

BON VOYAGE

Mountain View family visits 28 countries on yearlong vacation

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A Higham family trip a little over a year ago was hardly the typical vacation — it was a marathon journey around the world.

The Mountain View family's trek around the globe from June 2005 to June 2006 took them to 28 countries. They estimated on their family Web site that they spent more than \$121,000 for four people but spent less than \$100 on souvenirs.

The Highams are now making the much shorter trip around the Bay Area to share their experiences, and the father, John Higham, is trying to get a book about their travels published. He made the round-the-world trip with his wife, September; daughter, Katrina, 13; and son, Jordan, 10.

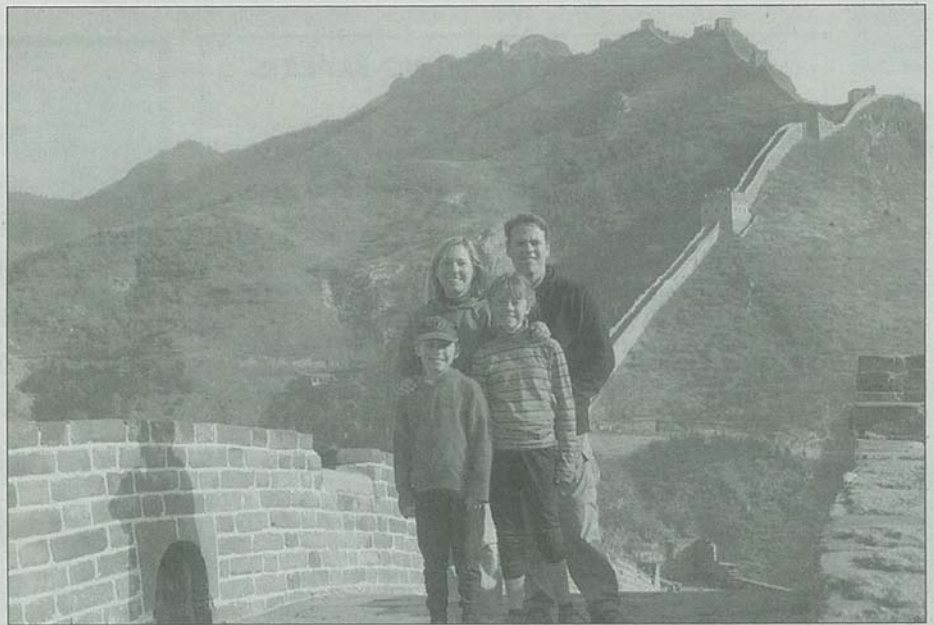
September's mom sent the children books while they traveled and September taught them math so they would not fall behind their classmates back home. And John was able to go back to work for the same company when he returned.

John and September started thinking about the trip before their children were born, while they lived in Japan for a brief period.

They saved up for decades, and said it was well worthwhile.

"We lived frugally to do it," September said. "We started seriously planning the year before we left."

They started in Europe and planned to bicycle for four months from London to Turkey, but Katrina broke her leg about six weeks into the trip while rappelling in Switzerland. They visited the Czech Republic and Poland while in Europe, and the rest of their trip included



Courtesy of the Higham family

The Highams pose for a photo while touring the Great Wall in China.

stops in Cambodia, China, Thailand and Costa Rica.

"We found that some of the most stunning scenery in the world was in Peru," September said. "The Serengeti in Tanzania was interesting."

While in Peru, the Highams hiked along the Inca Trail to the ruins of Machu Picchu in the Andes Mountains.

Their voyage also included a safari in Tanzania, where they saw lions, giraffes, hippos and other animals in their natural environments. Other nature experiences included camping in the Amazon, where they fished for piranhas.

Katrina called the safari one of the highlights of the trip.

"I love animals," Katrina said. "It was very different. We saw a leopard up in a tree with its kill."

Another plus about the trip, Katrina said, was that it brought her and her brother closer because he was the only other child for her to play with.

One of John's favorite countries was Bolivia.

"It was an exciting place," he said. "There is a lot to do in Bolivia. You got the Andes and

you got the Amazon in one country. The people and culture are fascinating."

Bolivia is also where the family had one of its more hair-raising experiences, which inspired the title of the book John wrote, "Armageddon Pills."

The family's vehicle broke down in a remote section of Bolivia, and all the family had to eat was peanut M&Ms, which they dubbed "Armageddon Pills." The mechanic they hired used one of the M&Ms to plug a leak and fix their vehicle after they were stranded for six hours, John said.

September said Turkey, Dubai and China were among the most interesting places for her. She said China has the best amusement parks and Dubai, in the Persian Gulf, has the best water park in the world.

"We learned many things," September said. "One of the most important things is that the world is not as dangerous as the media makes it out to be."

To find out more about the Highams' trip, go to www.armageddonpills.com. The Highams will share their experience at 7 p.m. tonight at the San Carlos REI, 1119 Industrial Road.

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