

# Summer and SCIENCE



The two go hand in hand at area camps

By Sara Solovitch

**H**ere in the land of Google, Apple and Intel, you'd think that science education would be the least of our worries.

But when the Nation's Report Card came out last year, California's school children ranked at the bottom of the heap, far behind their peers in 43 other states and in a dead heat for last with students in Hawaii, Arizona and Mississippi.

So it's no surprise that Bay Area parents – hoping to give their children a leg up – are turning to science camps in the summer and whenever there's a school holiday. The surprise, for many of these parents, is how much the kids actually love science.

There is a plethora of science camps here in the Bay Area, some focusing on nature, others playing up technology. The choice is all yours.

## Camp SeaLab

This camp – located on the shores of Monterey Bay in Monterey – aims to get kids hooked on ocean life by introducing them to all that's fun and adventurous: kayaking, snorkeling, surfing and more.

Its day camp, which goes from 9am to 4pm, is built around a weekly theme, like tide pools, kelp forests or intertidal animals. Campers go kayaking in the bay, hiking along the coast and exploring the ocean and its creatures.

“Monterey Bay is a hub of marine science, and there's such a wealth of resources, we want to expose them to all the activities,” explains Camp Director Amity Wood. “It's a good self-confidence building experience, a way for kids to find their voice and get them out of their comfort zone.”

For ages 8 and up, the program costs \$370 a week.

Left, Tree Frog Treks campers learn science through exploring the great outdoors.

Older kids ages 10 and up spend even more time in the water when they go to the residence camp. The program focuses largely on conservation and aims to get students to think about ways they can change the world and make a difference.

They also get a genuine college experience, eating in the cafeteria and sleeping in the dorms of California State University, Monterey Bay. The five-day program costs \$775.

Many of the kids who start by attending the day program eventually move on to the residence camp. One such student is 13-year-old Ryan Breen, a seventh grader at Buena Vista Middle School in Salinas, who attended Camp SeaLab for the past three years.

This summer, he plans to take part again in Voyage Seaward, a five-day excursion for teens from Sausalito to Monterey aboard an 82-foot schooner.

“He can’t wait to go back,” says his mother, Diane. “When he was on that boat, he learned how to navigate. They had to take watch in the middle of the night to make sure they were still anchored.

“He’s learned how to snorkel, sail a boat and dissect squid. He knows how you catch sand dabs and whether they’re male or female. He wants to be a marine scientist, and we thought that getting him involved in these programs would give him some exposure. It has. It’s been great.”

If your child would enjoy such exposure, check out [campsealab.org](http://campsealab.org).

## Marine Science Institute

Budding marine biologists who live farther north in the Bay Area may want to check out the Marine Science Institute near the Port of Redwood City. Founded in 1970, the Institute has always put a premium on getting students immersed in the physical world to enrich their scientific understanding and foster a responsibility to protect the environment.

Campers in the three summer programs learn about marine life and explore the bay aboard the institute’s 90-foot marine research vessel, the Robert G. Brownlee. Five- to 6-year-olds are introduced to the ocean world through fun hands-on

activities and crafts, games and stories. Older kids explore the San Francisco Bay Estuary and collect and sample its waters and organisms. Or they might investigate the open ocean by studying sharks, marine mammals and the mysteries of the deep sea.

“The best part was being able to touch so many different types of marine life,” says Tyler Aguallo, 10, of Pacifica, who attended camp last year. “All of the workers were very nice and taught us so much.” The weekly summer camps range in price from \$350 to \$750 and are geared for ages 5-18.

For more information, go to [sfbaymsi.org/marinecamp.html](http://sfbaymsi.org/marinecamp.html).

## Sarah’s Science Camp

Sarah Shaffer was a single mother with three kids when she completed her elementary education training. She couldn’t afford to do her student teaching – six months’ work

without pay? – so she began looking at after-school programs with which she could become affiliated. That’s when she had her epiphany: “I wanted to do things different than anywhere else.”

Fifteen years later, Shaffer is leading one of the most popular science camps in the East Bay.

“I have definite ideas about how kids learn,” she says. “They need to feel safe, to be in an environment where they won’t be mocked or humiliated. When a child is having fun, her mind is open to learning.”

And what better way to have fun than making toys? In Shaffer’s full-day program, kids learn science by making things. You want to know about a lever? Make a catapult – and then put it into play shooting marshmallows.

“We make robots,” says Shaffer, who believes that even a 5-year-old can understand the rudiments of atoms and electrons after building a complete circuit.

“We probably have 100 different designs of robots for teaching electricity,” she says. “Who doesn’t love a robot? Each child makes one and takes it home, and parents tell me they play with it for years, take it apart and put it together again.”

Shaffer’s vision has taken off. Her summer camp,

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which offers full-day weekly sessions for ages 5 to 15, has an 80 percent return rate for campers. There are three locations throughout the East Bay: Roberts Regional Park in Oakland, Tilden Regional Park in Berkeley and Little Hills Picnic Ranch in San Ramon. The cost is \$325 a week.

“We swim, we hike, we do fun nature activities,” says Shaffer, who is currently at work on a kids’ book about how to raise your own praying mantis. “We’re looking at bugs, holding lizards in our hands, just getting dirty. Every child I know loves science. The way we do it, it’s the *funnest* thing to do.”

For more information, go to [sarahscience.com](http://sarahscience.com).

## Smart Kids Camps

Led by two sisters, both of them credentialed teachers, this summer program combines art, science and history in weekly themes that range from Ancient Egypt to Ancient Rome and Colonial America.

Last year, for instance, the session on Ancient Egypt highlighted a class on mummification. The campers mummified each other’s arms – rubbing salt over their skin, covering it in scented oils, then wrapping them in linen.

Other activities included grinding perfumes out of oils and botanicals to create cosmetics. The children sculpted a sarcophagus of a cat, learned how to write in hieroglyphics and studied the importance of the Nile River in Egyptian history. They even excavated some “artifacts,” buried throughout the playground at Westminster Presbyterian Church in San Jose.

Smart Kids Camps is an outgrowth of two after-school programs: Science Smart Kids, which began in 2009 as a backyard playgroup by Ildiko Stennis, a former science teacher who was looking for enrichment for her own children; and Art Smart Kids, founded a year later by her sister, Maria Poling.

Together, Stennis says they’ve created a “meaningful, integrated program,” and parents and students seem to agree.

The half-day program costs \$335 a week, not including extended care.

“My son attended the Smart Kids Camps this past summer, and we couldn’t have been more pleased,” says Mary Pascual of San Jose. “Chance is a first-grader with a million questions, and the subjects they studied kept him challenged and helped appease his curiosity.

## More Science Camps

All over the Bay Area, there is an abundance of summer camp choices for science-loving children to attend. Here are a few of the many interesting offerings:

- **Camp Edmo and Camp EdTech** – Science and technology programs designed for children in preschool through Grade 9. \$330-\$370, for a full day, 9am-3pm program. San Francisco, Oakland, Moraga, Alameda, Cupertino, Palo Alto. [edventuremore.org](http://edventuremore.org).
- **Celsius and Beyond** – Science enrichment for ages 6 to 14, with credentialed science teachers, most of them affiliated with UC San Francisco, UC Berkeley, San Francisco State University and Stanford. \$385 per week. San Francisco. [celsiusandbeyond.com](http://celsiusandbeyond.com).
- **Camp Galileo** – A weekly summer camp with themes for grades Pre-K-5; Summer Quest for older campers (grades 5-8); and a Tech Camp for 4th-8th graders. Locations throughout the Bay Area. \$359 and \$399 per week not including extended care. [galileo-learning.com](http://galileo-learning.com).
- **Digital Media Academy** – Weeklong summer computer camps, with instruction on video game design, digital graphics, 3D animation and web design. All ages. Stanford University. Full day weekly: \$825. Overnight: \$1,320. [digitalmediaacademy.org](http://digitalmediaacademy.org).
- **Guadalupe River Park and Gardens** – Outdoor summer camps focus on science, environment, wilderness, adventure and more. Ages 5-11. San Jose. \$40 for half-day. [grpg.org/SummerDayCamp.shtml](http://grpg.org/SummerDayCamp.shtml).
- **Quantum Camps** – Math and science weeklong day camps in Mountain View and Berkeley. For students entering Grades 1 through 6: \$350. Math and science camps for kids in Grades 7 and 8: \$595-\$695. [quantumcamp.com](http://quantumcamp.com).
- **Rock-It Science** – Popular classes in a laboratory classroom where kids learn through a combination of science and “fractured fairytales.” Ages 5-11. Santa Clara. \$195 per week. [rockitscience.com/summer/index.html](http://rockitscience.com/summer/index.html).
- **TechKnowHow** – Fun and enriching computer and LEGO® day camps. Ages 5-14. \$215-\$375 per week. Locations throughout the Bay Area. [techknowhowkids.com](http://techknowhowkids.com).
- **Ventana Wildlife Society** – A natural science day camp with one overnight each week. Ages 8-12. Vans pick the children up at a designated spot near the Ventana Wilderness and transport them to public lands for a full-day program. \$310 per week. [ventanaws.org/education\\_summertimecamp](http://ventanaws.org/education_summertimecamp).