

"the winter months are probably the most important time to get outside"

*Pete Eshelman
Roanoke Outside Foundtain*



Did you know Explore Park has pod cabins and campsites that you can visit year-round? These new camping options are perfect for families (pod cabins include heating), so there's no excuse not to take that trip.

Make a fire

Ditch the starter bricks and build a fire the old-fashioned way in the backyard with the kids. Gather sticks and wood together, sort into tinder (for burning) and kindling (to get the fire going). Bring out some marshmallows and enjoy the warmth outdoors.

Plan a ski trip

There's one outdoor activity that's perfectly winter-appropriate—skiing. With plenty of locations within a day's drive, it's easy to take advantage of snow-capped slopes. Liberty Mountain in Lynchburg is an easy option for beginners, with both ski and tubing options; Wintergreen Ski Resort and Homestead Ski Area are local favorites for natural snow.

Go to the climbing gym

On the coldest of days, hit the River Rock Climbing Gym and learn

everything you need to know about navigating boulders and vertical terrain. There are special activities for kids' climbing as well (including a climbing team) that can introduce your family to the sport. If you get started now, your whole family will be ready to climb outdoors in the spring.

You can participate in almost any warm-weather activity in cooler months. Don't use it as an excuse not to get outside.

"Your body will thank you, and your kids will, too," Eshelman said. "You will get some needed fresh air and vitamin D, and your kids will burn off some pent-up energy."

The key to enjoying the winter outdoors is making sure to dress appropriately. (No one will have any fun if the cry of "I'm cold" is more common than laughs or smiles.) Wear thin layers that you can adjust as the temperature changes. If you are planning to do something more strenuous, such as hiking or jogging, dress for conditions about ten degrees warmer than actual temperatures. This

will help you stay comfortable once you start moving.

Consume a few extra calories

Eating just a little bit more will help you stay in peak condition as your body burns extra calories to stay warm. Snacks such as dried fruit and nuts are easy to carry on outdoor adventures.

Stay off the ground as much as possible

If you are going to take a break, sit on something insulated so you don't lose body heat. When your adventure is over, don't hang around in cold clothing or in layers that might have gotten a little sweaty.

So what are you and your family doing this winter outside?

Carrie Cousins is a Roanoke-based freelance writer who blogs for the Roanoke Outside Foundation.

Your Guide to Enjoying the Outdoors in Colder Months

By Carrie Cousins

Just because temperatures have started to dip doesn't mean you and your family can't continue to plan outdoor adventures. Sometimes cooler days—and nights—are the best time to get out and play.

"Yes, it's a pain to make it happen, but winter months are probably the most important time to get outside," said Pete Eshelman, director of the Roanoke Outside Foundation. "It's easy to stay inside where it's all nice and warm, but that's also where the TV, video games, and phones are. There's no doubt people—kids and adults—spend more time in front of screens

during the winter, so make a conscious effort to get outside."

So, where do you start? Lucky for you, there are plenty of outdoor adventure opportunities right here in the Roanoke region.

Photograph winter colors

The location of the sun in the sky provides a whole new perspective—and set of colors—for photos. Hit your favorite spot along a trail or on the greenway and take some photos with the family.

Bike on the greenway

Rent a bike or bring your own and pedal along the greenway. These paved trails are easy to navigate with fewer leaves, and have more sunlight than some of the more wooded trail options.

Take a hike along a blueway

You and the kids will delight at finding icicles and frozen waterfalls on hikes along some of the region's best blueways during the winter months. Make a game of it to see who can spot floating ice on the water or the most icicles hanging from trees.

Go cabin-camping