to find. Give each player a copy of the list, a pencil and pad of paper. Instead of collecting the items, make a drawing of each one. Leave only footprints behind so that others may enjoy the beauty.

Following are examples of some items that can be found around your campsite or on the hiking trail:

- Three different kinds of trees and their differently-shaped leaves
- Three different insects
- Three different rocks
- Three different wildflowers
- Three different seashells (if on the beach)

In searching for three of each item, players improve their observation skills and learn to appreciate the tremendous variety found in nature. Adapt the list to your local surroundings, and be creative. Anyone who comes back to camp with drawings of everything on the list wins an extra roasted marshmallow!

Photo Scavenger Hunt: For a more challenging variation, expand your scavenger hunt list to include animals and human-related objects in addition to stationary objects found in nature. (After all, we humans are found in nature, are we not?) For example:

- Sleeping dog
- Wet towel
- Squirrel with an acorn
- Muddy hiking boots
- Toasted marshmallow

Instead of sketching on paper, everybody captures their findings with a camera. Depending on the length and complexity of your list, this game can last an hour or be played over the course of your entire trip. Later on, compare photos!

Orienteering: Learn to use a compass and follow a map, develop your navigational skills together and connect to your surroundings. Take turns plotting a course around your campsite (e.g., take 15 steps to the tall white birch, go north 12 paces, then turn east). Then follow the landmarks and directions to reach a surprise destination or prize. Look for books and beginners' classes to learn more about this popular pastime before you go.

NATURE DISCOVERY (CONTINUED)

Tied Up in Knots: Learning this survival skill can be fun for all ages. Find a book on knots at your local library or bookstore and invest in good rope or twine. Practice tying bundles and tying objects to each other. Let your imaginations run wild – just don't tie yourselves up in knots!

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Weather Watching: Red sky at night, campers' delight. Learn how to predict the weather from clues in the sky. With a little experience and the help of a book, you can identify different types of clouds: puffy, cauliflower-like cumulus clouds, layered stratus, and wispy cirrus. Challenge each other to imagine pictures in the clouds, or to guess how fast they're moving, how high they are and what kind of weather might be approaching.

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Who Goes There? As you hike along a trail, be on the lookout for tracks. See if you can guess the animal that left the prints, and when and where it was going. Also listen for rustling in the woods or water around you and find out who or what is making the noise. Find a book on animal tracks ahead of time, and sure to bring binoculars for this game!

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Get to Know a Tree: Explorers in the wild must depend on their powers of observation to help them survive. Here's a game to test how sharp your senses are. In a safe area of the woods, blindfold one player and spin the person around. Guide the blindfolded one to a tree and have him or her walk slowly around it, feeling the texture and irregularities of its bark, sniffing the wood, and wrapping his or her arms as far around the trunk as possible to get a sense of its size. Then lead the blindfolded person away from the tree, remove the blindfold, and challenge him or her to find the tree.

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50 Wild States (from the National Wildlife Federation): Discover the official state bird, flower, tree and insect for each state you visit.

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Fold a Star Finder (from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)): Make your own starfinder – a fun origami toy that also serves as a guide to the constellations visible in the current month.

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Tonight's Sky (from the Earth and Sky Radio Series): Bringing a wireless-enabled laptop on your trip? Staying at a KOA with high-speed wireless Internet access? You can look up tonight's star chart and see what there is to spot in the night sky. For a basic primer on stargazing, try the Getting Started guide.

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Aquatic Life (from the Monterey Bay Aquarium): A tantalizing collection of aquatic-themed activities, including many that can be printed out for a child's Trip Book. If you find yourselves curious about particular aquatic species, check out their Living Species List.

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Birds Near You (from the National Park Service): Even if you have no plans to visit a particular park, this site provides a handy way to learn about birds wherever you are.

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Critter Guide (from Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)): Fun facts about all kinds of animals.

