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Around the world...



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF HIGHAM FAMILY; MCOLLATHY-TROBUE MAP

... with kids

LESSONS OF A MOUNTAIN VIEW FAMILY THAT SPENT A YEAR TRAVELING THE GLOBE

One year, 28 countries
Where the Highams visited, in chronological order

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1: Iceland | 15: Tanzania |
| 2: England | 16: Mauritius |
| 3: France | 17: Singapore |
| 4: Switzerland | 18: Japan |
| 5: Austria | 19: China |
| 6: Czech Republic | 20: Thailand |
| 7: Poland | 21: Cambodia |
| 8: Sweden | 22: Costa Rica |
| 9: Denmark | 23: Panama |
| 10: Germany | 24: Bolivia |
| 11: Italy | 25: Chile |
| 12: Greece | 26: Argentina |
| 13: Turkey | 27: Peru |
| 14: Dubai, UAE | 28: Belize |

By Michael Martinez
Mercury News

It's the vacation of a lifetime: 28 countries in 12 months, with plenty of time to see and do whatever you please. And not a care in the world.

Except for the two kids. But John and September Higham of Mountain View thought it was a good idea anyway — a chance to circle the world and share unique experiences with their two school-age children.

"You only have one chance to do it as a family," September Higham said. "Your kids are only going to be with you for 18 years. Taking off with them, that's a

Meet the Highams

The Highams have two multimedia presentations scheduled at local REI stores to discuss their family trip around the world.

Oct. 30: 7 p.m., 2450 Charleston Road, Mountain View, (650) 969-3938

Nov. 7: 7 p.m., 145 General Sillwell Drive, Marina, (831) 883-8048

once-in-a-lifetime thing." From June 2005 to June 2006, the Highams and their children — daughter Katrina, 11 at the time, and son Jordan, 8 — traveled around the globe, from Europe to Africa to Asia to South America. They saw the Louvre

Online Extra

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and the Vatican and the temples at Angkor Wat. They spent a day at a water park in Dubai, visited amusement parks in China and sought out the best ice cream in Istanbul.

The Highams are sharing their experiences in upcoming talks at REI stores in Mountain View and the Monterey area and have a Web site, www.armageddonpills.com, that details their trav-

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DAN HONDA — MESA/AMERICA

Above, the Highams' many adventures; right, a suitcase with patches from the countries they visited.

FAMILY | 28 countries in 12 months

Continued from Page 1TR

is. The site name refers to a bag of M&Ms that sustained the family while it was stranded on the Bolivian salt flats.

"It's definitely an interesting story that they traveled the world with the entire family," said Sarah Shier, RET's outreach and events administrator for the Bay Area. "It can inspire others who have thought about doing the same thing."

With preparation and a reasonable set of expectations for our kids, the Highams say anyone can do it. Even if you're thinking about taking the family to Europe for a month, there are guidelines worth following.

The Highams planned well in advance. They began saving for their trip 10 years earlier, getting their kids involved in deciding whether the family would spend money on an activity or sock it away. They budgeted \$121,000 for the trip. On a large wall map in their apartment, each of them marked places in the world they wanted to visit.

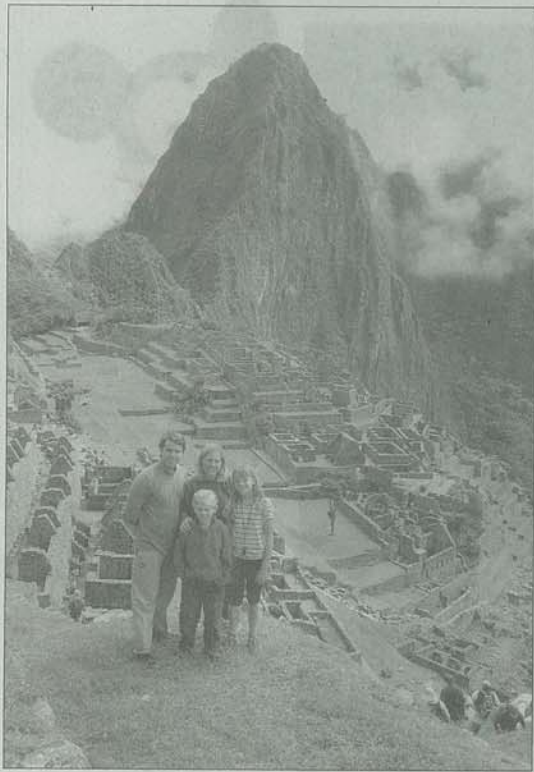
"It's one of the things that really connected us," said John, an aerospace engineer. Getting your kids sold at an early age — getting them committed to it and excited — is important."

Another was making sure Katrina and Jordan kept up with their schoolwork, even though it would be missing a year in the classroom.

The Highams put an emphasis on math but also insisted that their kids keep journals to document their experiences and practice their writing. They made sure Katrina and Jordan had plenty of books to read for entertainment (Katrina read 111 books during the year away from home).

"Every month, September's other mailed sections of math textbooks and kept the kids well stocked with other reading books.

"As soon as we got up and had breakfast, it was school time," said September, a software consultant. "We only spent an hour and a half on



The globe-trotting Highams at Machu Picchu in Peru.

school every morning, but we were consistent and there were no excuses, unless we were catching a bus at 6 in the morning."

Both children moved on with their class when they returned to Mountain View. Katrina passed a required math test before school started.

But the real education, they said, came every day as they traveled — meeting people, observing cultures, trying different foods, visiting museums and landmarks.

"We wanted this trip to change our children's lives," September said. "We believe it will change the way they vote, the way they treat immigrants who come to this country. We want our children to figure those things out for themselves, and traveling for a year is part of our wanting to educate them that way.

"We don't need to tell them how to think about war because they've been to Cambodia and seen the killing fields. They've seen what war can do to a country."

Those experiences left an impression on the children.

"It kind of made me realize what's going on in the world," said Katrina, now 13. "We saw a lot of poverty. I saw a lot of kids who don't have as much as I do. But a lot of people want to help you. Most everyone is good."

The Highams learned about the kindness of others while visiting the small town of Lushoto in the Usambara Mountains of eastern Tanzania. They had just \$9 in cash — and not an ATM machine in sight.

Worried about paying for a hotel and food, John wandered into the town square. There,



Jordan Higham has a close encounter with a toucan in Rurrenabaque, Bolivia.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE HIGHAMS

he met a man who loaned him \$3 for a taxi. The man said there was an inn in the mountains where he thought credit cards were accepted.

But that proved fruitless. The innkeeper, however, loaned John \$30.

Back in town, September went to the town's office of cultural tourism to ask if anyone there could offer a suggestion. There was nothing they could do, she was told, but if someone thought of something, they would let her know.

"Half an hour later, someone found me and said, 'We opened our safe and found \$100. Would you like to borrow it?'"

With the money, John traveled five hours by bus to the nearest ATM and returned to repay the loans.

"If it had been just one person who did that, it would have been touching enough," he said. "But it was three people on three separate occasions who lent us money, which to us was more than a coincidence. The irony of being among the richest people in the world taking charity from the impoverished was not lost on us."

There were other worrisome moments. Katrina broke

her leg six weeks into the trip while in Switzerland, forcing the family to give up its plans of bicycling to Istanbul. Jordan was slowed by altitude sickness while climbing the Inca Trail in Peru.

And when the kids had simply seen too many museums or visited too many castles, their parents made compromises.

"Seeing one or two castles is fine, or one or two cathedrals is fine," September said. "The great thing about traveling with your family is that you see a whole different piece of a country than you would otherwise."

"Kids want to hang out at public pools. They're just born that way. And when you do that around the world, you meet the most interesting people and families. You meet people who have nothing to do with the tourist industry, and that's not something that happens when you travel with just adults."

The Highams say friends and family still ask them why they did it. But they say it was a valuable experience — one they would do again.

"Being with your kids 24 hours a day — for some people

TIPS FOR TAKING THE KIDS ALONG

Thinking about an extended trip with the kids? John and September Higham, who traveled the world with their two children, offer these tips:

■ **Set reasonable expectations.** Your kids will get bored quickly if you visit museums every day. Let them pick an activity, such as visiting a water park or amusement park.

■ **Be flexible.** When the unexpected happens — a child gets sick or hurt — be prepared to make adjustments to your travel schedule.

■ **Don't worry about the kids missing school.** There's a lot to be learned on the road, a lot of life lessons that aren't going to happen any other way," says September Higham.

■ **Take it slowly.** Stay away from package tours, which can be long and tedious. Children don't have the stamina.

■ **Leave the electronics at home.** No iPods, cell phones or handheld game players. "Your kids will do much better if they can see and hear what's going on," September says.

that would be a trip to hell and back," September said. "It's not for everybody. But don't underestimate the power of your kids to be flexible and enjoy themselves wherever they are."

Contact Michael Martinez at mmartinez@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5503.

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