



Spend Your Summer Getting to Know Arizona on These Family-Friendly Day Trips



By Robin Layton

From snowy peaks to blooming deserts, Arizona boasts it all. Instead of planning an expensive, cumbersome, one-destination vacation this year, consider taking the children on several day trips and explore your home state.

Submerge Yourself in Ocean Fun in Scottsdale (108 mi.)

The Phoenix metropolitan area is packed with fun, family-oriented activities. Among them is the OdySea Aquarium, located in Scottsdale.

Karin Gallo, aquarium public relations manager, noted that it was recently voted the Kids Best Indoor Entertainment.

The multi-level facility holds more than two million gallons of water and is the largest aquarium in Arizona.

"OdySea Aquarium offers an educational, interactive, and entertaining experience for guests of all ages by combining theme-park style amusement with highly engaging presentations of aquatic life," said Gallo.

The aquarium features more than 65 exhibits, 370 species, the world's only Russian Sturgeon touch exhibit, as well as two Stingray touch exhibits and a tide touch pool.



Children have the chance to learn about sea life through question and answer times with aquarium staff.

It is located at 9500 E. Via de Ventura in Scottsdale, in the OdySea in the Desert Entertainment Destination, which also features Butterfly Wonderland, Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition, Polar Play Ice Bar, Surprise Your Eyes pop-up art installation, and Pangea Land of the Dinosaurs, in addition to 20 dining,

shopping, and amusement venues. For more information, call (480) 291-8000 or visit: OdySeaAquarium.com

Embrace the Cowboy Life in Cottonwood (43 mi.)

Drive over Mingus Mountain and drop into the Verde Valley to experience another side of Arizona. With red rock views in the distance, the Verde River offers fishing, canoeing and more.

Throw in some history with a stop at the Tuzigoot National Monument for a glimpse of the life people led in the valley 1,000 year ago. Explore the museum and talk to the rangers on duty about the Sinagua people.

Nearby is Dead Horse Ranch State Park which offers camping cabins, lakes to fish, and trails to hike.

Kids can even become Junior Rangers. Just ask for a booklet at the office, complete the activities, and then have a park ranger review it to become a full-pledged Junior Ranger!

Now that everyone has worked up a major appetite, it's time for dinner.

Located on the banks of the Verde River, the Blazin' M Ranch features a BBQ chuckwagon supper and a live Western stage show performed by award-winning cowboy musicians.

"The Blazin' M is a must-do family attraction during your visit to the Verde Valley," said Lori Mabery, managing partner and group coordinator.



Catch dinner and quite a show at the Blazin' M Ranch.



Enjoy a bit of ropin' at the Blazin' M Ranch.

The Western courtyard features an Old-Tyme photo studio, shootin' gallery, ropin' lessons, tractor-pulled wagon ride, a wood-carvings museum, saloon, and Western shops.

Reservations are recommended. Call (928) 634-0334 or visit BlazinM.com or e-mail info@blazinm.com.

Meet the Bears of Williams (69 mi.)

Head up to the mountains for some cooler air and a chance to see a bear ... or four.

Bearizona in Williams is "bringing the wild back to the West" on their 160 acres. Visitors drive through over three miles of forest to see animals in their natural habitats. Animals are also exhibited in Fort Bearizona, a 20-acre walk-through area.

On the self-guided walking tour, there is also the "Bearizona Barnyard" petting zoo, a Mine Shaft Experience which houses some nocturnal animals as well as some creepy, crawly critters, and a unique exhibit which houses kindergarten bears not quite old enough to go into our adult enclosure, according to bearizona.com.

The park also features a birds of prey show by the High Country Raptors, as well as a restaurant and a grille.

Bearizona is open daily 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. More information can be found at bearizona.com or by calling (928) 635-2289.

Don't forget to stop by downtown Williams and walk the famous Rt. 66 shopping area.

Reach for the Stars in Flagstaff (93 mi.)

Looking out over Flagstaff is the Lowell Observatory, a research in-

stitution founded in 1894.

Take a daytime guided walking tour of the observatory to learn about the historic campus, as well as see the 24" Clark Refracting Telescope, built in 1896 and still in use today.



The historic 24-inch Clark Telescope that guests get to look through on clear nights. Courtesy of Lowell Observatory.

Explore the discovery of Pluto in a 45-minute guided tour, or hear the story behind the Moon mapping that occurred at Lowell in preparation for the first Apollo mission.

Visit Lowell.edu or call (928) 774-3358 for tour information and directions.

For more family fun, stop by Fort Tuthill County Park for a hike or try out the Flagstaff Extreme Adventure Course. The zipline course has a special child's section, complete with a required training session and child-sized zip lines. Learn more at flagstaffextreme.com.

Get a Good Scare in Jerome (35 mi.)

If your family loves ghost tales, consider a haunted tour of the famous mining town of Jerome, nestled on the side of a mountain, overlooking the Verde Valley.

With Tours of Jerome, you can take a two-hour guided walking tour, equipped with EMF readers and flashlights. Learn what spirits are said to be hanging around the old town.

Visit toursofjerome.com for more information.

While in Jerome, visit the unique Gold King Mine Ghost Town, established in 1890.

Walk through an eclectic collection of structures and vehicles, visit with the menagerie at the petting zoo and even pan for gold!

See goldkingmineghosttown.com for more information.

Of course, before you head back home, walk through Jerome itself and take in the many artisan shops, galleries and family-friendly restaurants.