



# Sign Up For Camp

*Making summer planning easy*

## Urban Adventure Camps: Mike Dobson

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tags: [Bay Area camps](#), [camp director interview](#), [travel camp](#), [urban camp](#)

by signupforcamp

Every so often we conduct interviews with camp directors to collect advice for parents looking for unique experiences for their kids. We recently exchanged emails with Mike Dobson, director of [Urban Adventure Camps](#) in Oakland, CA. Mike grew up in the Bay Area going to all sorts of summer camps, both day and residential, and always remembers his experiences fondly. Throughout college he worked as a camp counselor on Catalina Island. After graduating from college with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, he worked in the automotive, semiconductor, and power industries.

After getting bored of cubicle life, he decided to take a leave of absence for the summer to be an activities and science instructor at a marine science camp. He had a blast and, driving home at the end of the summer, he decided wanted to work at camp full time. He became a science instructor at Astrocamp, a year round science center/residential camp teaching physical sciences and astronomy, where he eventually moved up to the Program Director and Summer Camp Director role. In addition to the summer camp program, he managed all of the programs, education, and staff for a facility that annually served over 16,000 children from approximately 250 schools. It was a wonderful job that was unfortunately in a very remote location. In an effort to be closer to family and friends he moved with his wife and two dogs back to the Bay Area. In order to continue their passion of working with children in a camp environment, they formed Urban Adventure Camps.

### **With so many camps available, how can parents find the right camp for their child? Any specific advice on selecting a traveling camp?**

Choosing a camp can be difficult. Ideally, parents want to choose camps that interest their child as well as themselves. I encourage parents to include their children in the decisions and to consider trying new things. We become who we are from our experiences in life and our reactions to them.

On selecting a traveling camp, I would encourage parents to look at where their child will be going. Are there places that seem of value to both you, the parent, as well as to the child?

In general, a good camp and a good instructor should be able to make a teachable moment out of just about any occasion. A quality camp not only focuses on fun, but also on instilling skills and values in the campers. Great camps help children to become better people by the time they leave at the end of the week.

### **What questions should a parent ask a camp?**

- How you are going to keep my child safe?
- How you are going to keep my child engaged?
- Is there a chance that my child will get lost in the group? How can you stop that?
- Is my child going to be both mentally and physically tired at the end of the day?
- What kind of staff do you hire? What is their previous experience with children?

### **Some kids attend as many as 10 weeks of summer camp. The summer can seem long. Any tips on preventing camp burn-out?**

Again, I would encourage parents to be creative and give their children as many experiences as they can. When I was a child my mother enrolled me in just about every kind of camp there was. I went to sports camps, science camps, horse camps, church camps, choir camps, scout camps, etc. You name it, I probably tried it in some form or another. I had some favorites that I would go back to summer after summer, but every year I also had a number of new ones to try. I have spoken with some parents that say they send their children to the same camp all summer long. I know that some of those kids are having a really fun summer, but I worry that they are missing out on other experiences that can be a lot of fun too. Find things that your child will be excited about and encourage them to try as many things as they can.

At Urban Adventure Camps we only have four different camp weeks that are cycled through a 10-week summer. Each of our camp weeks is designed to have a totally different focus. Even if we go the same museum in different camps, we have a

totally different experience and we learn about different things. I hope that campers stay with us for multiple weeks, but I don't expect them to be with us all summer long. If I ever had a parent that signed up for that, I would call them and encourage them to talk to some other camps. There are a lot of great camps out there and I hope they have as many great experiences as they can.

### **How should parents help kids prepare for camp?**

Help kids get excited. Children feed off of what parents tell them. If a parent sends them off in awe about what a great experience they are going to have on that day or that week, the child arrives at camp with a great attitude that is immediately contagious throughout the group. The same goes the opposite way, if a parent is hesitant when they are leaving them or says things like, "I am going to miss you so much" or "I don't know what I will do with out you", the children take them literally and it can really stress them and put a damper on their entire experience.

Be proud of your child for taking the step to choose an experience, encourage them, and do not feed off their homesickness. I have seen campers come to camp hesitant and they can have a huge amount of separation anxiety. If a parent has encouraged them to be strong and enjoy the experience, a lot of them come out of their sadness and have a blast. On the other side, I have seen parents try to be overly caring for their child and feed into their child's sadness. This normally results in more sadness. As much as you can, encourage your child.

Get your children to follow the camps rules and help us lead your children. Give us the information we need to succeed and please do not negate the things we tell the campers to do. If a camp has rules on no phones, or what to bring and what not to bring, help us out with that. After managing a large residential science center for seven years, I can tell you an amazing amount of experiences that were lessened or how certain situations got blown completely out of proportion with miscommunication. A good camp will always tell the parent first if there is any sort of issue, and they should be upfront and forthcoming about any situation, whether they did things correctly or not. The last thing I would ever want is to have a parent call me because they heard about a situation from their child, rather than from me or one of my staff members.

Lastly, ask your children if they have any questions. Go to the camp's website with them and read up on what they are doing. If there are questions that are not being answered, call your camp and ask them directly. A good camp should be an open book. There may be some surprises that we do not want to share with the campers so we do not ruin the effect, but we should always be able to tell the parents.

### **How do Urban Adventure Camps complement more traditional camps as a part of a child's summer?**

We are something different for their children. We take them to amazing places and let the kids explore. Instead of the usual summer camp question of "What did you do today?" they can ask "Where did you go today?" We offer teamwork, education, exploration, and FUN! Instead of having a facility that we stay at all day long, we move about from place to place and explore. We give them another experience that they can call on throughout their lives. We put a large focus on questions and letting the campers drive the learning. Of course, we have our featured destinations and subject topics to focus on, but one of the most enjoyable experiences we have is letting them try to stump the instructor.

### **Tell us what is special about Urban Adventure Camps.**

As one of the founders, I would say EVERYTHING!

- We are unique in our design of subject oriented weeks and the places that we travel.
- We try to pick the very best museums, science centers, in the Bay Area so that your camper gets the most out of the week.
- We actually teach the campers when they think they are just having fun. (Hehehe, fooled them.)
- Campers learn to confidently and safely navigate the Bay Area using public transportation.
- We give them an opportunity experience a variety of amazing places that are part of this amazing place.
- Our staff members have backgrounds working with children, as well as knowledge of the subject matter. Instructors are credentialed teachers and have taken larger groups of children on similar field trips.
- We are designed to help parents as well as campers by offering:
  - Full 8AM to 4PM camp days with options of pre- and post-day care
  - Drop off and pick up at Rockridge BART station – a place that is on the way for a number of commuting parents.

### **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

I hope that every child in the Bay Area has an amazing summer. Hopefully you will join Urban Adventure Camps for at least a week, but if not, have a blast and enjoy every minute of every experience.

Read more about [Urban Adventure Camps at SignUpForCamp.com](http://UrbanAdventureCamps.com)