



We're a kid's playground, too!

by June Corrigan

The Coachella Valley has been described variously as a playground for presidents, Hollywood entertainers and corporate CEOs.... but what about actual children? Whether you're a parent visiting the area with little ones in tow or a grandparent whose progeny has swooped in for a week, rest assured there are plenty of venues and fun activities the whole family can enjoy.

No trip to the area is complete without a visit to The Living Desert in Palm Desert. This zoo and botanical gardens features a wide range of animals including giraffes, cheetahs, zebras, reptiles and a number of aviary exhibits to name but a few. The expansive acreage boasts an authentic replica of an African village known as Village WaTuTu with its ever-popular Petting Kraal. Kids both young and old alike will thrill to the working model train exhibit, and be sure to take in one of the daily Wildlife Wonders Shows in the outdoor amphitheater. Look for special holiday events like the annual WildLights extravaganza running late November through December.

Next stop is the Children's Discovery Museum of the Desert in Rancho Mirage, which never fails to inspire and promote intellectual curiosity in young minds through its many interactive exhibits and programs. Budding scientists will find much to pique their interest, including an archeological dig. The artistically inclined can add their signature paint touch to an actual Volkswagen Bug. Little ones particularly enjoy shopping or manning the cash register in the pretend grocery store. Same principle applies in the make-believe pizza parlor. And be sure to make your way up to Gramma's Attic for an imaginative game of dress-up.

Craving the great outdoors? Head over to the Indian Canyons in south Palm Springs and hike moderately graded footpaths even the smallest children can navigate. Pack a picnic and enjoy it alongside the meandering stream, while your youngsters clamber over rocks amid the flora and fauna indigenous to this beautiful area.

You and the kids can explore nature trails at the top of Mount San Jacinto, too, courtesy of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway.



Families participate in interactive exhibits at the Children's Discovery Museum.

It's a thrilling ten-minute ride ascending 8,500+ feet in the world's largest rotating tramcar. The views are spectacular, but bear in mind it's generally about 30 degrees cooler at that altitude, so dress accordingly.

The Palm Springs area is synonymous with swimming pools, but what if your accommodations don't include a heated one? Kids can splash away to their hearts content in the warm water of the Palm Springs Swim Center and Palm Desert's new

Aquatic Center, even in the winter months. The Palm Desert facility features a couple of towering water slides as well as other water play features and both offer swimming lessons.

Kids like to play golf just as much as you do -- miniature golf, that is. Boomers family entertainment center in Cathedral City has that and more. The facility's go-karts, bumper boats, climbing wall and game room will be a sure-fire hit with tweens and teens.

And although Canada is miles away, your family can still get your ice skating fix in the land of palm trees at Desert Ice Castle, also in Cathedral City.

If you want to explore some hidden corners of the valley, consider taking a Desert Adventure Jeep Tour. The company offers a wide variety of packages and family themed tours. Kids will love the old mining camp and Cahuilla Indian Village that are oft-planned stops along the way. Their expert naturalist guides can instruct children in Indian petroglyph painting, Indian arrow and arrowhead-necklace making plus other desert arts and crafts incorporated into unique adventures to pockets of the desert heretofore unseen!

Finally, when you tire of reaching into your wallet for yet another outlay of cash to keep kids occupied and amused, circle back to the perceived notion of desert as playground. Because the Coachella Valley is home to lots of them - good old-fashioned green space, swings, slides and climbing structures, that is, and, what's more, they're free! Try Civic Center Park in Palm Desert, Sunrise Park in Palm Springs and Fritz Burns in La Quinta for starters. Each offer ample opportunity for children to burn off a little steam and a chance for all family members to delight in the blue skies and warm weather that brought you here in the first place.



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