

Let the kids snap the cool vacation photos

Below: They s  with fresh eyes and wonderment



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Leave it to the kids.

They scored the best moose and bear shots on our recent trip to Yellowstone. Of course, they were taking pictures of their tiny stuffed moose and the giant bear that was along for the ride rather than the real thing.

They photographed their moose — which they named Mr. and Mrs. Moose — everywhere we went: at the campfire, on a kayak, at Old Faithful, the top of a hiking trail even the outdoor potty at our campsite arranged by [Austin-Lehman Adventures](#).

We laughed at their moose shots. But at the same time, 9-year-old Ethan Sitzman and his 6-year-old sister, Hannah, were making us look at the places we were visiting in a totally different way.

And that's the way it can be wherever you go. Just hand the kids a simple point-and-shoot camera and then look at the way your kids see, suggests Mike Nolan, a National Geographic photo instructor and well-known wildlife photographer aboard the [Lindblad Expeditions National Geographic Explorer](#). "When you have kids along, everything is interesting to them," he explains. "Their minds are so much more open. We could all use that child-like wonder."

Aboard the Explorer in the Arctic recently, I watched 9-year-old Evie Plunkett photograph her pink bear everywhere she went, lugging her grandpa's camera and long lens all over the ship, getting tips from C.T. Ticknor, the other photo instructor onboard, on how to better compose images. Shoot high or low, Ticknor suggested. Get in close!

Tell a story

"Let your images tell a story," she continued. "Pull the person into the moment you are sharing ... make the story richer."

Sounds so easy. Evie, who like my cousins in Montana, planned to make her photographs of her stuffed pal part of her personal story of her trip (a great idea for any vacation that includes a child's favorite stuffed animal) seemed to absorb the lessons like a sponge, while I struggled with the basics — getting my camera off "auto," even though I was using the latest equipment.

B&H Photo Video, the leading camera supplier in New York, lent me a brand-new Canon Rebel EOS T3 and a long lens to test on my trip — easy to use but I still had trouble figuring out all the buttons! "Kids have no fear at all when it comes to technology," observed Mike Nolan. "They don't feel the boundaries that we adults fight against."

Certified photo instructors like Nolan and Ticknor are now aboard all of Lindblad's expedition ships thanks to Lindblad's partnership with National Geographic. They are available throughout the trip — there is no extra charge — to help take your photography skills to the next level, from composition to proper exposure, whether you are a novice or serious amateur photographer, whether you are an adult or a child. There are special photo sessions for kids and you'll see guests and the instructors huddled over cameras and laptops all over the ship.

"Taking the pictures isn't just about the image," said National Geographic photographer Chris Rainier, a leading documentary photographer and himself the father of a 5 year old, also onboard the Explorer as part of this initiative. "It is the journey to the image ... wherever a family travels, photography can enhance the experience."

Cheap cameras

That's as long as you're not squabbling over who is using the camera or taking the better pictures. (For instant sharing, of course, use your smartphone.) There are many digital cameras, including the Canon Powershot A495 and the Kodak Easy Share C195, available for under \$100. Nikon's popular Coolpix cameras were just over \$100 at B&H when I did a recent web search.

"Photography should be fun, not a competition and sharing images with each other is something that can be shared by the whole family," said Ralph Lee Hopkins, who oversees the program. He added that with digital cameras, beginners could quickly improve with the instant feedback they get and by being willing to make mistakes. Nor is it necessary to invest in an expensive photo-editing program, as long as you have a browsing/editing program of some kind like Apple's iPhoto and Google's Picasa. "The No. 1 thing travelers want to do is share their images," said Hopkins. "These programs make it easy."

Buy each child an inexpensive point-and-shoot (check the children's cameras from Digital Blue, [www.digiblue.com](#)) and let them practice before your next trip, he suggests, photographing the cat, the dog, each other. "Kids will become better observers with cameras in their hands," he adds.

Parents and grandparents, too. Evie's grandfather Bill Plunkett is an accomplished amateur photographer and it pleases him immensely to see Evie begin to share his passion. "It's nice to have something special with her," he says.

Have patience

And there are important life lessons to be learned. "You can't just snap a picture and walk away," Plunkett says. "You need to have patience and you need to wait. You have to think about what you are doing." That's why the photo instructors suggest we keep our cameras at the ready when we travel. Who knows when that memorable moment will occur — whether spying an Arctic fox crossing the tundra or a preschooler writing her name in the sand on the beach (that was my daughter and it remains one of my favorite images).

I smile whenever I think of the Sitzman kids so carefully posing their moose in Montana.

"Everyone sees something different in a photograph," observes Ticknor. "That is the magic of the image. It tells a different story for each person who sees it."

Just like the places we take our kids.



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