

Places to Go

Summer 2009

Fun Nature-Related Outings to Take with Kids,
Contributed by local Preschool Parents

Santa Clara & South Bay Area

Baylands Park

999 East Caribbean Drive
(Near Lawrence Expressway & Highway 237)

Fun and unusual playground areas fringed by a beautiful wetlands setting -- with nature paths. Ideal for kite flying, long walks, and even bikes. A gorgeous place to spend a piece of your day. Seasonal passes available.

Casa De Fruta

6680 Pacheco Pass Hwy,
Highway 152
(408) 842-9316

"We pass this whenever we take a trip out to Highway 5, to head south. We jokingly call it Casa de Everything. My kids LOVE it. Even my almost 18 year old has such fond memories that she is yearning for another visit this summer. Carousel, train ride, Thomas oriented gift shop, small petting zoo, playground, restaurant, dried fruit emporium (with other picnic goodies), and more! Located in the Pacheco Valley, two miles east of the junction of Highway 152 and Highway 156, Casa de Fruta is easily accessible from both Interstate 5 or Highway 101, and is only short drive from Gilroy. The scenic grounds offer a relaxing place to sample your purchases while your children romp and explore within view. *Please note that there is a shallow open pond near the playground, so those with active toddlers will need to exercise caution.* There is also a Ren Faire held here annually and a Native American Pow Wow." -- Linnaea

Emma Prusch Farm

647 South King Road
San Jose, CA 95116

This is a great park to visit with young kids as it has a playground, large sweeping lawns to run and play, and a real working barn with farm animals! Historic buildings and gardens add extra ambiance for adults. Open daily, 8:30 am to sunset. One Saturday morning each month, kids will have the opportunity to feed the farm animals. Call (408) 926-5555 for more information. <http://www.pruschfarmpark.org/>

[Gilroy Gardens](#)

3050 Hecker Pass Hwy
Gilroy, CA 95020
(408) 840-7100

What sets Gilroy Gardens apart from other theme parks is its emphasis on natural beauty. At Gilroy Gardens, there are many opportunities to rest the body and the spirit by basking in the wonder of the natural world including a variety of gardens, ponds, waterfalls, playgrounds, and the picnic groves. The result, parents say, is a much more relaxed, grounded experience. But kids will most likely remember the beautiful carousel, the rock maze that changes daily, riding the Artichoke Dip or the Garlic Twist, and the Circus Trees. The only bad news about the park is that it is on the pricey side. To get your money's worth, plan to arrive early and spend the entire day. <http://www.earthskids.com/sanjuan.aspx>

[Great America](#)

Great America Parkway, Santa Clara
Just off Highway 101

“Very expensive but lots of fun with a season pass, go for just a little while, all my kids can ride something there.” - Kate

[Guadalupe Rose Garden](#)

“Located on Taylor just past Coleman, my son went there on a field trip and they got to learn A LOT about flowers, real hands on experience” -- Kate

[Hidden Villa](#)

26870 Moody Road, Los Altos Hills
(650) 949-8650

“It is a working organic farm with sheep, pigs, cows, goats, ducks and gardens. There are picnic areas and hiking trails. In the spring and early summer they offer fun events for children. They offer summer camp, environmental education programs and community programs. This is one of my favorite places to take my kids” – Melissa <http://www.hiddenvilla.org/>

[John D Morgan Park](#)

540 W. Rincon Ave.
Campbell, CA 95008

The city's largest park is Morgan Park, named for former Police Chief John D. Morgan. Morgan Park is 32 acres and is located east of San Tomas Expressway between Budd and Rincon Avenues. Fun sand & water play area.

[Japanese Friendship Garden](#)

1300 Senter Rd
San Jose, CA 95112

“I couldn't find the official City of San Jose website, but this gives all the info you need. A beautiful garden to wander through. It's right next to Happy Hollow.” -- Amanda

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/japanese-friendship-garden-san-jose>

[The Los Gatos Creek Trail](#)

The Los Gatos Creek Trail enters its most [popular segment](#) as it runs under Blossom Hill road into Vasona Lake County Park. Across the creek is Los Gatos' [Oak Meadow Park](#). The trail follows along the east bank of the creek next to a picnic area. It passes by a restroom and rises up to a trail junction at 1.3 miles. Here a wooden bridge crosses over the creek to enter Oak Meadow Park. The bridge is actually a train crossing for the famous [Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad](#). Pedestrian walkways on the bridge are on either side of the train tracks and lead to the train station in Oak Meadow Park. 2) <http://pages.prodigy.net/rhorii/lgcrktr2.htm>

[Rancho San Antonio & Deer Hollow Farm](#)

Rancho San Antonio County Park
Los Altos, CA, 94024

(Rancho San Antonio park w/ 4h animals, hiking, etc) Located within the 3,800-acre Rancho San Antonio wildlife preserve, Deer Hollow Farm is an educational center where visitors, school classes, and community groups can participate in an historic working farm. A visit to the Farm will take you back 150 years to when homesteads were an important source of food for the residents in this area. Not just the orchard and gardens, but animals as well contribute to the food stuff produced by the farm. Thus visitors will see chickens, rabbits, goats, sheep, and a cow. (Animals can be view from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm) The natural setting created by the wildlife preserve gives visitors a unique opportunity to sample rural life as it once existed all over Santa Clara Valley. The farm is open to the public Tuesday, Thursday-Sunday from 8:00am-4:pm. And on Wednesdays from 8:00am-4:00pm. Animal viewing from 9:00am-3:00pm. Admission is \$2 for children and \$5 for adults. *For extra fun: You can also buy fresh eggs there from their hens.* (650) 965-FARM

[Santana Row Farmer's Market, San Jose](#)

“Often there's live music. Nice fountain where kids play with rocks. Area with chess tables and even a large chess set that kids have fun moving the pieces. We go to this farmer's market because it's close, but I know other people have recommended others like Los Gatos, Sunnyvale, etc.” -- Amanda http://www.pcfm.com/marketdetail.php?market_id=16

[San Juan Batista](#)

“Even if you have no interest in visiting the mission and its lovely grounds, you'll enjoy wandering the historic town, peeking in at the art galleries (actually entering if the kids are asleep in the strollers!), stopping in at the bakery, eating authentic Mexican food, and watching the chickens cross the road. Take a baggy of bird seed for the kids to toss to them! On weekends there's often live music pouring out of one of the establishments. There's a little playground several streets down from the mission for the kids to play. When my son Brian was 2 he had his first taste of sand here. My mom couldn't stop laughing at the look on his face!” - Linnaea

[Shoreline park in Mountain View](#)

A beautiful 700-acre park with a saltwater lake, golf course, rolling grassy hills, and bay trails. Take Hwy 101 to the Shoreline Blvd. exit. Exit north onto Shoreline Blvd., which leads directly into the main entrance of the park.

South Bay Historical Railroad Society at the Santa Clara Railroad Depot

“Again, not nature-related but this is my son's absolute most favorite place to visit. These train guys volunteer their time to operate a railroad museum in the depot that includes operating scale model train displays. And because it is at the Santa Clara Depot, kids can watch the real trains roar by. It is free to the public but they ask for donations. It is open Tuesday evenings and Saturdays” -- Melissa. <http://www.sbhrs.org/index.html>

Ulistac Natural Area in Santa Clara

“Not a large “hike” by any means, but a short nature trail. Lots of rabbits, birds, bugs, etc. to see. You can get onto the levee trail along the Guadalupe River and extend your nature walk.”
- Amanda http://santaclaraca.gov/park_recreation/pr_ulistac.html

Vasona Park & Oak Meadow Park

A large 12 acre park featuring a large grass field, large playground area with a real, decommissioned USAF T-33 Jet, bocci ball courts, BBQ and picnic facilities, Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad, W.E. Bill Mason Carousal, access to Vasona County Park, and the Los Gatos Creek Trail. Go for a hike and a train ride at the end.

Your Own Backyard

Simple, but certainly close to home! (Important with gas over \$4 a gallon!) Tristen advised, “Go for a bug hunt in your back yard or someone Else's. Noah likes to catch the snails and play with them before putting them on the ferry (Ferry= placing them in our clean green bin since we don't use pesticides and don't want to teach him to kill bugs).”

Youth Science Institute

“The Sanborn Park location is my favorite. They have a science and nature center with live animals, geology exhibits and a bug zoo that my kids love. They also host summer day camps.”
-- Melissa

For more info visit them on the web at <http://www.yisi-ca.org/> or call:

Alum Rock Center
16260 Alum Rock Ave.
San Jose, CA 95127
(408) 258-4322

YSI Sanborn Center
15055 Sanborn Road
Saratoga, CA 95070
(408) 867-6940

Vasona Nature Center
296 Garden Hill Drive
Los Gatos, CA 95032
(408) 356-4945

Places to Go in Fremont

Lake Elizabeth

Set on 450 acres with an 83 acre lake and named “Best Park” of the Tri-Cities area by the Argus newspaper for 2004! <http://www.ci.fremont.ca.us/Recreation/LakeElizabeth/default.htm>

Ardenwood Historic Farm

34600 Ardenwood Blvd.
Fremont, California 94555

This 205 acre historic farm is a wonderful place for families to relax and explore an earlier era. Older children can learn about the rural life of 100 years ago through hands-on exhibits about cooking, blacksmithing, wool spinning, soap making, growing crops, and etc. The littlest ones will enjoy just seeing the animals! Chickens, turkeys, pigs, sheep, horses, and strolling peacocks are just part of the farm's menagerie. Bring a picnic to enjoy at one of the tables or out on picturesque front lawn of the 1890s Victorian style main house. Restrooms and group picnic facilities are available. **Special weekend activities and demonstrations** (including wagon rides) are augmented by seasonal events such as the pumpkin patch and corn maze in the fall, the Civil War reenactment in May, the Christmas tour of the big house in December, and etc. **Please note that Ardenwood is closed Mondays.**

<http://www.fremont.gov/Recreation/ArdenwoodPark/History.htm>

Coyote Hills Park

8000 Patterson Ranch Road
Fremont, CA 94555

The East Bay park features great family hiking amidst fascinating mini biomes that include salt evaporation ponds, rolling hills, and marshes with boardwalk trails. Restrooms are few and far between so have children plan wisely or be prepared to go "au natural". Note that it's location next to the bay means this park gets a cool summer breeze. Stop in at the Visitor's Center to learn about the Native Americans who once inhabited this area. The visitor center is open Tuesdays through Sundays 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., but is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Mid Peninsula

Coyote Point Museum

1551 Coyote Point Drive,
San Mateo, CA 94401-1097

"Playground, picnic areas, bayfront beaches." -- Sarah

The Dish Hike, Palo Alto

"I used a jogging stroller. It's mostly paved, but I think I remember some of the path being rocky. Be prepared for a workout, but it's amazing views help take your mind off the climb." -- Amanda

<http://dish.stanford.edu/>

River Otter Feeding



Daily at 12:30

<http://www.coyoteptmuseum.org/>

Palo Alto Junior Museum and Zoo

1451 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto
(650) 329-2111

The exhibits inside the museum change from time to time, so check their website to see what's go on currently. The museum's tiny zoo features many local animals, some displayed in naturalistic exhibits.

Santa Cruz County

Big Basin Redwood State Park in Santa Cruz

"You can camp and hike. There are many hiking trails, including an easy 1/4 loop from the park headquarters that is easy for little kids and includes some really big and really old redwoods.

They also offer guided tours for families with kids." – Melissa

<http://www.bigbasin.org/>

Capitola Beach

"Fo'get about it on a summer weekend! But other times this is heaven on earth. Park at the Esplanade (if you get lucky), kick off your shoes, and put your feet up on the dash while you eat a slice of the world's best pizza from Pizza My Heart. More great little shops and eateries abound. The view is incredible no matter the weather. Locals love the drive from 41st avenue, down along the cliffs, and down along the esplanade." -- Linnaea

Henry Cowell State Park & Big Trees

101 North Big Trees Park Road
Felton, CA 95018
831-335-4598

Not as big as Big Basin, but if you have children in tow, that could be a good thing! Henry Cowell also has picnicking areas with a nice "wildy" feeling about them. But be warned, the mosquitoes come out at dusk (sometimes earlier), so bring your repellent just in case. Do be sure to visit the nature center. Includes some hands on touchy feely items that will appeal to all children, especially preschoolers. Note that a restroom is provided half way through the loop -- a real boon to small children. Camping is available on the other end of Henry Cowell (S.E. of Roaring Camp). For more information call 831-438-2396. But spaces are limited to reserve way ahead.

Natural Bridges Beach

"In Santa Cruz, really cool rock structures, I think also camping spots." -- Kate

Ocean View Park

"We went to Ocean View Park in Santa Cruz. It was totally worth the drive and we will go again. You have to go up 25 steps for the long slides." -- Bethanne

http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/pr/parksrec/photogallery/thumb_oceanviewpk.htm

Pillar Point

"Tide-pooling. Just Google 'tide table pillar point Half Moon Bay' to find a low tide. This is some of the best in CA" - Bethanne

Seacliff State Beach / Cement Ship

Seacliff, CA
(831) 685-6444 or 685-6500

"Growing up in Santa Cruz, this was one of my favorite beaches! Lots of sand and surf to play in. Parking right next to the beach - except on summer weekends. And the little cement ship pier to do a little fishing off of. To camp in a small RV here is divine. But getting a reservation is tough. Camping at nearby New Brighton State Beach, where you're under the trees instead of down against the beach, is a great runner up option with little kids. Both provide hookups."
-- Linnaea

Seymour Marine Discovery Center, Santa Cruz.

"It is part of UC Santa Cruz. We haven't been yet, but we plan to check it out this summer. We rented a beach house in Aptos and plan to go to the **Monterey Bay Aquarium, The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park, and the Santa Cruz Boardwalk** in addition to the Marine Discovery Center. " - Melissa <http://www2.ucsc.edu/seymourcenter/>

Twin Lakes Beach

East Cliff Drive at 7th Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Park your car right at the edge of the sand. Right across street, is the "duck pond" (Schwan's Lake, part of the Twin Lakes), a real favorite with kids of all ages. There's a lovely view of the light house from here, and yes, there is a public restroom. Typically nice and sunny when Capitola and Seacliff are fogged in. The only drawback is that parking is extremely limited, so your best bet is to come on a week day. Better yet, try hitting it in late Spring or early Fall -- while the working folk and older school kids are locked indoors.

Monterey County

Carmel River Beach State Park

Carmel, CA 93923
(831) 624-4909

If you enter the beach from the city side (via the parking lot in Carmel By-The-Sea) note that you must contend with a considerable slope. But you'll get to take in a fantastic view of the gorgeous Monterey Bay and wiggle your toes in **the softest, whitest sand imaginable**. If you

are heading out toward, or returning from, Point Lobos you'll find another nice entrance to this straggling State Park, with parking just alongside the highway. Here the beach is flat and broad with plenty of room for kids to race about and stretch their legs and build that perfect sand castle. <http://www.earthskids.com/monterey.aspx>

Monterey Bay Aquarium

Cannery Row
Monterey, CA 93940
(831) 648-4800

The tide pools, the kelp forest, the deep ocean section -- these are just a few of the reasons to visit this gorgeous, modern aquarium. When you're done looking inside, go outside for a sweeping panorama of the Monterey Bay -- or a stroll down Cannery Row. (Will it be wine tasting or outlet shopping -- or candy and a carousel ride?) <http://www.mbayaq.org/>

Point Lobos State Preserve

Located off of Highway 1,
three miles south of Carmel, CA

We made the pilgrimage in mid April and were treated to an up close view of mother harbor seals sunning on a beach with their newborn pups. Other wildlife spottings included sea gulls and vultures soaring a few feet above our heads on the brisk sea breezes, plus cute sea otters bobbing in the kelp beds, a variety of shore birds, and a satisfying assortment of tide pool denizens, including tiny fish and hermit crabs in a whimsical assortment of borrowed shells. The tide pools here are the best we've found for exploring with kids. Lots to see, easy to get up close and touch, and much safer for visiting with small children than other central coast tide pools. To make it just a little sweeter, the walk from the car to the first tide pool was ridiculously short.

San Francisco, Oakland, & North Bay

Bay Area Children's Discovery Museum

A one-of-a-kind indoor/outdoor children's museum that offers a full range of programs for children, parents, school groups and educators. Located on 7 and 1/2 acres in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area at Fort Baker in Sausalito, CA., the Museum's unique programs feature hands-on art, science, environmental and media exhibitions, performances, special events and ongoing educational curricula... all with a focus on fun! <http://www.baykidsmuseum.org/>

California Academy of Sciences

Golden Gate Park

"Right now the Howard Street location in San Francisco is closed. The big reopening in Golden Gate Park is coming Septemeber 27, 2008! I can hardly wait!" -- Linnaea

<http://calacademy.org/index.php>

Crissy Field in SF

“You can play on the beach, watch the windsurfers and snack in the warming hut.” -- Bethanne

Exploratorium

3601 Lyon Street, San Francisco CA
(415) 561-0360

The bay area's best hands on science exploration museum. Plan to spend about 3 hours. A snack bar is available inside, but prices are a bit high. Check their website to find out about current or upcoming exhibits. <http://www.earthskids.com/california.aspx>

Oakland zoo

977 Golf Links Road, Oakland, Ca
(Inside Knowland Park)
(510) 632-9525

“Very nice, great kids part with farm animals, play area” -- Kate

Tide pools at the Presidio in SF

Tilden Regional Park

Enter via Wildcat Canyon Road
or Grizzly Peak Boulevard in Berkeley, CA

Wow! Wildlife, hiking and horseback riding trails, swimming, picnicking, pony rides, petting zoo/farm animals, a carousel, stream trains, and botanic gardens. Incredible views of the bay on the drive up and back - at least for passengers!”

Walking along the waterfront in SF

“Walking from Market Street/Ferry Building until as far as you can get (we stop at Ghiradelli's past Pier 39). You can scooter this, bike this, stroller this, walk this, it's just great.” - Bethanne

“I agree - great views of the Bay, plenty of interesting people watching, lots of fun places to stop and shop, fun eats at the Rainforest Café (horribly overpriced but worth it now and then), and nearby is Pier 39.” -- Linnaea

Overnight Excursions

Point Reyes hiking/walking.

Offers camping, hiking, nature center - lots of scenic vistas. Well worth the drive.

Big Tree Drive-Thru

Avenue of the Giants, California

They are the biggest trees in the world: the giant redwoods of Northern California. Unlike your own local oaks, these wizened sentinels -- many living when Columbus found the New World -- are big enough to drive through. <http://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/2043>

California State Railroad Museum

“This isn't nature-related but this is a fantastic museum in Sacramento. On National Train Day (May 10) we took Amtrak <http://www.amtrak.com> to Sacramento and visited the museum. They have restored old engines and coaches that you can climb aboard! This museum displays interesting information about CA railroad history. We stayed at the Holiday Inn, Sacramento. The hotel is a short walk from the museum and the Amtrak station (very important if you get there by train) and they offer a Railroad Museum package that includes tickets to the museum, tickets for the steam train which rides on the Central Pacific Railroad, and breakfast for two for \$164. My son and daughter had a fantastic time. So did my husband and I. And on National Train Day, kids can ride Amtrak for free. Amtrak is a very comfortable way to travel with kids, I learned!” -- Melissa <http://www.csrnf.org>

V. Sattui Winery in St. Helena, CA

“Great place to either bring your own picnic food or buy some at their deli--& of course buy a bottle of their wine! :) It's beautiful and they have a lovely picnic area for relaxing or running around. A fun place to bring visitors. If you visit the website you can click on the "picnic grounds" tab and see for yourself.” - Amanda <http://www.vsattui.com/>

Many thanks to my preschool/Adult Ed parents for these great contributions.
For even more great ideas for Places To Go With Kids visit my website:

www.earthskids.com/togo.aspx

-- *Linnaea*